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## AFRICA'S YOUTH EMPLOYMENT CHALLENGE: NEW PERSPECTIVES

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# The Politics of Youth Employment and Policy Processes in Ethiopia

**Eyob Balcha Gebremariam**

**Abstract** Policy processes are inherently shaped by political contexts. One way of identifying the impact of politics on policy processes is by examining how policy narratives and framings evolve through time. This article examines youth employment-focused policies in Ethiopia between 2004 and 2015. It argues that policy narratives and framings driving youth employment policy are directly derived from the developmental orientation of the incumbent Ethiopian regime. The 2005 post-election political crisis also played a major role in streamlining youth-focused policy processes.

**Keywords:** unemployment, Africa, young people, Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF).

## 1 Introduction

This article uses youth-focused policies in Ethiopia to demonstrate how politics and societal narratives shape policy processes. It does this by adopting two interlinked lines of analysis. The first explores the role of political context in shaping policy processes. In doing so, the primary focus is on how policy narratives and framings change depending on context and political dynamics. The second related line of analysis explores the relationship between broader social narratives and policy narratives. Here, the focus is on the two-way interaction between socially constructed positions of youth and youth-focused policies. The argument is that categorisations of youth such as 'vanguard or vandals' (Abbink and van Kessel 2005) or 'makers and breakers' (Honwana and De Boeck 2005) of society shape and are shaped by policy processes.

The analysis focuses on the period 2004–15, when Ethiopia registered significant socioeconomic developmental success. According to the World Bank, the average economic growth rate between 2004 and 2014 was 10.9 per cent (World Bank 2016). Furthermore, the poverty trend has also been declining significantly from 55 per cent in 2000 to 31 per cent in 2013 (UNDP 2014; World Bank 2016). At the same time, the country's political landscape also changed considerably. With three national elections conducted during this period, the ruling party, the



Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), emerged as the dominant political actor in the country. One example of this dominance is the current parliament (2015–20) where the party controls 100 per cent of the seats. The article explores how these political and economic dynamics have been affecting youth-focused policy processes.

There are two questions that motivate the analysis. First, how does politics shape policies relating to youth employment? In answering this question, I will demonstrate that policy processes are not technocratic, linear and rational, but are rather driven by political dynamics and interests. Second, how do socially constructed positions of youth affect policies that address youth employment? Answering this question contributes to the understanding of how societal beliefs can be translated into policy frameworks and how politically crafted policies interact with social narratives. To address these questions, a legal document, two youth-specific policies and the youth-focused sections of three consecutive national development plans are examined.

Two core arguments are developed. First, dominant policy narratives and framings relating to youth are directly derived from the political orientations of the government, which in Ethiopia is building a developmental state through rapid economic growth. In line with the developmental orientation, policy narratives and framings have changed from portraying youth as 'vagrants' and 'threats' to society, or 'marginalised and victims of social evils', to seeing them as 'entrepreneurs' and 'seeds of democracy and development'. Second, with specific focus on youth employment, the policy process was driven by the need to respond to a political crisis.

The remainder of the article is divided into four sections. Section 2 introduces the two main ways of understanding the social position of youth, *viz.* as an age group or a transitional stage. Section 3 sets the context towards understanding the social position of Ethiopian youth. Hence, the section provides an overview of the political and policy context and implications for the social position of youth. Section 4 analyses the four policy documents in order to address two central questions. Finally, Section 5 discusses the findings and concludes.

## **2 The social position of youth**

### **2.1 Age-based notions of youth**

Age is one of the most crucial elements that shapes understandings of youth. One of the central features of age-based categorisation of youth is the assumption that there are 'clearly identifiable processes which are universal' (Wyn and White 1997: 53). Hence, when young people depart from the assumed set processes and behaviours, they are easily categorised as 'deviants' and 'abnormal' (*ibid.*). Age-based categorisations are often used to frame policy interventions in areas such as education, health and criminal justice. One important limitation of age-based understandings of youth is that they promote a categorical approach. Examples include the notions of 'adolescents' and 'juveniles' that link

the biological age of young people to their psychological and emotional status, and to their social identity and behaviour. This is critiqued for being ‘biologically determinist’ and reducing the experiences of young people at the individual level (Wyn and White 1997: 54–7).

