Contemporary Journal of African Studies Vol. 12 No. 1 (2025), pp.103-141

Social justice and infrastructure approach to youth development in Ghana

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Abstract

Ghana seeks to develop its youth to contribute to national transformation. It is planned that this will be attained through policy measures and programmes to develop capacities and reduce unemployment among young people. Thus, the Ghanaian state through its agencies seeks to provide jobs, skills training, and financial capital to young people. Though state policies seek to support all youth to develop, in practice support reaches only a select few through a merit-based approach. Most youth are unable to access this support, thus constraining their efforts to develop. This paper contends that the merit-based approach is a neo-liberal paradigm focused on individual capacities to the neglect of socially just and equal access to resources for the diversity of young people. Drawing on primary data obtained through qualitative interactions with 20 young people who participated in a workshop in Ghana between 2018 and 2019, the paper demonstrates this injustice against most young people. To correct this injustice, this paper proposes the social justice and

https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/contjas.v12i1.4

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infrastructure framework for youth development, emphasizing the provisioning of basic infrastructure that are accessible to all young people in their diversity, to stimulate and motivate innovation and entrepreneurship.

Keywords: youth development, social justice, infrastructure, starters, staggers, Ghana.

Résumé

Justice sociale et approche infrastructurelle du développement de la jeunesse au Ghana

Le Ghana cherche à développer sa jeunesse pour contribuer à la transformation nationale. Cet objectif devrait être atteint par l'entremise des mesures politiques et des programmes visant à développer les capacités et à réduire le chômage chez les jeunes. Ainsi, l'État ghanéen, par l'intermédiaire de ses agences, cherche à fournir des emplois, des formations qualifiantes et un capital financier aux jeunes. Bien que les politiques de l'État cherchent à aider tous les jeunes à se développer, dans la pratique, l'aide ne parvient qu'à un petit nombre, selon une approche fondée sur le mérite. La plupart des jeunes n'ont pas accès à ce soutien, ce qui limite leurs efforts de développement. Cet article soutient que l'approche fondée sur le mérite est un paradigme néolibéral axé sur les capacités individuelles, au détriment d'un accès socialement juste et égal aux ressources pour la diversité des jeunes. S'appuyant sur des données primaires obtenues grâce à des interactions qualitatives avec 20 jeunes qui ont participé à un atelier au Ghana entre 2018 et 2019, l'article démontre cette injustice à l'égard de la plupart des jeunes. Pour corriger cette injustice, l'article propose le cadre de justice sociale et d'infrastructure pour le développement de la jeunesse, en mettant l'accent sur la fourniture d'infrastructures de base

accessibles à tous les jeunes dans leur diversité, afin de stimuler et de motiver l'innovation et l'esprit d'entreprise.

Mots clés: développement de la jeunesse, justice sociale, infrastructure, starters, staggers, Ghana.

Introduction

The focus of this work is the skewed state support for youth development in Ghana. Using support for entrepreneurship to demonstrate its point, the paper contends that in Ghana, state support for youth development is implemented from a perspective that favours efficiency in allocation of limited resources. However, this support, expressed practically as entrepreneurial start-up financial and skills training, reaches only a select few, based on 'merit', even if there exists a desire to support as many young people as possible. This efficiency, merit-based principle is individualistic, targets those individual young people that the state believes meet certain criteria for support to develop their entrepreneurial ideas. It discriminates against most young people who do not make the criteria for start-up support. This paper suggests that a social equity, justice, and infrastructure approach that emphasises collective advantage would complement the state's merit-based approach to reach the majority of youth with support for building their livelihoods.

The contentions here do not devalue nor discount the relevance and benefits of the current merit-based efficiency approach through start-up support. Rather, the social justice framework being suggested can be run complementarily with the merit-based approach. This would, at the first instance, provide basic resources as incentives from which all youth can access and begin to build their entrepreneurial ideas. The youth can then individually seek and attract other support to further develop these ideas.

Between 2018 and 2019 the research organisation Farafina Institute[1] organised a set of workshops on youth entrepreneurial skills development in Ghana. Youth participants in attendance expressed to the author their frustrations with the selective and individualistic way state support for young people is implemented. This paper seeks to make meaning of the perspectives that the young people shared at this workshop and contends that the Ghanaian state's merit-based support for youth development is at variance with a social collective advantage for all young people.

Ideally, youth development entails the processes of enabling all young people, irrespective of their current individual abilities to harness opportunities, to attain conditions of socioeconomic and political wellbeing, in assuming responsible roles for themselves, their families, communities, and society in general. However, in practice, it is based on a selective, competitive, and merit-based principle that reaches only a few who can prove concrete business ideas and plans. These select few are referred to in this paper as *starters*. The focus on supporting starters discriminates against most youth who currently may not possess any such concrete ideas or plans and are in transitions to discover themselves. These youth, the majority, are referred to in this work as *staggers*. On this basis of conceptualising youth development in Ghana, the object of this paper therefore is the practice of support from the state that maintains a socially unjust environment for *staggers.* An infrastructure framework is suggested to complement the state's merit-based approach. This would contribute more meaningfully to a social collective approach to state support implementation.

[1] Farafina Institute (www.farafina-institute.org) is a research and programme implementation institute focused on transformations in Africa. This paper however is not funded by this project. It is a personal endeavour of the author, being a part of these workshops as a co-coordinator.

Infrastructure, in this sense, denotes integrated physical and institutional elements that together are enabling and provide the congenial environment and inputs to operationalise ideas and potentials to produce concrete goods (Buhr, 2003; Chester et al., 2019). Therefore, the paper contends that by supporting *starters* based on their ideas, the process should not discriminate against *staggers*. Thus, the paper critiques the merit-based individualistic support implementation of the state.

