

“Young people can effect change”

Interview with Job Shipululo Amupanda

Mr Amupanda, in your view, how are young people represented in African politics?

The logic of the European state does not apply to Africa. In African politics, different rules of engagement apply. One difference is the loyalty to elders: young people are not allowed to question elders. The generation that freed Africa from dependence has done a lot for the continent. But today, this old generation believes that because they fought for freedom, because

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they liberated the continent, they have a natural right to rule and govern. A friend of mine calls it “governing until the grave”.

In many countries, there is a minimum age to become president – you must be at least 35 years or older. But hypocritically, you can remain president above a certain age. However, the African Youth Charter defines youth as ranging from 18 to 35 years of age. This means that there is no possibility of a youthful president on the African continent.

How do young people make their voices heard?

Since the mainstream political discourse and institutions do not give enough opportunities for youth, they have found alternative ways. There are of course different ways of formal engagement such as the African Youth Union or the African Youth Commission. But these institutions have repeatedly and consistently been resisted by the elders of the African continent.

In 2011, young people in North Africa got fed up. As a result, they began to topple dictators who had been in power for a long time. Mubarak of Egypt became a casualty. Ben Ali of Tunisia became a casualty.

Colonel Gaddafi of Libya became a casualty. And recently in 2015, Blaise Compaoré of Burkina Faso became a casualty. We now begin to see an era where young people are finding alternative ways of political participation. Young people are able to effect change in the state. What is political participation if it is not the actions to influence the constitution, the shaping and the decision-making processes of government?

“Young people are finding alternative ways of political participation.”

Unfortunately, in West and East Africa, political participation has taken a different turn. Many young people there have bought into extremist narratives of political participation. “Political participation” is not the term used in the literature to explain why young people join Boko Haram, Al Shabaab and all other movements. But these extremist groups are indeed fighting against the established order which is not to the satisfaction of young people. Therefore, the majority of people joining those groups also see this as an alternative form of political participation.

In Southern Africa, young people have started protesting and establishing independent movements outside mainstream political participation, outside state institutions, outside formal youth organisations. There, young people are protesting for social justice, protesting for free education, protesting for health care and many other things.

What needs to change?

There has been a lot of arrogance by leaders of the African Union. They say they are serious about youth participation because they have given the year 2017 a theme focusing on youth. In reality, however, a flimsy thing such as a theme cannot be regarded as political participation. That is absolute nonsense. Because in reality, youth policy does not seem to be a priority. In 2006, the African Union adopted the African Youth

Charter. But as we are speaking today, 18 African countries have not ratified it. Rhetoric and statements are not enough. Institutions such as the African Union should make the circle bigger instead of focusing on mainstream elite politics.

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Unfortunately, politicians often look at youth as youngsters kicking around a football or seeking entertainment. That is why many Ministries of youth are called “Youth and Sport”, “Youth and Recreation”, “Youth and Civic Education”. Only Zimbabwe looks at youth in the context of economic development. That is one thing that needs to happen for youth: connecting the talents and aspirations of young people to economic power.

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is a young politician from Namibia. He is especially outspoken on issues concerning youth and youth participation. He co-founded the Affirmative Repositioning movement aimed at redistributing land titles in favour of urban youth. In 2017, he was elected Commissioner for African Diaspora & External Affairs of the African Youth Commission.



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[Read the conference report.](#)

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