However, one cannot ignore the crucial role that age plays in shaping the experiences, opportunities and challenges of youth. One way of broadening the understanding of youth is to examine how biological age shapes interactions between youth and the state as well as with other social institutions. For example, some argue that states use ‘age statuses’ to categorise youth as a ‘discrete and distinctive social category’ (Mizen 2002: 6), and that this categorisation provides a foundation for dominant policy narratives that subsequently shape the experiences of young people (Wyn and White 1997). Age also interacts with state institutions through, for example, the legal voting age, age-based eligibility to claim social and economic rights (such as minimum/living wage) and access criteria for state loans.

Age-based characterisation of youth plays a central role in policy narratives built around the notions of ‘demographic dividend’ and ‘youth bulge’. ‘Reaping the demographic dividend’ essentially requires policy and institutional frameworks to make the segment of society within a certain age range healthier, educated and more productive (Bloom and Williamson 1998). Without age-specific characterisation, one can argue that all aspects of policy relating to youth will remain weak (Mizen 2002: 8). However, the experience of being ‘a youth’ is not only about belonging to a certain age group for a specified period – it is also about growing up and transitioning to the status of adulthood.

## **2.2 Transitional status of youth**

Youth is not a permanent status, and some scholars argue that the meaning of youth is inextricably linked with the concept of adulthood (Wyn and White 1997: 11). Signs and processes associated with the transition to adulthood include school-to-work transition, economic independence, leaving the parental home and establishing a family. Processes of transition are complex, non-linear and context-dependent, which only complicates the job of much youth policy that aims to facilitate transitions into adulthood.

It is important to note that growing up is a social process that is contingent on the interplay of enabling and constraining conditions within a given context and society. State policies and institutions in particular have a direct impact on youth transitions. For example, the introduction of neoliberal policies impacted on the lives of many African young people (Caffentzis 2002). Withdrawal of state guarantees to rights and services in the areas of health, education and employment severely affected young peoples’ transitions into adulthood. In some cases, the failure and degeneration of the state led to civil war and protracted conflict, with young people being both victims and perpetrators (Abbink and van Kessel 2005; Honwana and De Boeck 2005). More generally,

in contexts where the state fails to deliver the benefits of development, smooth transitions to adulthood are compromised.

Precarious socioeconomic conditions, civil unrest and institutional exclusion can also prolong the process of transition. Honwana developed the concept of *waithood* to explain this, with waithood being 'a prolonged period of suspension between childhood and adulthood' (2012: 1). The argument is that because of structural challenges which hinder social mobility there are multiple cases where youthhood has become a more permanent status rather than a transitional stage. Furthermore, in situations where transitions are prolonged, young people often engage in survival strategies while navigating the contours of waithood. Expressions such as 'eke out a living' or 'getting by' (Honwana 2012) and 'hustling' (Di Nunzio 2012) provide a flavour of this navigation. The key point is that this period of 'extended liminality' increases the vulnerability of young people (Honwana 2012).

In the following section, the article reflects on age-based experiences and transitional statuses of youth in recent Ethiopian socioeconomic and political contexts.

### **3 Ethiopian youth: political contexts, policies and changing social positions**

This section sets the ground to understand the interplay between political contexts, policies and changing social positions of youth. It first discusses the notions of political context and politics. Then, after a brief historical overview, the methods of analysis used are presented.

In a nutshell, an appreciation of political context helps to understand *when* policy processes emerge onto the scene, *how* policy is crafted and *who* the leading or powerful actors are, both in policy formulation and implementation (Turner, Hulme and McCourt 2015). This approach contrasts with the 'stages' approach to the policy process, which focuses on technical processes (Jenkins 1978). Whilst examining the role of political context in policy processes, it is imperative to clearly set how the study approaches politics.

For the purposes of this study, politics is understood as 'the processes of conflict, cooperation and negotiation involved in the [ownership], use, production and distribution of resources' (Leftwich 1996: 17).

In operational terms, this definition leads to a concern with how youth-focused policy processes trigger 'conflict, cooperation and negotiation' (*ibid.*) between the Ethiopian state and youth. Because of the interest in youth employment policy, economic opportunity and fulfilment of economic citizenship rights are crucial elements around which the processes of conflict, cooperation and negotiation occur. Political processes that affect the provision of economic opportunities directly influence how economic resources are accessed and claimed by youth. Furthermore, changing social positions of youth are also inextricably linked with the evolving political context, and affect the dynamics of conflict, cooperation and negotiation between state and

youth. Likewise, societal narratives about youth cannot remain insulated from the dominant features of politics.