Defining youth, starters, and staggers

Constructions of youth in literature and policy documents depict youth generically as both a person or persons within the period of preparation towards adulthood and full responsibility for oneself and towards society (Arthur-Holmes and Yeboah, 2025; Honwana, 2014; Henze, 2015). Both the Ghana National Youth Policy of 2010 and 2022 define youth in sociological and demographical terms as any person who falls within the age bracket of 15 and 35 years (GoG-MYS 2010, 2022). In the African Youth Charter, youth is similarly defined as people between the ages of 15 and 35 years (AU, 2006). Generally, this demographic stage is considered a period of socioeconomic dependence on adults, and transition to adulthood. These definitions clearly connote personhood in transition, without full control over their lives. To this extent, these definitions, signifying preparedness and conditioning towards responsibility to themselves and society, justify state support to reach the collective youth, all of whom should have opportunities towards being responsible youth and eventual adults. The core idea in Abbink's (2005) delineation of youth in Africa is that all youth are socially and economically inadequate andnot yet expected to assume adult responsibilities. However, this point of youth not yet being burdened with adult responsibilities is contentious in the African setting where some youth, though 'inadequate' and in transition, already perform adult roles of care for siblings, parents, and other family members. Faced with responsibilities,

some of these youth engage in insecure and less rewarding economic activities to survive and support their families (Arthur–Holmes and Yeboah, 2025). These activities may not meet the criteria of brilliance in entrepreneurial ideas to merit state support. But, if sidelined by the merit–based support of the state, these youth can fall out of opportunities to develop and transform their lives.

The construction of youth as being inadequately prepared for adulthood underscores the crucial difference support for their development can make for their development into responsible youth and in adulthood. Honwana's (2014) notion of waithood as a period of youth uncertainty, insecurity, and being inadequately prepared for responsible adulthood helps to understand the risk of some youth falling into desperate illegitimate and criminal activities to survive. In the context of this work, this risk validates the point that some young people, from diverse backgrounds, lack the capacity to build meaningful livelihoods and thus require basic support to build their lives as responsible people. If the constraining circumstances negatively affecting youth capacities to develop their livelihoods are not addressed, it could persistently limit their potential to transform their lives into responsible agents of transformation as the state desires. Granted that the constitution of youth as a dependent social segment is acceptable, then it is also reasonable to contend that every young person – and not just a few deemed worthy – insofar as they are a dependant, needs support.

Staggers and starters

Constrained by difficult circumstances and structures, and thus unable to currently bring their agency to action or to articulate clear entrepreneurial ideas to attract state support, *staggers* are understood in this work to be those young people who lack support to develop ideas into concrete livelihoods and thus to be 'staggering' towards desired employment, political participation, and social responsibilities both as young people in transition to forming their own lives and into adulthood. They 'stagger', not only because of their individual circumstances but also due to wider social, economic, and political structures of society. This paper does not share the view that staggers fail to attract state support due to individual circumstances only. It can be contended that such an individualistic merit-based construction of support for youth is based on a neoliberal frame of youth development, which emphasizes individualized empowerment based on merit. It stands in opposition to the social collective justice model of youth development adopted by this paper. Drawing from Cuervo (2013)'s critique of the individualized meritorious approach and its shortcomings, one can understand that the 'failures' of *staggers* to perform is seen less as a problem for society or the state, but rather as individual weaknesses.

Thus, in this understanding, staggers should take actions for their lives based on their own decisions and take responsibility for the consequences of these actions. Many of the participants at the Farafina Institute workshops could easily be placed as staggers. Despite their staggering path towards establishing their lives and adulthood, and unable yet to articulate their visions, the disadvantaged youth nonetheless can be considered active agents to make sense of their own world as Chudgar and Chavda (2023) have shown, especially if basic resources are made accessible to them, to challenge the selective, merit-based and segregated practices of the state to youth development.

'Starters' emerge from a competitive meritorious process. In this regard, *starters* develop their agency, aided by their own circumstances and wider favourable factors, to garner support from the state. They preoccupy themselves with pursuing the competitive criteria and directives of the state to access state resources. To this extent, the expectations, directives, resources of the state hold a heavy influence to largely determine the life outcomes of youth who pursue their lives on these state expectations. State expectations and directives in this regard produce opportunities as outcomes of intense competition and linear mobility of youth development, overshadowing a social outcome of youth development as a collective problem. Put together, the agency of *starters* to merit state support should not constitute a limitation for staggers to do same. For both starters and staggers, the circumstances that produce them can be understood as factors beyond their individual control. These factors are wider social, economic, and political circumstances such as lack of institutionally grounded access to land and other resources, favouritism and nepotism in politics, existential family challenges, rural and urban divides, or even limited electricity and internet availability. The state, however, can change most of these political and infrastructural factors to enable opportunities for starters and staggers.

The rest of the paper proceeds as follows. In the next section, the African context of youth development is dealt with, leading on to a discussion of the central role of the state in the diverse paths of youth development in Ghana. The qualitative methods for this study are described in the next section, then an explanation of the conceptual framework of social justice and infrastructure follows. In the ensuing section, results of the interactions at the Farafina Institute workshops are described and analysed. The discussion then connects the strands in youth experiences of state support and points to a variance between social justice principles in state policies and the

discriminatory merit-based practices of the state. Finally, conclusions drawn are presented.

African context of youth development

African government's investments in youth development are directly connected to youth as a developmental concern appearing in global development discourse in the 1980s, especially with the UN declaration of 1985 as the first International Year of Youth. A few other important declarations followed, including the African Union declaration of 2009-2018 as the decade of youth development in Africa (AU, 2011). In youth developmental terms, Klouwenberg and Butter (2011) observed that youth in Africa can mean different things depending on the context. Across Africa two main conceptions of the relationship between youth and society can be identified. Youth are considered dialectically not only as a burden on society but also as possessing prospects for national and continental transformation (Hlungwani and Sayeed, 2018; Hilson and Osei, 2014). As burden, youth unemployment is acknowledged almost everywhere in Africa. While youth attempt to overcome periods of uncertainties and lack of state support for building their lives, in what Honwana conceptualises as waithood, they may resort to violence and illegitimate activities (Honwana, 2014), though this is contested for example in the case of Ghana (Arthur-Holmes and Yeboah, 2025). Yet, the consequence of state failure to solve the youth problem across the continent cannot be overstated.

