

Introduction: About the Special Issue

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Africa has recently been declared the most “youthful” continent in the world because over two-thirds of Africa’s population is under the age of 35 years. For Africa, this is not just a demographic feature but a turning point in terms of nations’ socio-economic and political configurations and dynamics. Youths in Africa do not only constitute the majority population, but they are also at the centre of societal interactions and transformations (Honwana and De Boeck 2005). Put it differently, the youth in Africa are located at the core of the continent’s opportunities, challenges and crises of the 21st Century (Burges 2005).

Despite efforts to invest in the youth, both formal and non-formal institutions have tended to pay inadequate attention to the development and empowerment of the youths in Africa. Instead, this generational category has often been linked with violence, economic vulnerability, political exclusion and other forms of vulnerability. In that respect, to be young in Africa has come to mean being disadvantaged, vulnerable, and marginalized in the social, political and economic sense. This attitude tends to slow down the ability of communities and policy makers to understand how relations between public authorities and the youths impact the governance, security, and development prospects of nations and communities.

It is against this background that the current special issue reflects on a number of issues pertaining to the “Youth Question” and violence in Africa. The papers constituted in this issue stem from a research on “*Youth, Conflict and Violence in Africa*”, which is being conducted in several countries, including Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe and South Africa with funding from the Canadian International Development Research Center (IDRC). Contributors of this issue are from organizations, i.e. University of Dar es Salaam (Tanzania), University of the Western Cape (South Africa), Centre for Peace, Security and Governance (Uganda), Research and Advocacy Unit (Zimbabwe), Youth Empowerment and Transformation Trust (YETT) (Zimbabwe), which are all grantees in the IDRC ‘Youth Cohort.’

Further, the papers in the special issue were first presented during the fourth Voice of Social Sciences (VSS) conference at the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM) in

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November 30, 2017. The VSS is an annual conference of the UDSM College of Social Sciences that brings together academics and practitioners to deliberate on research findings in the social sciences discipline. The 2017 conference theme focused on “The Youth Question and Socio-Economic Development in Africa.” The theme was founded on the understanding that both formal and non-formal institutions have tended to pay less attention to the development and empowerment of the youth in Africa. Instead, this generational category has often been linked with violence, economic vulnerability, political exclusion and other forms of vulnerabilities. The conference theme was reflective of the IDRC Youth Cohort research agenda, and indeed there was a panel that specifically focused on the IDRC research. The papers in the current special issue formed one of the panels during the conference.

References

- Burgess, T. 2015. “Introduction to Youth and Citizenship in East Africa,” *Africa Today*, 51 (3): vii-xxiv.
- Honwana, A., and De Boeck, F., Eds. 2005. *Makers and Breakers: Children and Youth in Postcolonial Africa*. Oxford: James Curry.