Here it is important to sketch out how the changing political context in Ethiopia has affected the social positions of youth. After the EPRDF came to power in 1991, the country was forced to implement structural adjustment programmes by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Demissie 2008; Feyissa 2011). Despite strong ideological resistance from the EPRDF not to reduce the state to an ideal ‘night-watchman’ status as the neoliberal policies would have required, there was a considerable escalation of privatisation (Stiglitz 2002). The EPRDF tried its best to remain committed to its ideological aspiration of building a socialist economy. To this end, the party pursued its revolutionary democracy ideology to remain the politically dominant player in the country while strategically engaging with western donors (Feyissa 2011). The strength of the EPRDF’s ideological commitment was demonstrated by its determination not to relinquish state ownership of land and not to liberalise key sectors of the economy such as finance, telecoms, transport and energy. Nevertheless, other aspects of the stabilisation and privatisation programme were implemented.

The structural adjustment programmes had significant impact on society in general and youth in particular. Especially in urban areas, government employment, which was often considered ‘desirable’ (Mains 2011: 115) for young people joining the labour market, was severely affected. A reduced public sector as a result of privatisation, reduction of public expenditure and restructuration contributed to increased unemployment (Krishnan, Selassie and Dercon 1998; Demissie 2008). On top of limited employment opportunities, the number of high school graduates continued to increase. With a growing gap between the available employment opportunities and the number of new young jobseekers, the seemingly predetermined process of transition into adulthood started to derail, resulting in new societal problems.

Youth unemployment became a major problem starting from the early years of EPRDF’s tenure. A socioeconomic household sample survey conducted in 1994 revealed that young people below the age of 35 constituted 90 per cent of the urban unemployed (68 per cent between the ages of 16–25) (cited in Kebbede 2004). Another study argued that in 1994, 50 per cent of the male workforce below the age of 30 were unemployed in urban areas (Serneels 2004). The considerably reduced capacity of the state to offer employment opportunities was seen to explain urban youth unemployment. Furthermore, the mismatch between education and job openings was also a major factor. For example, another survey in 1994 showed that in Addis Ababa, 50 per cent of the unemployed youth were high school graduates (cited in Minas 2002).

In 2001, a decade after it came to power, the EPRDF went through a major ideological revision. The objective of creating a socialist society was dropped in favour of building a capitalist society

(Tadesse and Young 2003). As a result, the principles of free market economics were adopted, and there were more opportunities for private accumulation of wealth. The late prime minister called this new development strategy 'democratic developmentalism' (Zenawi 2006). The reform processes also endorsed the good governance agenda and established formal institutional and policy frameworks. As part of this, the first youth-focused ministry was established in 2000, and was mandated to formulate the first national youth policy.

The first post-reform election was in May 2005, and in a relatively open political environment, the ruling party suffered huge losses (Aalen and Tronvoll 2009). However, the EPRDF used its power over the military to squash both opposition parties and protest activities during the post-election period (Aalen and Tronvoll 2009; Gudina 2011). Following the wake of the post-election violence, EPRDF undertook a campaign of mass mobilisation, particularly targeting urban youth who participated in protest activities in significant numbers (Di Nunzio 2012). To this end, the EPRDF-led government started to invest heavily to address urban youth employment, and to reduce youth marginalisation through the introduction of youth participation fora.

Furthermore, the EPRDF controlled the post-2005 political context by putting in place institutions and politico-legal frameworks to guide the processes of conflict, cooperation and negotiation. These, combined with political repression, acted to constrain the activities of opposition parties, private media and civil society organisations (Aalen and Tronvoll 2009; Gudina 2011). At the same time, the ruling party enhanced its political power by establishing channels of mass mobilisation targeting women, youth, farmers and other segments of society. These served both as spheres of cooperation and negotiation as well as political control. In contrast to the early 1990s period of dismantling public services, the EPRDF expanded the state structure which also created massive employment opportunities. Mobilisation occurred hand in hand with recruitment into the party structure, which also involved resource distribution. Young people became crucial targets of the ruling party in these processes of cooperation and negotiation, which included controlled economic and political inclusion. For example, the ruling party established its youth league in May 2009 with 180,000 founding members, and reaching 2.3 million in 2013 (EPRDF 2013). At the same time, party membership also increased exponentially from around 700,000 in 2005 to 6.3 million in 2013. These efforts to manage conflict and promote cooperation and negotiation have been important aspects of the ruling party's agenda of 'democratic developmentalism'.