Conflicts across the continent, latent or manifest, are often blamed on the youth who may be mobilized and used by the key actors in these conflicts. Some politicians in Africa manipulate and fuel youth violence resulting from lack of state support and employment towards their development (Hlungwani and Sayeed, 2018; Hilson and Osei, 2014). Commenting on the African youth condition (Hlungwani and Sayeed, 2018, in reference to Dejaeghere and Baxter, 2014) observe that the

notion of youth bulge where Africa's population is characterised by a growing proportion of young people is accompanied by discussions that this growth in population presents a time bomb. It is estimated that a third of the world's youth population will live in Africa by 2050, rising from a fifth in 2012. This growth is occurring especially in West, Central, and East Africa (Bloom, 2012). In Nigeria, Watts (2007), and Chukwuemeka and Aghara (2010) cited in Ackah-Baidoo (2016)'s report that youth are heavily involved in the conflicts over oil production in the Niger Delta, while in Liberia youth have been mobilised and placed at the centre of violence (Maconachie, 2014, cited in Ackah-Baidoo, 2016). Ackah-Baidoo (2016) notes that the government of Ghana is awakened to fully address youth unemployment due partly to latent but intermittent eruption of conflicts in many parts of the country. The notion of waithood captures youth experiencing the failure of the state to adequately provide for them to develop into responsible adults (Honwana, 2014). Although waithood manifests differently across the continent, it clearly constitutes injustice to youths who, despite the social contract between the state and its citizens, are denied basic resources for their livelihoods and development.

Youth also hold prospects for social change and prosperity. They hold the mantle as future leaders in various respects, and as agents of transformation in whom the continent hopes to achieve prosperity. Youth help bring key transformations towards enabling society to flourish. In 2024, young Kenyans through their mass activism online and in the streets protested taxation and public sector corruption. In South Africa, student protests around injustices against blacks in the educational system sought educational opportunities for all. Between 2010 and 2012 in North Africa and the Arabian peninsula, youth mass political and social protests against challenges in youth political participation and lack of decent livelihoods, in what has become known as the Arab Spring, significantly contributed to deep political and social changes including changes in governments in countries like Tunisia,

Libya, and Egypt. Seen as potential agents of transformation, youth appear in state policies across Africa as being prepared for adult responsibilities and to take up the role of transformative agents. Nonetheless, youth access to resources such as internet connectivity, reliable and renewable electricity connection, communication facilities, and land continue to be constrained (Kidido et al., 2017). Land grabs by elites and foreign firms compound the problem and lock youth out of access to agricultural land (Kumeh and Omulo, 2019).

To promote a process for the youth to unleash their potential, African governments and non-state stakeholders encourage entrepreneurship as the driver for youth employment and national prosperity (Kew et al., 2015; Brixiová et al., 2015; Sutter et al. 2019). Particularly since the 2000s, governments in Africa have placed faith in the private sector as leading the efforts to stimulate and sustain economic growth and create the necessary jobs for youth (Flynn et al., 2016). Yet, the private sector has not been able to provide adequate, secure, and decent jobs to meet the growing and diverse needs of the youth (Ayele et al., 2018; Aryeetey and Baah-Boateng, 2013). Arthur-Mensah and Alagaraja (2018), discussing youth unemployment in Ghana, note that the informal economy in Ghana and many African countries is huge, where businesses of young people provide employment for many people. States acknowledge their core responsibility to resolve unemployment, yet have not managed to do so effectively. In Nigeria, for example, youth policy and programmes have been to some extent at variance with the skill requirements and aspirations of youth (Badejo et al., 2015). In Ghana, Ackah-Baidoo (2016) describes a similar situation where youth unemployment has in fact risen over the years due to ineffective policies and programmes. The Institute of Statistical, Social, Economic Research (ISSER) at the University of Ghana reports that in 2019 (ISSER, 2023), youth unemployment stood at 19.7%, while the Ghana Statistical service reports an increase in youth unemployment from 20.6% in 2022 to 21.7% in 2023 (GoG-GSS, 2023). From Malawi,

Kadzamira and Kazembe (2015) describe efforts of the state to attract youth into agriculture to reduce unemployment as showing little success. They identify lack of active engagement of policy formulation with the youth as one major factor for failed policies. In Rwanda, the government's strict regulation and control of the economy stifles the youth expression and activism that drives innovation (Sommers and Uvin, 2011). Overall, youth are caught up in fundamental structural constraints of African economies that erode opportunities, not only for youth but for other social groups as well (Sumberg et.al., 2021). As is being suggested in this paper, Sumberg et al. (2021) argue that structural constraints require not just equipping youth with skills, but more broadly about creating the environment to enable all youth to access opportunities to explore their potentials.

In Ghana, though state support is crucial for all youth, many young people do not just wait around for government to solve their problems. Interactions from the Farafina Institute workshops suggest that young people are already making good efforts on their own with any resources they could mobilise from their families, communities, and friends. These instances of experiencing uncertainties about state support to be gainfully employed yet harnessing agency to survive is the point Honwana (2014) makes about African youth in her concept of waithood, and Aurther-Homes and Yeboah (2025) similarly about Ghanaian youth in their derived concepts of 'waithood temporality', 'survival-hood', and 'ensnared waithood'. In a paper on youth agency and entrepreneurship in the mobile telephony industry Afutu-Kotey et al. (2017) conclude that in Ghana many young people have a high sense of responsibility, facilitating their transition to adulthood. The current work recognises that state resources for youth development are limited, but these resources can be invested in infrastructure that provide for wider access by most youth than is presently being achieved with start-up support for a select few. Youth in their diversity have different life paths based on their

circumstances. Yet, this differential development path suggests every young person possess some potential to develop themselves, making it relevant that fundamental resources should be available to all of them.

