

Youth Participation in Decision Making and Conflict Resolution: The Case of Assosa Town

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Abstract

Efforts to attract youth to engage in activities that are carried out, and empowering youth through decision-making on youth development programs or activities organized by youth associations can eventually create quality, credible, and moral values of youth which elevates the roles and participation of youth in society and future more productive development. This study aimed to examine youth participation in decision making and conflict resolution in Assosa Town. Cross sectional data randomly collected from 141 sample respondents in Assosa town, were employed in this study. Descriptive way of analysis has been used. The study reveals that the participation of youth in both decision making and conflict resolution has been challenged by poor responsiveness of local leadership, poverty, lack of access to quality education and training, exclusion of youth's interest in public issues, restrictive organizational structures, corruption and anti-social behavior of the youth themselves. Thus, the government has to draft sound youth policies which clearly set out the interest of youths in the development process that enhances their participation and benefit out of it.

Keywords: Youth Participation, Descriptive statistics, Decision Making, Conflict Resolution

Introduction

Youth development is at the center of the then Millennium Development with seven thematic program pillars and the current sustainable development Goal with seventeen programmatic intervention strategic development programs. Across the world, countries with positive youth development efforts have better experience in developing their countries as they have utilized such productive labour force as a nation building efforts and enhancing their economic productivity. But in countries of sub-Saharan Africa, predominantly in Ethiopia, the main demographic dividend, and probably the main economically productive section of the labour force is less developed to consolidate national and sub-national development (Shek, Dou, Chai, 2019).

Youth development is a process that prepares a young person to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood and achieve his or her full potential. Youth development is promoted through activities and experiences that help youth develop social, ethical, emotional, physical, and cognitive competencies Positive youth development is an intentional, pro-social approach that engages youth within their communities, schools, organizations, peer groups, and families in a manner that is productive and constructive; recognizes, utilizes, and enhances young people's strengths; and promotes positive outcomes for young people by providing opportunities, fostering positive relationships, and furnishing the support needed to build on their leadership strengths (Konopka Institute, 2000, pp. 3-4).

Over time, practitioners, policymakers, funders, and researchers determined that promoting positive asset building and considering young people as resources were critical strategies. As a result, the youth development field began examining the role of resiliency the protective factors in a young person's environment and how these factors could influence one's ability to overcome adversity. Those factors included, but were not limited to, family support and monitoring; caring adults; positive peer groups; strong sense of self, self-esteem, and future aspirations; and engagement in school and community activities (Shek et al., 2016).

Youth development programs, particularly positive youth development programs, are gaining international and national attentions during the current development prospects of different countries in particular and Ethiopia in general. Out of all this programs, Youth participation in decision making and conflict resolution/peace building remained the forefront concern of civil society organizations. For this baseline research all literatures, which have been undertaken on youth participation and youth development are outlined as follows. A research undertaken by Bronfenbrenne (1986) synthesized the research regarding the interpersonal contexts of human development and trans-contextual environmental factors beyond the family setting. The finding of this investigation has indicated that the multiple contexts in which adolescents live include school, peer group, social networks, neighborhoods and communities are directly influencing positive youth development in either way.

Eccles (1993) examined the appropriateness of school environments to adolescents' developmental needs. Her work pointed out that mal-adaptation of adolescents could be associated with poorly designed environments in different contexts. In addition, based on the ecological perspective, Lerner and his colleagues proposed that "relative plasticity" in youth development is shaped by "developmental regulations", which are formed by mutually influential interaction between individual and multi-level contexts. Adolescents who have mutually beneficial or positive interaction with their multi-level contexts would engage in the process of positive development.

In addition to this, Catalano et.al., (2004), proposed an operational definition of positive youth development based on literature review and consultation with leading researchers, planning colleagues and evaluation staff of positive youth development programs. This definition introduces 15 developmental constructs as indicators of positive youth development, including bonding, resilience, social competence, emotional competence, cognitive competence, behavioral competence, moral competence, self-determination, spirituality, self-efficacy, clear and positive identity, belief in the future, recognition for positive behavior, opportunities for pro-social involvement and fostering pro-social norms.