The remainder of the article uses discourse analysis to examine youth-focused policy documents. Narratives and framings are analysed with considerable focus given to the policy processes and context. Since the study relies on secondary data, it also refers to studies conducted on Ethiopian youth to provide additional evidence alongside the close examination of the policy documents.

#### **4 Analysis of youth employment-focused policies**

This section presents analysis of policy frameworks that address youth employment launched by the Ethiopian state between 2004 and 2015. The analysis is based on a review of one legal document, two youth-focused policy documents and three national development plans.

##### **4.1 Vagrancy Control Proclamation**

The Vagrancy Control Proclamation (VCP) (384/2004) came into force on 27 January 2004. The preface of the proclamation explains the rationale: 'Vagrancy is increasing and wide-spreading in our country from time to time, thereby creating a threat to the tranquillity and order of the people' (FDRE 2004: 2533). Hence, the purpose is 'to permanently dispel this threat... to bring criminals to justice and create conditions for their social rehabilitation' (*ibid.*). The objective of the VCP is '... bringing criminals to justice, imposing punishment proportionate to their crimes and to create conditions for their transformation into law-abiding and productive citizenry' (FDRE 2004: 2534). The VCP defines vagrancy as '... whosoever, being able-bodied, having no visible means of subsistence' but found committing actions restricted in the proclamation. Such restricted actions include 'betting and gambling in a public place, substance abuse, disturbing on streets or around schools, participating in organized gang brawls' (FDRE 2004: 2534–6). 'Police' and the 'federal prisons commission' are identified as being responsible for implementing the VCP. The proclamation also sets up a 'centre' for psychosocial and behavioural counselling as an institutional mechanism for providing 'rehabilitation services to any persons convicted of vagrancy' (FDRE 2004: 2534).

In terms of political context, it is worth considering two important factors that contributed to the emergence of the VCP. First, as argued earlier, the contraction of the public sector due to structural adjustment programmes significantly reduced potential job opportunities. The nascent private sector was not at the time mature enough to create employment opportunities for the increasing young population. As a result, young people, many of whom were high school graduates, remained unemployed for relatively long periods of time. But remaining unemployed defies societal expectations about youth. Since youth is considered as a short period of transition, moving out of this temporary status is essential, and not being able to complete this transition is deviancy. For example, Mains (2012) described how members of the wider society in Jimma town, south-western Ethiopia, felt insecure and threatened with the presence of 'idle' and 'unemployed' young men on the streets. For the young men, the 'abundance of unstructured time' (*ibid.*: 122) was a trap that they wanted to escape from if they could get job opportunities. With quite narrow job opportunities, as well as with limited skills acquired through education, the young men were forced to pass most of their time 'hanging out on street corners, watching films, chewing *khat* (mild stimulant)' (*ibid.*: 123).

Second, the VCP was introduced in the wake of large-scale unrest in the capital following Addis Ababa University student protests in April 2001.

The students called for the reinstatement of the independent students' union and newspaper, and replacement of armed campus police with civilian police (Balsvik 2007). The protest spilled over into the city and resulted in large-scale looting, ransacking and vandalism in major market and shopping areas. At least 40 people were killed. The government accused unemployed young people and opposition parties of being the main perpetrators of the violence and looting (*ibid.*): the blame was laid at the feet of 'unruly' and 'unemployed' youth.

The name of the Amharic version of the VCP can be literally translated into 'Dangerous Vagrancy Control Proclamation'. The use of such alarmist language helps to garner unconditional moral and normative support. The VCP argues that social 'order' and 'tranquillity' is compromised because of 'dangerous vagrancy'. Hence, 'punishment' and 'rehabilitation' need to be administered as remedies. With such interventions, the VCP claims it will restore societal order by 'transforming' criminals into 'law-abiding and productive citizenry'. Furthermore, the VCP strengthens the crisis narrative and the need for urgent action by adding both a space and time dimension. The proclamation depicts 'dangerous vagrancy' as 'wide-spreading', which implies it affects or will affect large areas and numbers of people, while the phrase 'from time to time' is ambiguous and provides no real indication of the prevalence of the problem (FDRE 2004: 2533–4).