The role of the state and its policy in Ghanaian youth development

Over the decades youth development has been given due recognition by successive governments in Ghana, and pursued through various models (Tagoe and Oheneba-Sakyi, 2015). These models are aligned with three distinct but closely connected global perspectives on youth development; they are: the preventionist or interventionist model, the positive youth development model, and the social justice model (McDaniel, 2017). The preventionist or interventionist and positive youth development models address the need for young people to change from conditions of low capacities to become skilful and knowledgeable individuals. Thus, they must be directed by external agents to do so. The positive youth development model sees youth as assets and seeks to provide them with opportunities in this regard. It emphasises fostering positive qualities and skills in young people, and strengthening their development into healthy, productive adults (Lerner et al., 2021). The social justice model addresses injustices and emphasises the agency of all youth and their rights to adequate support. It also addresses the need for youth and adults to work together to enable disadvantaged youth as well to achieve their life goals (Lerner et al., 2021; Ginwright, 2005). The social justice model should not be delinked from the positive youth development model to recognise the agency of even the disadvantaged to pursue meaningful livelihood and effect social change (Agbiboa, 2015).

Ghana's policy actions on youth can be described as leaning towards the positive youth development approach, which can also be understood as interventionist. It is in this

regard that Ghanaian state policies and programmes construct a utilitarian definition for all youth lives, not just a few, to harness youth potentials for societal transformation. Emphasis on skills training, education, and other resources to build and develop youth capacities for employment and national development is prominent (Tagoe and Oheneba-Sakyi, 2015) and appears in all the policy documents examined and discussed in this paper. Ghana's governments had, and continue to refer to youth as the future leaders who should be nurtured for this role. Moreover, the Ghanaian state's utilitarian construction of youth also draws from the dominant global efforts to harness the demographic (youth) dividend where investments in education and skills are central to harnessing the productivity of youth towards GDP growth.

The Ghanaian policy documents rightly see the potential of the diversity of youth though with their different capacities. For instance, the 2010 National Youth Policy of Ghana asserts that,

> The main goal of the policy is therefore to ensure the transformation of a knowledgeable, self-reliant, skilled, disciplined, and a healthy population with the capacity to drive and sustain the socio-economic transformation of the nation (GoG-NYP, 2010: 10).

In the 2022 National Youth Policy, the state instrumentalizes youth development, to benefit national development. This is the demographic dividend clearly highlighted across youth policies. According to the 2022 National Youth Policy,

> The government recognizes the youth as an important asset in nation-building and is therefore committed to harnessing their demographic dividend through increased investment in issues affecting them and sustainable partnership with all

> development stakeholders (GoG-MYS, 2022, 6; 22-23)

Another policy document, the Coordinated Programme of Economic and Social Transformation Policies 2017 – 2024, states that:

> Government will create an enabling environment to build the capacity of the youth to take on more active roles in the transformation of the country (GoG – NDPC, 2017: 120).

The Medium-term National Transformation Policy Framework 2018-2021 (MTNDPF) notes,

> The past youth transformation interventions have been overly concentrated on unemployment to the neglect of the other aspects of youth development, including: their role in developing new business and creating economic opportunities; as change agents in communities; and participation in political governance (GoG – NDPC, 2017: 61).

Refreshing and laudable in all these policy statements is the fact that governments seem keen to create enabling environments to develop capacities of youth. Yet, the stated goals are far from being attained, as policy implementation prioritises a meritorious, competitive process for reaching a few youth with support for their development. Schoon and Lyons-Amos (2016) aptly advise that conceptualizing diverse youth development pathways will enable us gain insight into the complexity of the youth period and address such complexities without leaving vulnerable youth behind in youth development. This admonishment is the core concern of this work, to propose a social justice approach to youth development in Ghana that makes provision, in terms of fundamental resources, for all youth to explore their lives and flourish. State support for young people is skewed towards the *starters*, leaving the majority *staggers* now discovering themselves, unattended to. This paper

contends that this paradigm can change through a social justice and collective approach.

Key objectives of the 2022 National Youth Policy assign a leading role to the state at all levels (national, regional, and district), to provide the youth with skills and opportunities for their empowerment, supported by the private sector, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders such as community-based organisation. The state finds itself at the forefront to guarantee fundamental amenities to provide opportunities for all youth to explore their lives based on their competencies and efforts (GoG-MYS, 2022, 6). The youth policy emphasizes that state support would be accessible *'For all Ghanaian youth, everywhere'*[2]… to ensure that *'No one is left behind'* (GoG-MYS, 2022: 73-76). As the 2022 youth policy notes, youth entrepreneurship programmes such as the Microfinance and Small Loans Schemes, the National Entrepreneurship and Innovation Programme (NEIP), the Rural Enterprises Project, Planting for Food and Jobs, Youth in Agriculture Programme, among others are all aimed at mitigating the effects of inequalities in availability of support for some segment of youth. The 2022 National Youth Policy acknowledges that despite government support in various fields for the youth, challenges still exist for desired levels of youth development (GoG-MYS, 2022: 26). In this regard, this work contends that since the state has been pursuing the merit-based approach to youth development, this approach has failed, drawing from the youth policy's own account of youth-based programmes.

For a while now, the Ghanaian state has been constrained financially and unable to provide the needed material support such as start-up funds for all youth. The public debt in Ghana is high and rising, at 57.2% as at June 2018 (after rebasing of the economy), but 67.3% (before the economy

[2] Emphasis mine

rebasing), though some decline has been registered in 2019.[3] In May 2023, the government had no choice than to approach and obtain a $3 billion financial bailout from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to restore macroeconomic stability and debt sustainability (IMF press release no. 23/151). The state had argued that the public financial struggles was a result of the difficult aftermath of the covid-19 pandemic and the current impacts of the Ukraine and Russia war. As conceptualized in Cuervo (2013), collective access to support for all youth is grounded in liberal egalitarianism, which is a social approach that considers meeting needs of all youth as an opportunity they deserve. But where the state deliberately selects a few over based on merit, this role to create opportunity for all youth is clearly breached.