In countries like Ethiopia, the youth section of the society is lagging behind development and becomes the major source and energizer of conflict. Having inequitable resource distribution as the center and the periphery, poor of the poor regions whose youth are suffering highly are that of

the youth of the Benishangul Gumuz Regional State. In this region, there is low youth infrastructure, low employment generation and less productive institutional setup in absorbing the productive section of the labour force which is categorized as youth in Ethiopian and the regional population structure. This clearly indicates less productivity of youth in the regional development and most importantly their limited presence in their participation in decision making and conflict resolution.

Even though all these researches are undertaken in Ethiopia, in Benishangul and elsewhere, there is no empirical investigation that was undertaken so far on Youth participation in decision making and conflict resolution/peace building in Assosa town. Thus, the ultimate purpose of this inquiry is assessing youth participation in decision making and conflict resolution/peace building in Assosa city administration of Benshangul Gumuz Regonal State. More specifically, the investigation was aimed at the following key objectives

- To assess the degree of participation of the youth in the decision-making process
- To assess the engagement of youth in the process of peace building or conflict management
- To explore challenges of youth participation in peace building

Methods

In order to assess youth participation, decision making and conflict mitigation, both qualitative and quantitative research approaches are employed to generate figurative quantitative data and narrative analytical experiences of youth who are participating in multiple youth development programs. Therefore, this investigation has followed, mixed research method research where both data are separately collected and finally be mixed depending on appropriate empirical procedures. The ultimate purpose of this research is shading light on the youth development specifically targeting where, the subjects are exposed to multiple levels of grievances and person stories that they are experiencing due to weak collaborative interventions among key actors.

The methodological purpose of this assessment was action research with descriptive and analytical quantitative study regarding the nature of youth development which targets youths, community representatives, institutions working on youth, Challenges encountered for enhancing positive youth development, measures to be taken and finally in dealing with the appropriate course of action for dealing with the plights of youth section of the society. The qualitative section of the assessment has employed a case study of youth that have impacted local youth development endeavors, weak accessibility of youth infrastructure and a trend towards sustained youth development that has put in place in the city administration. The Specific quantitative section of the assessment was survey research where structured survey questionnaire as tool of data gathering instruments was developed for collecting figurative data. In terms of time dimension, this assessment is cross sectional survey for the fact that data for the baseline assessment was generated at one point in time. Cross sectional research is a study conducted at single point in time (Chris & Diane, 2004).

Study Area

This assessment was conducted in the selected Assosa City administration. The city administration has two Woredas, Woreda 1 and Woreda 2 for which both Woredas which were included to the action research. From Woreda 1, Ketene 2 and from Woreda 2 Ketena 1 and 4 were included to generation data for the action research. The Kebeles that were selected are those who were the main targets where youth with the age of 15-29 are obtained that are engaged in positive youth development where there are gaps in youth participation, decision making and conflict mitigation.

Participants of the Study and Inclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria should be arranged for the purpose of guiding the data collection process and to determine the right targets from which the data is collected. This assessment was undertaken on different groups of study targets. This includes individuals that are disabled youths, community representatives, youth associations, youth federations and youth exposed to conflict and migration. The second inclusion criteria were set for organizations working on the issue of youth like Women's, Youth and Children's Affairs, Youth and Sport Bureau, Labour and Social Affairs, Education Bureau, Health Bureau, Red Cross, Pro-poor and Micro and Small-Scale Enterprise Development Agency. The inclusion criteria that were set and used for this study purpose include: (1) heads, directors and officers of respective sectors who have the needed information, (2) who are currently working on issues related to youth development, (3) who have worked at least for one year, (4) who are interested to give their consent after being informed about the purpose of the study, and (5) community members who have a direct role related to the program. Community members are identified nodes of communication in their local community and the power they have on their role in changing the attitude of their members. The inclusion criteria for these participants included representatives who have the required information about the issue and those who represent their group besides giving consent for participating in the assessment.