Both the narratives and framings in the VCP correspond with societal narratives about 'idle' and 'unemployed' youth who pass most of their time on the street. These youth were perceived as deviants because of their failure to meet societal expectations of growing up and becoming independent adults. The VCP builds on such narratives, and making reference to occasional, large-scale incidents such as the riot in April 2001 links unemployment with crime. Furthermore, the VCP also claims moral superiority by stating its purpose as 'to bring criminals to justice'. In addition to the judiciary solution, the VCP declared its intention to change the values of vagrants through 'social rehabilitation', which was broadly defined as 'transformation into law-abiding and productive citizenry'. The components of social rehabilitation mentioned in the proclamation include education, vocational training, civic education, counselling and hard labour. The police, public prosecutor, courts and 'rehabilitation centre' were identified as key implementers of the VCP (FDRE 2004: 2538–9).

The VCP's link with youth employment can be seen in its targeting of unemployed youth. One of the key elements of the definition of vagrancy in the VCP is having 'no visible means of subsistence'. Particularly in a context where young peoples' transition to 'socially acceptable status of adulthood' (Honwana 2014: 29–31) is severely compromised, a dependence on activities in the informal economy is inevitable. Studies have indicated that young people with limited opportunities for social mobility rely on casual work and activities on the fringe of legality. These survival strategies are not considered 'visible means of subsistence' by the

VCP, which makes young people who are actively involved in the street economy (Di Nunzio 2012) prime targets of the proclamation.

Di Nunzio (2012) describes survival strategies of young people in poor urban neighbourhoods in Addis Ababa as including a combination of street activities, which are broadly defined as hustling. Hustling is ‘being smart and finding a way to make money for survival’ (*ibid*: 443). Common street activities include brokering small transactions, running errands for a small fee, working as an informal tourist guide and grabbing any opportunity that would generate money. Sometimes hustling may involve illegal activities such as pick-pocketing, thieving and drug selling. It is important to note that hustling differs significantly from the notion of being ‘idle’ and ‘unemployed’. Young people who are involved in hustling consider that their activities are ‘tiring’, and require skills, networking and different layers of interactions.

The VCP’s focus on these young people became more pronounced during the highly contested 2005 elections. The government used the VCP as an instrument of repression when it targeted unemployed youth because of their support for the opposition during the tense pre- and post-election period. Opposition parties widely criticised the government for the high unemployment rate and for its criminalising discourse. The government labelled young people who participated *en masse* in pre-election demonstrations and post-election protests as ‘dangerous vagrants’, ‘jobless’ and ‘unruly’ young people (Aalen and Tronvoll 2009; Di Nunzio 2012). Furthermore, unemployed youth and particularly those surviving through hustling constituted a significant majority of the nearly 30,000 people detained during the post-election violence (Gebremariam and Herrera 2016). Hence, in the tense political context around the election, unemployment was not only associated with crime but also dissent and protest.

The VCP definition of vagrancy also unequivocally focuses on the individual – an ‘able-bodied’ person not having any ‘visible means of subsistence’. The proclamation never mentions a single causal or contributing factor – social, economic, cultural or political. Thus it fails to recognise the multiple factors that can force young people into activities defined as vagrancy, including an ineffective education system, lack of work, and the expectations of society that young people quickly become independent adults (Miles 2003: 189). As discussed earlier, a political context which removes systems of direct and indirect support for youth employment pushes young people to the margins of illegal activities. When opportunities for transition into adulthood become narrow, young people engage in activities such as hustling. By focusing on the survival strategies of these economically marginalised young people, the VCP missed the root cause of the problem.

To conclude, the VCP came into being when the political context and limited economic opportunities had led a large number of unemployed youth to hustle for survival through a combination of legal and illegal

activities. Both societal narratives and the VCP perceived the survival strategies of the youth and the situation they were forced into as deviance; hence a threat that needed legal intervention (Mains 2012). However, the VCP was not the only approach that the EPRDF used to address youth issues. It also produced a youth policy that is discussed in the following section.

#### 4.2 National Youth Policy

Endorsed on 12 March 2004, the National Youth Policy (NYP) is one of Ethiopia's most significant youth-specific state documents. It argues that an age-based definition of youth is 'most suitable for research and policy purposes' (MYSC 2004: 3), and goes on to define youth as people between 15 and 29 years. The NYP envisions 'creating [an] empowered young generation' (*op. cit.*: 19) with values incorporating a democratic outlook, knowledge, professional skills, organised engagement and ethical integrity. The objectives of the policy include: to 'bring about active participation of youth' (*ibid.*) in socioeconomic, political and cultural activities; and 'enable [youth] to fairly benefit from the results' (*ibid.*).