Conceptual framework: social justice and infrastructure in youth development

Social justice (for youth development)

Social justice in the context of this work concerns the equitable and just distribution of and accessibility to resources and socioeconomic collective benefits, and participation in policy discourses as free thinking, choice, and opportunity for everyone (Rawls, 1971; Coburn & Gormally, 2017). In the context of this work, emphasis is placed on equality of opportunity for every young person to give them the chance to develop themselves and contribute to development of others, including protection of natural resources (Kosciulek, 2020). Social justice principles mean that interventions in youth

[3] Ghana's debt to GDP ratio increased from 32 percent in 2008 to 73.1 percent in 2016 but declined to 67.3 percent in June 2018 (before rebasing the economy) and 57.2% (after rebasing the economy). (Source: Budget statement, and Budget speech for 2019 financial year, presented to Parliament by Minister for Finance, 15 November 2018).

development recognise that all young people face basic needs, irrespective of their different capacities to innovate at any given time. The social justice framework departs from current constructions of support for youth in Ghanaian national policies as meritorious efficient allocation of resources. This meritorious approach is where start-up resources are allocated to youth who show potential for entrepreneurship (*starters*) and who are prioritised in view of their current possession of entrepreneurial ideas. To this end, those youth with no such potential yet, or who do not have any entrepreneurial ideas as yet (*staggers*) are not reached with such support. The contention against this approach is that it is discriminatory against most young people who may be unsure of their potentials and are currently discovering themselves and need support as well. In this work, social justice is a more fundamental approach that complement the meritorious approach of the state. Even if merit is a criterion for obtaining limited support, the social justice approach offers a relationship between state and youth to be one that provides for opportunities in infrastructures that reach the diversity of young people in their different circumstances.

While there are different theories of social justice, such as rights-based, pluralistic, feminist, or egalitarian theories, two important bases for social justice are difference and sameness. For a discussion of social justice among a group of people, it is acknowledged that there is some form of difference between members of the group such as diversity among youth along lines of age, gender, economic status, formal education, and disability, among others. This is a morally important justification not only for the differential distribution of benefits and burdens but also for attention to disadvantaged groups (Rawls, 1971). However, there is recognition also that social justice is founded on sameness of basic human needs, which then demands that everyone is entitled to access to resources to meet these basic needs (Smith, 2000). For instance, it can hardly be denied that every young person, irrespective of the stage in entrepreneurial idea development, needs internet, reliable and renewable

electricity, land, and communication platforms wherever they live. Even those with doubts in their minds as to what to do, the *staggers,* would be motivated and stimulated to innovate if such basic infrastructure were available. Social justice concerns in youth development also cover not only distributive fairness and equity in access to benefits and responsibilities, but also the preservation of rights, liberties, entitlements, and capabilities of the diversity of young people that provide for dignity and respect for all of them (Van den Bos, 2003). Social justice treats all young people in equal and just terms, meaning that at least all youth should receive the basic resources for their transformation (Smith, 2000).

Social justice infrastructure

Social justice in youth development in Ghana can be achieved by constructing youth entrepreneurial resources not only as merit-based start-ups for a select few, but also as infrastructure for everyone. Infrastructure is defined in this context as integrated physical and institutional elements that together are enabling and provide the congenial environment and inputs to operationalise ideas and potentials into concrete goods and services (Buhr, 2003; Chester et al., 2019). Thus, infrastructure is input to provide social goods which should be accessible to most people unconstrained. Infrastructure are shared public resources that should be accessible and available to all segments of people irrespective of status in any terms. In youth development in Ghana, infrastructural needs for entrepreneurship include institutionalised access to land, tax rebates, internet and communication networks across communities, reliable electricity connectivity, and legal frames to protect youth from adult business manoeuvres, among others. Though access to, and use of infrastructure resources should not be constrained, there could be a limited set of regulations in the use of such resources to ensure everyone's

access is provided for and goods produced are socially beneficial to society.

The traditional meaning of infrastructure that covers physical amenities such as roads, telephone lines, buildings and their facilities, water amenities etcetera all have an underlying value of being inputs to producing social goods, and serving most people without restrictions, beyond individual rights. Inherent in infrastructure is the notion of justice and low or no bias against anyone willing to access such infrastructure (Buhr, 2002). The market is not the frame for guiding access to infrastructure as public resources. Rather, it is the value of producing social goods that guides access to infrastructure, which should be enjoyed as a right of all citizens. To this end, especially for young people who are starting life and have no or little capital, selecting among them by assigning brilliance or capacity as a criterion, and not providing alternatives for those who do not fit these criterion, amounts to employing discriminatory market principles to resource access against the majority. Differential access to resources place those with limited access behind others, in terms of participation in the production of goods and services thus opportunities to live meaningful lives. It is contended in this respect that equal access to infrastructure rather than merit–based start–ups would provide enablement for all youth, both *starters* and *staggers,* to pursue their respective livelihoods. While some young people with unfettered/ unhindered/unencumbered access to infrastructure would falter along the way, the majority of youth would be enabled in their quest to build their livelihoods and lead responsible lives into adulthood.

A participant interactive method

A participative research approach was adopted. Data were gathered through participation in the Farafina Institute's entrepreneurial workshops held between August 2018 and April 2019 for Ghanaian youth. Qualitative interactions were held with

20 youth to understand their perspectives on youth development. The Farafina Institute (www.farafina-institute.org) is a research and programme implementation institute focused on transformations in Africa. It has run projects on youth transformation, environment resources and energy, and migration challenges in Africa and about the African diaspora in Europe. The Farafina Institute workshops from which data for this work was gathered, were part of a project titled 'Spreading the Word on Potentials for Excellence in Ghana'. It was funded by The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the Centre for International Migration and Development (CIM). With 32 participants randomly selected in each region to participate in these workshops, I found it a unique opportunity to reach a diversity of youth from different parts of the country in one place. These youth were both male and female all between 21 and 35 years. For these workshops, they were selected, irrespective of whether they had a business established or not, whether they were trying to implement a business, or even if they were not sure of their ideas at all.