Population, Sampling and Sampling Technique

The Population of an investigation refers to the major target from which samples for the study are selected. Population entails the sampling frame which consists of the list of the population from which samples are scientifically drawn for generating data for the investigation. Therefore, the population of this study is taken from regional bureau of Women's, Youth and Children affairs. 70 samples were taken from the populations and 35 in-depth and key informant interview participants and 36 FGD discussants for the two FGDs a total of 141 samples were taken.

In order to know the current status of youth development program in Assosa city, probability sampling for quantitative study and non-probability sampling for qualitative section of the data are employed. Whereas purposive and availability/convenience samplings are used to generate data on the qualitative section of the research. According to Nixon and Wild, (2012) currently there are no description of how saturation might be determined and there are no practical guidelines for estimating sample size for purposively selected samples.

Method of Data Collection

Data is collected from the different groups of respondents and participants accordingly based on the arrangement that was made with them. Method of data collection employed was detailed as follows.

Interview

This study has utilized interview (In-depth and with key informant) on the different categories of participants. The first in-depth interview was conducted with vulnerable youth to understand their socio-economic situations they face because of their rights. The second key informant interview was conducted with program coordinators, heads or officers of women affairs, labour and social affairs offices followed by third in-depth interview for representative's religious organizations and community leaders. Semi structured interview checklist was used to collect data on the major research questions. Interviews are guided conversations that are usually one of the most important sources of qualitative evidence. However, they should only be used to obtain information that cannot be obtained in any other way. Interview conversation has been described as a pipeline for transmitting knowledge (Yin, 2003). Semi-structured interviews are more flexible and allow the researcher to better understand the perspective of the interviewees. Thus, a researcher is able to refocus on the questions, or prompt for more information, if something interesting or novel emerges.

Structured Questionnaire

Structured questionnaire of close ended type was developed to generate data for the self-administered survey. This questionnaire helps us to generate data on the multiple barriers to youth development programs in the form of quantitative data. This includes the socio demographic profile of the respondents, major questions related to the youth participation, decision making and conflict resolution, the role of existing institutions as well as ways of enhancing their positive youth development in the form of the forward.

Document Analysis

Rigorous review of related literatures on youth development, major types and steps of youth participation, engagement of youth towards decision making and the role that the youth section of the society is playing in conflict resolution and peace building sections under which secondary sources are generated to support the action assessment. Community response towards directing the youth in to positive youth development and capitalizing that as a tool for city development was the crucial section of secondary data that was gained from documents referred from the community representatives. For this study purpose, researches, books, reports of organizations, published and/or unpublished literatures were consulted. Secondary sources analysis is the study of existing data initially collected for other purpose and many of the most valuable contributions to our knowledge base of this method.

Focused Group Discussion

Focused group discussion has been undertaken with different groups of people for this action research purpose. For this study three focused group discussions were undertaken for the action research purpose. The first focused group discussion will be undertaken on representatives of sector organizations, whereas the second and the third focused group discussions were undertaken with representatives of different community members in the stated Ketena's. The number of the groups for the focused group discussion was between 8-12 which accounts for a maximum of 36 discussants which will be divided in to two. These were two youth FGDs and Sectorial FGD.

Method of Data Analysis

The analysis stage relied on propositions and considers and employs analytic techniques, explores rival explanations, and displays data apart from interpretations (Yin, 2003). The quantitative section of the assessment generated through structured questionnaire is analyzed by using Stata professional software version, 15 whereas the qualitative data that is extracted through the aforementioned methods mainly relied on meanings and words. Thus, it involved interpreting and translating the meaning and categorizing expressions in to sub themes unified to the assessment objectives.

Results and Discussions

Descriptive Statistics

In this part of the study, the data was analyzed which was collected from primary sources. The primary data were collected by using questionnaire, key informant interview, observation and focus group discussions. As described above, a sample of 70 youths has been selected from the three selected Ketenas (i.e., Ketena 2 from Woreda 1, Ketena 1 and 4 from Woreda 2). Out of the total respondents 14(20%) are females and 56(80%) are males.