The VCP and NYP emerged at approximately the same time and within the same socioeconomic and political context. However, the NYP was produced based on a 'comprehensive study' (*op. cit.*: 1) which involved consultation with stakeholders including youth. The study conducted as a baseline for the policy identify pervasiveness of extreme poverty (44 per cent in 2004), high youth unemployment (67 per cent in 1999), high prevalence of HIV/AIDS and low enrolment in secondary and higher education as major challenges for Ethiopian youth. Furthermore, the country's long history of non-democratic politics is highlighted as a hindrance to meaningful youth participation.

There are two levels of narrative within the NYP: a broad narrative about the status of youth, and a narrative more specific to youth employment. At the broader level, high levels of poverty, economic and political marginalisation are identified as main factors restricting young people's 'potential energies and capabilities' (*op. cit.*: 5). The policy envisions changing the dire socioeconomic and political situation through 'active participation' (*op. cit.*: 19) of the youth. The government aims to play an instrumental role to help youth organise themselves and actively participate in 'development endeavours, building democratic system and good governance' (*op. cit.*: 21).

The narrative specific to youth employment issues has multiple layers. The NYP suggests that the government alone cannot 'resolve the problem of unemployment' (*op. cit.*: 12). Hence, the policy aims to create favourable conditions for the youth to 'create new jobs for themselves' (*op. cit.*: 26), and to enable the private sector to create job opportunities for them. It also advocates for policy interventions that shape both formal and informal employment opportunities, and suggests that these can help address the under- and unemployment problems among youth. With regard to rural youth, ensuring access to land and expansion

of off-farm activities are identified as part of the solution to youth unemployment.

One of the most important framings adopted by the NYP is an age-based definition of youth. While it is not the only document to use age-based definitions, taking an age-based definition has serious limitations. One of these is the tendency for homogenisation, despite important differences arising from gender, culture, socioeconomic status and geographic location. For example, the kinds of expectations, experiences, challenges and opportunities facing young men and women vary significantly despite age similarities. Mains (2012) for instance talks of ‘barriers to adulthood’ for young men in Jimma town because of limited economic opportunities to move towards marriage and fatherhood. In this case, young men are forced into a prolonged period of transitioning into adulthood. On the contrary, young women might be forced by cultural practices of early marriage, even as young as ten, which inevitably shortens their period of transition. It is also important to note the salient role that socioeconomic status and geographic location play in shaping young peoples’ lives, despite belonging to the same age cohort. For example, young people from wealthy families may have better access to opportunities than other young people in the same age cohort. Likewise, social norms, values and practices based on age hierarchies among different cultural groups across the country also vary considerably. Hence, the age-based definition needs to be used with caution.

The other main characterisation of youth in the NYP is in terms of their receptiveness to ‘new ideas’, [their] ‘potential capacity for creativity and productivity’, and ‘potential energies and capabilities’. This framing is supported by depictions of youth as ‘nation builders’ and positive ‘agents of change’. While focusing on the potential capabilities of young people, the NYP also identifies present-day challenges that may compromise the future – for example, young people as potential victims of an unfavourable environment broadly categorised as ‘economic and social problems’. Here youth are portrayed as marginalised and vulnerable members of society who are ‘exposed to social evils’ (MYSC 2004: 5).

In response to the crisis around the 2005 election, the government relied on the VCP instead of the NYP. As argued earlier, unemployed young people in the informal economy were targeted because of their direct involvement in the post-election violence. Furthermore, the highly technocratic approach of the NYP, with its stakeholder engagement and strategic plan, was not deemed to be useful in the short term. The EPRDF-led government faced a serious crisis of political legitimacy because of the post-election violence. It chose to address this among the youth through massive political mobilisation: the political priority was addressing the legitimacy deficit, irrespective of the existing youth policy framework.

In general, it can be argued that the NYP illustrated the case in which the political context becomes a vital factor in shaping policy processes. When

the NYP was formulated, the government was not under any immediate political pressure. However, when the political environment became tense, the NYP was not used to guide the political processes of cooperation and negotiation with the youth that the government badly needed. The political urgency required another policy framework, and as a result the government drafted and introduced the Youth Development Package (YDP) that directly serves the political interest of the government. The following section further elaborates on the YDP.