Permission was sought from the Frafaina Institute to participate in these workshops with the aim of listening to the views of the youth participants about their development experiences and to interact further with them on these experiences. Guided by the research goal to examine state youth development policy and practice, interactions with the young people in these workshops focused on three main questions; i) whether, why, and when the youth had accessed any form of state support in their entrepreneurial livelihood development; ii) how crucial it was to receive or not to receive state support for their entrepreneurial livelihoods; and iii) what the youth without state support were doing with their lives. This author attended 10 workshops in each of the then 10 regions

of Ghana.[4] For the purposes of the discussion in this paper, two participants in each regional workshop –– one with a business and another without any or much experiences of running a business –– were selected purposively. The ages of those selected for the interactions ranged between 22 and 34 years. Thus, a blend of youth with various levels of establishment in entrepreneurship, and gender was achieved. Moreover, two group discussions were held in the Greater Accra and Brong Ahafo regional workshops.

Transcripts of the interactions confirmed two categories of youth in their experiences of state support; these were: 1) those with some entrepreneurial ideas who were running businesses, referred to in this work as *starters*, and 2) those without any ideas or only faint ideas about entrepreneurship, referred to in this work as *staggers*. This categorisation then formed the basis for further analysis of the data. The interviews were transcribed, coded, and analysed in the Atlas.ti quantitative data analysis software. Results of these analyses are presented in this work in the form of quotes. In Atlas.ti, coding, code system development, hyperlinking, source–target linking, and network building were done. This entails identifying, collecting, and giving peculiar names (codes) to relevant paragraphs, words, and sentences in transcripts and secondary materials, that describe or explain various aspects of youth experiences.

Beyond the workshops, six national policy and programme documents were examined, to identify the approach and practice to youth development and the kind of support the state offers young people. These policy and programme documents are:

i. The Coordinated Programme of Economic and Social Development Policies (2017–2024). An Agenda for Jobs:

[4] At the time the Farafina Institute workshops were held, between 2018 and 2019, 10 regions existed in Ghana.

Creating Prosperity and Equal Opportunity for All. GoG, October 2017;

ii. National Youth Policy (2022-2032): Benefit for Youth involve Youth, Together for a Prosperous Future. MYS, 2022.
iii. National Youth Policy of Ghana; Towards an Empowered Youth, Impacting Positively on National Development. MYS, August 2010;
iv. Ghana Industry Policy. GoG, n.d.;
v. Medium-term National Development Policy Framework: An Agenda for Jobs: Creating Prosperity and Equal Opportunity for All (First step), 2019-2021. GoG, December 2017; and
vi. Ghana Trade Policy. GoG, n.d.

At the time the workshops were being held, a key target document that could have been included was the 40-year Ghana National Transformation Plan that was being developed around the time the interactions were held. However, this 40-year policy document had not been officially launched and therefore could not be included in this work. The choice of the six policy documents was influenced by their ready availability and accessibility and their high level of influence on youth development. Copies of all the policy documents examined were obtained online. The main interest from the policy document review is the linkage between youth development challenges, measures to address these challenges, and social justice in policy measures.

Youth experiences of skewed access to entrepreneurial support

In this section, results from the interactions at the Farafina Institute workshops are juxtaposed with the case analysis of the Ghana Enterprises Agency (GEA; https://gea.gov.gh/) and the National Entrepreneurship and Innovation Programme (NEIP; http://neip.gov.gh/). The juxtaposition is to demonstrate

the realities of the limitations to the merit-based efficiency (start-up) approach of state practice, and the possibilities of a more social justice approach to reaching majority of youth. GEA and NEIP are two of the foremost national agencies maintained purposely to provide support for medium and small businesses, with core target being young people. The GEA, formerly the National Board for Small Scale Industries (NBSSI), came into being in 2020 by Act 1043 of the Ghana Parliament. Its main mission is to improve the competitiveness of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) by facilitating the provision of Business Development Programs and Integrated Support Services.[5]

Youth access to resources in the Ghana Enterprises Agency

GEA services can be categorised into tangible support (material) including mainly financial grants, and non-tangible support (knowledge and skills) including business advice and trainings for Micro, Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (MSMEs) as its primary target. Support from the agency is operationalised through the Business Advisory Centres (BAC) located in the districts of each of the then 10 regions in Ghana. Thus, GEA is highly visible, at least at the regional and district capitals. With limited resources, provision of funding and training reaches a few young people, usually those with promising businesses. However, business advice is supposedly meant to be available more readily, insofar as a young person can place a call or visit the BAC in the district capitals. GEA on its website provides telephone contacts to each of the BAC in the district capitals. But the youth at the workshops lament that for those in remote communities, while telephone lines may not go through, or may go unanswered, some youth do not have the

[5] GEA, at https://gea.gov.gh/about-us/, accessed on 19 December 2021; and KEEAMA, at https://keeama.gov.gh/index.php/business-advisory-center/, accessed on 19 December 2021.

means to place a call for longer than 5 minutes to obtain business advice.