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample Respondents

Table 1: Age Group and Sex of the respondents

Age group	Sex		Respondents	
	Male	Female	Total number	Percentage
14-18	8	1	9	12.86
19-24	25	7	32	45.71
25-29	23	6	29	41.43
Total	56	14	70	100%

Source: Source: Field survey (2021)

The survey reveals that, from those participants 14(20%) are females and 56(80%) are males. It implies that male respondents are higher in number than female. The mean ages of participants

were 23. Accordingly, the categories for age shows that 32 (45.71%) of the youths are within the age range of 19-24, 29(41.43%) are within the age range of 25-29 and whereas 9(12.86%) are in the range of 14-18. From this study it is possible to understand that, male members of the society are more interested to respond to the questionnaire that are requested by the researchers to be fulfilled in their respective Woreda's where female members of the community are less interested to respond to the questionnaire.

Table 2: Birth place of the respondents

Birth place of the respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Assosa town	39	55.71
Out of Assosa town	31	44.29
Total	70	100

Source: Field survey (2021)

As Table 2 shows, most of the respondents birth place were in Assosa town 39(55.71%), while the rest were out of Assosa town which accounts for about 31 (44.29%) who have traveled to Assosa due to different reasons, like marriage, employment and different factors.

Table 3: Household size

Household size	Frequency	Percentage
1-3	20	28.57
4-7	37	52.86
8-11	13	18.57
Total	70	100

Source: Authors survey (2021)

From the above table, it is easily noticeable that 37(52.86%), 20(28.57%) and 13(18.57%) of the respondents have 4-7, 1-3 and 8-11 household sizes respectively. This indicates that majority of the respondents' household size fall under the category of 4-7 followed by 1-3.

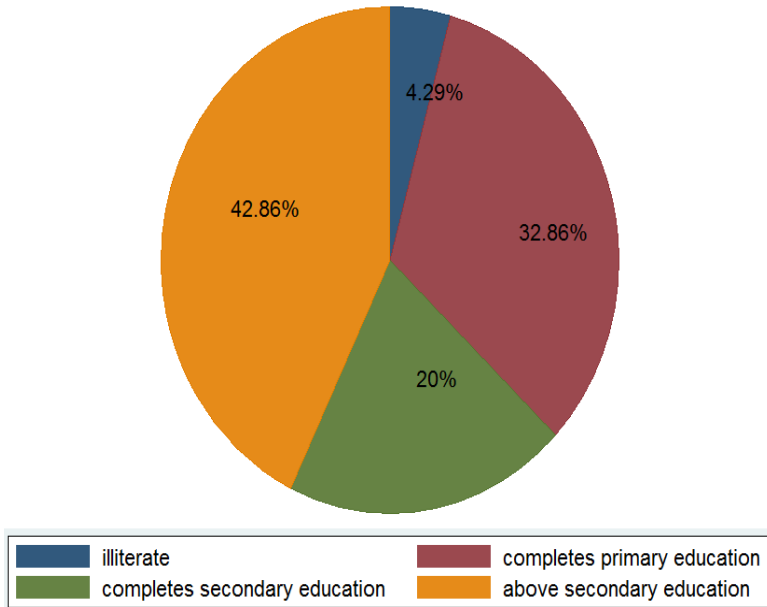


Figure 1: Education level of the youths

As depicted above, most of the youths reported that, their education status was above secondary education 30(42.86%) followed by primary school completes, secondary school completes and illiterates which accounts 23(32.86%), 14(20%) and 3(4.29%) respectively. This calls the government should consider illiterate youths while drafting policies.