#### **4.3 Youth Development Package**

The Youth Development Package (YDP) was launched in September 2006. The associated documentation claims that the YDP reflects consultations with youth in both urban and rural areas (FDRE 2006: 6). Based on the consultations, the YDP was formulated to address three 'burning problems': unemployment, 'unavailability of well-equipped and youth-focused social services and recreational centres' and 'exclusion and lack of participation forums'. A number of 'strategic directions' are set out through which these issues will be addressed. Perhaps the key one is the endorsement of youth as the 'front-leaders' to solve the problems they are facing. Additional strategic directions include: 'enabling the youth to understand its leading role', 'facilitating [the creation of] youth participation forums', 'enhancing young people's educational, vocational and leadership skills for improved participation', and 'organizing the youth depending on their interests'. The package assigns the role of 'key supporter' to the state in addressing the 'burning problems'. The YDP adopts the age-based definition of youth set by the NYP and approaches the problems of urban, rural and pastoralist youth differently (*ibid.*: 1–19).

The YDP emerged as a response to the 2005 post-election violence: in effect, the government used the YDP to try to mend its relations with young people. The central narrative of the YDP focuses on the imminent risk associated with youth marginalisation. This narrative establishes a direct connection between the status of youth and both the existing and future socioeconomic and political orders. The central proposition – that the level of exclusion and desperation among youth has detrimental effects in the present and the future – suggests the YDP is mainly meant to mitigate 'serious risk'. Within this narrative, the YDP addresses youth as vital actors: in the present as nation builders, and in the future as 'inheritors' or 'successors'. Youth need to prepare themselves to be 'leaders of their time', while the government must play its role 'to prepare' the youth to become 'inheritors' (*ibid.*: 2).

Unemployment is identified as one of the burning problems that requires a coordinated response, and it is argued that the causes of youth unemployment in urban and rural areas have both similarities and differences. Some common causes are identified such as limited skills development and exclusion of those who are not in education, employment or training. It is also suggested that limited access to financial services restricts youth entrepreneurship. Two factors are

posed to contribute specifically to urban youth unemployment, with the first being the constraining environment that inhibits the private sector and specifically growth of micro and small enterprises (MSEs). The second factor is that the education system needs ‘to produce entrepreneurial youth with improved skills and mind-set’. The YDP argues that unemployment among rural youth is deeply rooted in the land tenure system, which excludes them and makes them ‘property-less’. The document notes that the national agricultural policy neglects the specific challenges of rural youth, which contributes to their ‘high economic vulnerability’. In order to address these problems, the YDP aims to expand off-farm employment and income-generating opportunities (*ibid.*: 5–8).

Two observations can be made about the YDP. First, it can be seen as an example of a policy process that responded quickly to a particular political crisis. Political expedience – the Prime Minister’s Office formulated the YDP and ordered the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture (MYSC) to implement it – meant that the finer points of policy formulation, like consultation, went out of the window. Broadly speaking, the YDP is fairly similar in its narratives and framings to the NYP. But it also has unique features: for example, despite adopting the age-based definition of youth, the YDP attempts to broadly categorise youth in terms of their geographical location and primary socioeconomic activities. In doing so, the YDP categorised youth as being either urban, rural or pastoral. Challenges and opportunities that correspond to these categories were also elaborated. Perhaps the long-standing EPRDF tradition of producing detailed political strategy documents came into play in the production of the YDP. Whilst the NYP followed the formal structure and presentation of a policy document, the YDP is produced in a detailed 90-page document similar to other political strategy and propaganda documents.

Second, while relying fairly on similar framings and narratives to the NYP, the YDP clearly acknowledged structural and institutional constraints on youth. The government did not stop at identifying the constraints; it also acted swiftly to address both economic and political marginalisation. For example, it highlighted the expansion of MSEs, and provided young people with financial and technical assistance to start their own businesses. Obviously, since the programme was primarily initiated to regain the government’s legitimacy, the sustainability and long-term impact must be carefully examined. However, the effort required to address youth unemployment with actual job creation programmes should be recognised. As part of the effort to address the political marginalisation of young people, the EPRDF also initiated Youth Forums, particularly in Addis Ababa, as a permanent consultation platform between youth and the government.