The interactions with participants at the Farafina Institute workshops confirm that access to GEA funds, training, and business advice is valuable, yet a lot of young people cannot access these forms of support. One participant, a *stagger*, summarised this succinctly:

> Oh, I did attempt to apply, I did a few times; the NBSSI [now Ghana Enterprises Agency] says it can support us young people with funds and training. But the requirement means that I have a business already that I can prove to exist. Mine has been struggling and not working now so I was rejected. (Individual interactions at Farafina Institute workshops, April 2019)

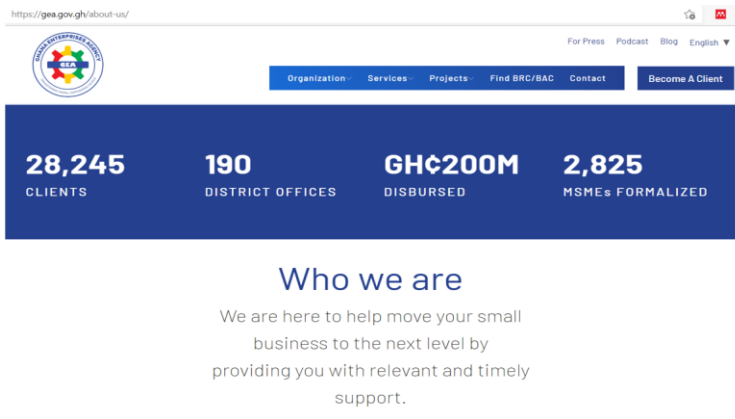
Of course, state resources are limited and may not be expended on everyone. However, alternative approaches such as development of infrastructure should be accessible to everyone. GEA recognises that accessibility to its services, at least business advice and trainings for the diversity of youth irrespective of location is essential to harness their potential. However, for most young people interacted with, basic social and business enabling infrastructure such as reliable internet and electricity, adequate and secure land, efficient telephone lines, and business information on radio, websites, and social media have not developed to enable them to find credible information to develop their businesses. These are infrastructure that stimulate ideas and production and can turn *staggers* into innovative youth. Youth in rural areas are the most vulnerable in terms of internet, electricity, and communication facilities, and availability of credible information. They bear the heavy brunt of state limitations in this respect.

In a group discussion in Accra, group members acknowledged that spreading resources thinly for everyone does not mean quality is sacrificed for quantity:

> …if government funds are limited, of course it cannot be for everyone …ok, but we also say that other things like internet, electricity, communication network, and land rights can be established at all areas for everyone [a group member's sentiments] …me too I think, yes, this does not mean that the best entrepreneurs cannot be selected for funding [another group member's view]….that is why taxes are paid for everyone to have some basic things from government [a third group member's view] (Group interactions at Farafina Institute workshop, Accra, April 2019).

GEA promotes its visibility in numbers (Figure 1); thus, it believes in the statistical strengths of its products. On this point, extending basic resources to a larger number of people can even enhance its statistical strength.

Figure 1, GEA promoting its "visibility through numbers" (coverage).



Source: Ghana Enterprises Agency website, at https://gea.gov.gh/about-us/, accessed on 20 December 2021.

Youth access to resources in NEIP

The National Entrepreneurship and Innovation Programme (NEIP) is a flagship policy initiative of the Government of Ghana. With the primary objective to provide integrated start-up support for small business entrepreneurs. Its primary focus on youth has made NEIP a key point of reference for many young people to seek support. Its services include business development, start-up incubators and funding for young businesses.[6] Workshop participants interacted with who have businesses running or starting-up are more confident of applying to NEIP for funding or training support. Yet, they acknowledge their limited chances to win the competitive grants. Like GEA, NEIP employs a highly competitive selection process to ensure funds are allocated to the 'best' entrepreneurs (Figure 2).

[6] NEIP, at http://neip.gov.gh/, accessed on 20 December 2021.

Figure 2, highly selective criteria for access to NEIP support

Source: NEIP, at http://neip.gov.gh/business-support-report/, accessed on 20 December 2021.

In these circumstances, youth without any businesses nor concrete entrepreneurial ideas, that is, the *staggers*, expressed very little confidence of ever attempting to access state support until they have effectively started their businesses. A young woman participant who had been attempting to start a business noted that,

> But honestly, I had been struggling to do a business, but the idea keeps changing; like I do not have a concrete idea yet. So, in all cases I just write something down as much as I can with my little English; but I did not believe that much in my idea as yet and so I cannot even get any support to motivate me to do something new. (Individual interactions at Farafina Institute workshop, April 2018)

Another participant, a young man *stagger*, took a geographical perspective and explained that,

> …in rural areas, yes, finding people to help you formulate your business idea into writing is not easy. So, this means your idea will die if you do not put it into action by whatever means you can find, even without developing this idea on paper, before governments comes in with support. But it has also not been easy to get this support due to high competition; everyone wants some support from government. (Individual interactions at Farafina Institute workshop, April 2018)

Staggers have the potential to start meaningful businesses, but they need to be stimulated by availability of the basic infrastructure. The quote above explains the constraints *staggers* face to access state support. These constraints demonstrate the privileged access to state resources. Yet, this challenge is compounded by the large and still increasing number of youths from the growing population.

However, policy statements show government's good intentions for all youth. For instance, in the Coordinated Programme of Economic and Social Transformation Policies (2017-2024), government spells out clearly that,

> The challenge to Government, in this regard, is to initiate and implement a set of transformative policies to build one of the most business-friendly and people-centred economies in Africa, capable of bringing work and prosperity for all Ghanaians. (p. 3).

The same policy document highlights that,

> In a push towards job creation and skills transformation, Government will introduce a mandatory job impact assessment for all public sector projects or initiatives. Job impact assessment will also be required of private sector entities that work on Government projects or

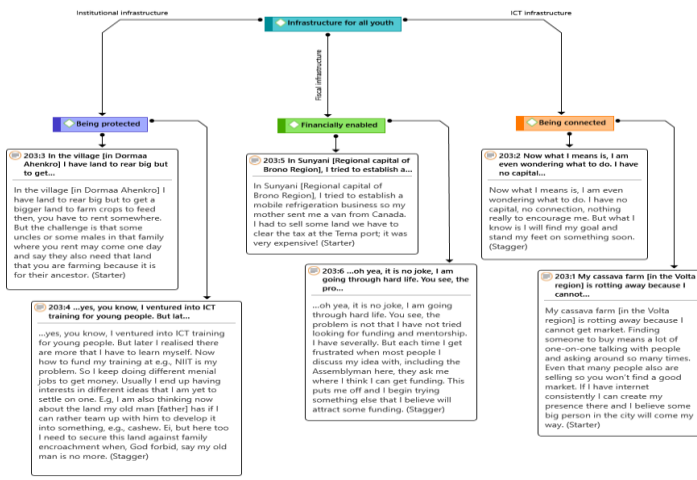
> contracts. In other words, all public sector projects, whether executed by public sector or private sector contractors, must undergo an assessment to evaluate the potential job-creation impact. (p. 108).