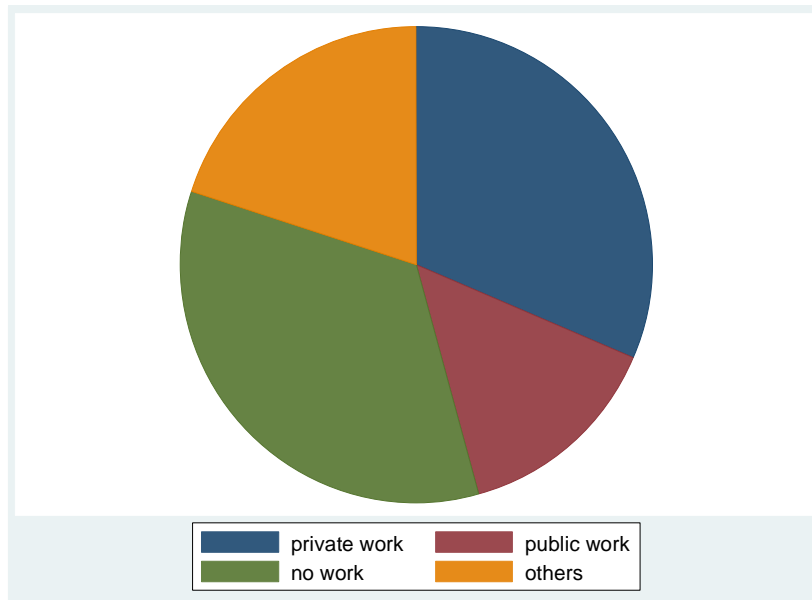


Figure 2: The types of work that the youth participate

From the above figure, we can infer that most of the youths reported that, they do not have jobs 24(34.29%), followed by private employees, others (students, baby sitters for own families) and

public employees accounting for 22 (31.43%), 14(20%) and 10 (14.29%) respectively. The data generated from qualitative research has supported this finding stating the most of the youth in members of the community are exposed to unemployment. The interview undertaken with youth members in Woreda 1 Ketena 2 has clearly depicted that youths including me are unemployed or underemployed. This makes unemployment to be the major perpetrator of youth vulnerability to different social problems. The youth interviewee in kebele indicated his life challenge emanated from unemployment as follows.

I was a graduate of Arbamich University before 2 years in chemical engendering, when I finish my course work and graduate, I have thought I was lucky and about to get employment so that I can support my elder mother. But after graduation when I come back to Assosa in search of job to my home town, I have applied to all organizations that are related to my profession but unfortunately, I am unable to gain job for the past 2 and half years. Thus, my major problem is unemployment.

Table 4: Marital status and religion of the household head

Marital status of the household head	Frequency	Percentage
Single	17	24.29
Married	34	48.57
Divorced	11	15.71
Widowed	8	11.43
Total	70	100
Religion of the household head	Frequency	Percentage
Muslim	28	40
Protestant	25	35.71
Orthodox	14	20
Others	3	4.29
Total	70	100

Source: Field survey (2021)

As it is clearly shown from the above frequency distribution table, 34(48.57%), 17(24.29%), 11(15.71%) and 8(11.43%) represents the marital status of the head the household who was married, single, divorced and widowed respectively. From this one can say that the majority of the respondent’s household head have got married.

Regarding to the religion of the household head 28(40%), 25(35.71%), 14(20%) and 3(4.29%) accounts Muslim, protestant, orthodox and others respectively. The result from the table shows that majority the youths are from household head with Muslim religion followed by Protestant household head.

The table below clarifies whether youth's parents are alive or not. And most of them reported that, their parents are alive 55(78.57%) and 15(21.43%) of them reported that their parents are not alive.

One of the qualitative findings from the interview undertaken among members of the youth has indicated that the presence of parents for vast majority of the respondents is not a guarantee; having most of the family members with them; they are still vulnerable to multiple livelihood shocks; are unable to full fill their basic needs; still significant number of the youth is relying on other informal supports, kinship care and use of daily labour to generate income. The in-depth interview with youths in Woreda 2 ketena 1 has clearly indicated their living condition with their family as follows.

I have 8 members of my family here with me, but my parents are aged and unable to participate in gainful employment. There are no members of the family who have stable income and most of us are doing daily laborers. Based on the income we generate from this daily work we are supporting out family but our expenditure is far more that the income we generate.