#### **4.4 National development plans**

Three national development plans have been adopted since 2005, and in different ways each addressed youth issues and particularly youth

employment. The Plan for Accelerated and Sustainable Development to End Poverty (PASDEP) (2005–10) (MoFED 2006) emerged as part of the global effort to reduce poverty which had the effect of reducing any sense of ownership on the part of the Ethiopian government. With the subsequent Growth and Transformation Plans (GTP I from 2010–15, and GTP II from 2015–20), the government enjoyed more policy space to formulate its own approach and plans. After electoral defeat in several constituencies, the EPRDF engaged in mass mobilisation, effective political restrictions and huge public sector investment (Aalen and Tronvoll 2009; Gudina 2011). These activities contributed to the party winning 99.6 per cent of the parliament seats during the 2010 elections. The national development plans need to be examined in relation to the political context from which they emerge. Accordingly, in GTP I, the government officially declared its aim to build a 'democratic developmental state' (MoFED 2010: 22), and this was reaffirmed in GTP II. Both plans were preceded by national elections that gave the ruling party control of almost all parliamentary seats. Hence, the development plans were also commitments through which the ruling elite sought to consolidate its legitimacy.

PASDEP addressed youth employment by incorporating the narratives of NYP and the ten-year multi-sector and five-year strategic plans that followed the NYP. By aligning PASDEP and NYP, the government attempted to maintain some level of policy coherence. However, as noted earlier, once the YDP entered the policy scene, it replaced all other youth-specific policy frameworks. GTP I approached youth issues in tandem with sports, and youth-specific objectives were presented in broad terms: '[T]o increase the participation of youth in democratic governance and economic development processes' (*ibid.*: 112). The three identified 'GTP I targets for youth development' were increasing youth centres at district level; youth mainstreaming in development programmes; and increasing the number of youth volunteers. No clear indication was given as to how youth employment would be addressed. GTP II maintained the broad objective of enhancing meaningful youth participation in the socioeconomic and political arenas. GTP II defines youth as 'seeds of development and democracy' and aims to make them sources of 'developmental investors' through entrepreneurship schemes (MoFED 2015: 86). It further argues that youth employment is best addressed by organising young people in MSEs. The plan aims to integrate the job creation and entrepreneurship programmes with education and training and the manufacturing sector (*ibid.*: 127). To this end, it set a goal of organising 7.43 million young people in MSEs and 1.35 million in cooperative unions. These plans included making approximately £366 million available to young entrepreneurs.

In all three documents, the age-based definition of the NYP was the main departure point. Youth issues are also presented as 'cross-cutting' in the national development plans. At the same time, there is a shared portrayal of youth as a marginalised and excluded segment of society that needs coordinated support. GTP II in particular uses the phrase 'seeds of democracy and development' (*ibid.*: 86) to embed the

process of growing up into the political and economic discourse of the developmental state.

### **5 Discussions and conclusions**

Three main learning points can be identified. The first is that context plays a critical role in influencing when a policy emerges, how it is formulated and implemented, and who gets involved. The VCP, NYP, YDP and the national development plans emerged in different contexts and these contexts are reflected in their respective narratives, framings and implementation. The structural adjustment period that caused the economic marginalisation of youth did not trigger a direct policy response. Rather, the resulting prolonged period of unemployment and transition was treated as a sign of deviance and a threat to society, and the VCP was crafted as a remedy. The NYP, while in many ways good intentioned, had minimum impact, and was quickly overtaken by the YDP and GTPs after the 2005 election crisis. The post-election crisis provided the EPRDF with lessons about the relevance of cooperation and negotiation, and as a result new framings were introduced that recognised the marginalisation of youth and the need for them to be included.

The second point is about how policies in turn affect the way politics is pursued. For example, the VCP with its narrow perspective arguably contributed to the 2005 conflict. On the other hand, policies with a different point of departure, which are not focused on criminalising youth – such as the creation of Youth Forums and promotion of MSEs – can promote political processes based on cooperation and negotiation.

The third point is that policies rooted in long-term developmental objectives and the political vision of the state tend to be consistent in their narratives and framings, and can be effective in identifying root causes and delivering tangible outcomes. As a result of its strong developmentalist orientation, the Ethiopian state can claim to have created millions of jobs and self-employment opportunities for youth.

In terms of addressing youth employment, two points need to be underlined. First, the challenges of youth employment cannot be addressed with categorical approaches to defining youth or with approaches that frame young people as isolated individuals. The VCP's criminalising narrative stems from detaching the individual young person from the socioeconomic and political context in which they live. Second, when broader socioeconomic and political contexts are taken into account, challenges of youth employment can be addressed systematically. The NYP, YDP and GTP II identified structural and institutional challenges, which set the stage for effective long-term intervention.

Finally, the analysis demonstrates that it is important to examine youth employment within the context of the broader socioeconomic and political dynamics of the state. How state elites pursue their political purposes determines the developmental orientation of the state. These broader political dynamics inevitably shape youth employment policy processes.

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