This clearly indicates that youth development programming and targeting is not only the matter of presence of their parents, more than that is the matter of understanding and knowing the level of youth vulnerability. Based on the level of the vulnerability and contextual factors youth empowerment, employment, capacity development and over all positive youth development programs are put in place for government and civil society organizations.

Table 5: Youth participation as decision maker

Have you been involved in the community as decision maker?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	17	24.29
No	53	75.71
Total	70	100

Source: Field survey (2021)

As shown above 53(75.71%) of youths reported that, they were not involved in the community as decision maker, while 17(24.29%) of them confirmed their participation as a decision maker. Those who participated as decision makers in the community reported that they have participated for five years, four years, three years, two years and even weekly upon the request from their institutions.

All qualitative studies undertaken on this action research like the in-depth interview with the youth, key informant interview with sector representatives, interview with concerned civil society organizations have confirmed that finding here stated in the quantitative section that general youth participation is extremely low. Besides that, genuine youth participation on issues that concern in a productive and respected way with a voice is limited and almost nonexistent. Even though youths

with limited participation are those whose participation is unproductive and most importantly geared towards rallies and labour works during emergency and holiday programs and religious rituals. An in-depth interview with one of the senior directors at Labour and Social Affairs in Regional Labour and social affairs bureau has indicated his experience of working with the youth and challenges youth are immersed in are of multiple types. He started his reaction to the question the interviewer has raised by saying how he sees the level of productive youth participation as follows.

I have worked in this institution for more than ten years, and I have closely worked with youths as a concerned director who has stayed in touch with youth for so long, I see untapped potential in youth, I see one day Ethiopia will really change and that is the time when we practically bring youth productively in the level the youth is so convinced and in the way youth potential is absorbed in contributing to the economy. This wise investment in youth productivity and making all youths to be engaged to work that we will have less fear of youth being in addition centers and of course doing this demands servant leadership and well capacitated youth.

Table 6: Reason for not to be involved in the community as decision maker

Reason for not to be involved in the community as decision maker	Frequency	Percentage
Limited resources	7	13.20
restrictive organizational structures	20	37.74
lack of knowledge about youth-adult partnerships	4	7.55
lack of knowledge about developmental characteristics of youth	14	26.42
The perception of youth	8	15.09
Total	53	100

Source: Field survey (2021)

Table 6 contains information about the reason for not to be involved in the community as a decision maker. As represented by the table above, 20(37.74%) of the respondents were not involved as a decision maker because of restrictive organizational structures. The other reasons like lack of knowledge about developmental characteristics of youth, the perception of youth, limited resources and lack of knowledge about youth-adult partnerships accounts 14(26.42%), 8(15.09%), 7(13.20%) and 4(7.55%) respectively. From this information we can deduce that for most of the

youths, their participation as decision maker has been troubled by restrictive organizations structure.

The table below presents the rank given by youth about the level of youth inclusion in community development programs. Hence, 39(55.71%), 15(21.43%), 13(18.57%) and 3(4.29%) of the respondents were ranked as low, no participation, medium and high respectively. This implies that the immense potential of youths was not well exploited in communities’ development program. In addition, they reported that they were participated in March 8, children’s day and party day, in high school clubs, but not in community development programs. In some cases, youths are requested to participate in ceremonies, which is less productive and labour related activities if needed.

Youth participation in development program is one of the thematic pillars of sustainable development goals which the world is promising to fulfill as part of their organizational mandate and statewide promise for building more inclusive society suitable for all age categories. Despite this promise, it is very challenging to see youth being actually included in participation and benefiting from such development programs. *The finding from this survey has indicated the level of participation of youth as low and far worse totally absent from participation. What a shocking finding that having majority of the population as a youth and finally having non participants and low participants in affairs that matter most to the youth.*

Table 7: Participation in conflict resolution

Have you participated in conflict resolution?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	31	44.29
No	39	55.71
Total	70	100

Source: Field survey (2021)

As observed above 39 (55.71 %) of youths reported that, they did not participate in conflict resolution in their respective villages or Ketenas. However, 31(44.29%) of them confirmed their participation in conflict resolution. This indicates how the youth’s falls behind to play their parts in development. Those who worked in conflict resolution has been participated in resolving conflicts of friends, families and communities by youths themselves and with the help of youth federations.

Youths were asked about the definitions of decision making and indicated that decision making may refer to decision made at personal, family, community and state level upon issues related to

community's development. Participating in government office, behaving together for mutual benefit, when youths have power in institutions, taking responsibility, sharing of ideas to other, dealing together for a single issue, giving daily decisions when necessary, discussing and deciding together for a better tomorrow, and providing real information to others can also represent decision making.

They understand peace building as creating peace, avoiding conflict and strengthening security. Apart from this, for the youth, peace building refers to controlling conflict through military forces and solving disagreements through discussion. The issue of controlling conflict through military forces should be taken seriously. This does not work in a modern state. So there should be training about what looks like a modern state then. This supports Eccles et al.'s, (1993) finding.

According to the youth, the most important factor that drives to greater participation in peace building were: unity to participate on issues related to development; giving training for the youth to get rid from their anti-social behaviors; providing real information to the community; working to strengthen religious institutions; strengthening youth associations to assure peace with in the community; reducing poverty; getting help from the government and creating of job for unemployed youth; educating the youth; democratic governance and leadership; drafting a policy which stands to respect the interest of the youth; linking and smoothening the youth and leaders' relationships; creating informal jobs for uneducated youth; participating in all issues that concern the youth; promoting youth associations (5/10 members inside); confirming females' participation by creating jobs; developing pro-youth development programs; and inclusion of the voice of the youth in community development programs.

Below are the most prominent obstacles for the youth to a greater participation in community development programs. The obstacles for youth participation in peace building within their communities were poverty; dissemination of wrong information to the public; less political power of the youth; less considerations of unemployed youth by the governments; leaders' selfishness; corrupt officials/leaders; having less committed leaders (poor quality of leaders); low participation of females; disinterestedness of leaders in youth participation; anti-social behavior of the youth (addiction of youths with Khat, Shisha, gambling, and film); inability of leaders to create job opportunities for unemployed youths; conflict between youths and community representatives; inequality; conflict within the community; and more interest of leaders to work with potential business owners than the youth.

To enhance youth peace building initiatives the government should draft a policy that gives priority to the community (youth), adopting round table discussions (community dialogue), allowing youths to lead their own development programs, appreciating differences, developing infrastructure, and inviting NGOs to participate on issues related to the youth.

Conclusions

The study reveals that the participation of the youth in both decision making and conflict resolution has been challenged by poor responsiveness of local leadership, poverty, lack of

access to quality education and training, exclusion of youth's interest in public issues, restrictive organizational structures, corruption and anti-social behavior of youth themselves.

To summarize, youth development through decision making and conflict resolution has not given appropriate emphasis in Assosa city administration. This makes the lives of youths difficult in shouldering personal responsibility on one side and family responsibility on the other side. Of course, there are gaps on the side of the youth, where some limited members of the youth have less interest in some job types, preference towards government employment and sometimes being addicted to drugs and loss employment while other youth are looking for any type of job. Thus, the government has to draft sound youth policies which clearly set out the interest of youths in the development process that enhances their participation and benefit out of it.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the followings recommendations were forwarded for further organizational action, further intervention in to new youth development related programs and projects:

- ✓ Since the issue of decision making and conflict resolution becomes the concern of state development, the local government should work seriously for youths better tomorrow by engaging youth at genuine level.
- ✓ The youth associations, established as interest groups, are either weak or nominal that they are unable to force government structures in making the regional government be accountable to their responsibilities. These youth centers and associations have to be strengthened and made to lead by influential full-time workers in the office that can make the youth interest to be fulfilled at better level that the existing one.
- ✓ Finally, the youth themselves have to protect themselves from drug use and other harmful actions that can undermine youth potential and expose them to other forms of destitution and change their attitude in accepting all forms of jobs whether temporary or permanent, offered by CSOs and the government at any level.

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