Yet, despite these laudable objectives of the state, the low investments in infrastructure remains, and continue to stifle livelihood innovation by many young people.

Youth will and determination

While state direct employment, funding, and logistic support are skewed and inaccessible to many youth particularly *staggers*, the alternative for some of these youth is not to remain idle but to attempt to build some form of livelihoods by themselves. In fact, in a neo-liberal sense, this is what the state expects all youth to do. However, the common challenge youth face can be identified as lack of infrastructure that provides them with the resources to leverage multiple livelihood options (Figure 3).

Figure 3, an Atlas.ti network view of youth infrastructural needs



Source: Authors interactions with youth at Farafina Institute workshops, August 2018 to April 2019.

Figure 3 is an Atlas.ti network view, generated from transcripts of interactions with the youth at the Farafina Institute workshops. It shows sentiments from the two categories of youth in this paper, that is, *staggers* and *starters* (appearing at the end of the quotations). *Staggers* and *starters* have similar basic livelihood development needs, all of which can be conceptualised as basic infrastructure. To this end, it can be argued that solutions to the limitations of the state to provide funding for all youth, whether *starters* or *staggers*, is to focus more on the provision of basic infrastructure for young people. Unlike direct provision of jobs and funding support from the state for a select few, infrastructure provides opportunity for all categories of youth to innovate. My observations around their workplace and communities shows that young people who are aware of functional internet and communication infrastructure are stimulated to consistently try livelihood options or persistently pursue career goals. The main idea here is that infrastructure as depicted in this Atlas.ti network view (Figure 3) are fundamental inputs and should not be aligned to the needs of a particular category of youth out of reach of others; they should be accessible to all youth.

Connecting the strands of youth experiences: a just access to foundational resources

Starter and stagger continuities

While there are differences in access to resources between *starters* and *staggers*, this does not necessarily have to be so. Social justice and equity in Ghanaian youth development centrally should address structural inequality by refocusing on process, participation and collective rights of all young people (Coburn & Gormally, 2017). Continuity from the social justice principles in state youth policies, to real actions in programmes should be a priority of the Ghanaian state. The youth unemployment wave across Africa and the central role of the state in supporting youth livelihoods is a social contract that

governments must prioritise. In this way, the state defines a role for youth in exchange for being provided with support for their livelihoods. In Ghana, as can be deduced from the policy documents included in this work, the state constructs youth as a necessary and vital tool for national economic transformation (GoG–NYP, 2010, 2022); GoG – NDPC, 2017: 120). But it is unjust for *staggers* that only those young people with capacities defined by the state, *starters*, do have a chance to obtain support to flourish in entrepreneurship (Ginwright, 2005; McDaniel, 2017). With a high number of *staggers*, youth unable to identify their goals yet, and who have limited access to state resources, the high youth unemployment in Ghana would likely linger (Arthur–Mensaha and Alagaraja, 2018).

Though government support for those already in business is perhaps intended to stimulate others to harness their agency to establish businesses, the side–lining of the *staggers* could widen the existing social inequity gaps between *staggers* and *starters* as not everyone would be thus stimulated. Moreover, as seen in the African context of youth development discussed above, entrepreneurship is the dominant approach through which states seek to reduce youth unemployment (Badejo et al., 2015; Kadzamira and Kazembe, 2015; Hilson and Osei, 2014). This paper contends that it is not possible to provide support on a merit basis to all individuals, which is evident in the failures of the state programmes to reach everyone. On the contrary, it is possible for the state, even with limited resources, to provide some infrastructure which the diversity of youth can have access to. Direct employment of young people by the state in Ghana in various youth programmes as described in the 2022 National Youth Policy has not been sustainable. The situation in Ghana is similar in most African countries (Hilson and Osei, 2014; Badejo et al., 2015; Kadzamira and Kazembe, 2015). Financial constraints on the state comes against growing human population and increasing need for even the basic infrastructure and social services. A constrained state cannot afford (and needs not) to directly

provide jobs to a growing young population well into the future. Direct job provisioning for youth by the state is not a bad approach if the state can afford it. Hlungwani and Sayeed (2018) offer the same advice, that constrained states do not have to directly create jobs but rather to proactively provide the enabling environments to ease the cost of creating and maintaining businesses. This paper aligns with this piece of advice to reverse the constraints on youth as active agents to access opportunities for their development (Blumsztajn, 2020).

Conclusion

The paper does not fault the ability of *starters* to attract funding, acknowledging that *starters'* abilities to attract state support in themselves do not discriminate against *staggers*. It is rather the state's meritorious practice of support that maintains the discrimination, and this needs to change. The object of this paper is to promote a socially just and equal environment for all youth to innovate, establish livelihoods, and flourish. The problem with the merit-based approach to state support for youth development is both political and structural. It can be addressed through a paradigm shift from state funding support for youth development largely to a select few established businesses to a more fundamental approach that priorities infrastructures from which every youth can access and benefit from. This is socially just for youth in their diversity. The point in this paper is not to say that state funding should be allocated equally at all times and for everyone, nor start-up funding for a select few should be abandoned all together. The substance of adopting the social justice and infrastructure framework for youth development is to give all youth at least the basic inputs and opportunities to develop their livelihoods. From there, then some form of differentiated support may apply in allocating state material support differently to meet the varied needs of youth. Constructing and implementing youth support approaches as infrastructure for social justice provide

the framework for not only youth themselves but also stakeholders in youth development to think in a long-term and collective perspective. In the long-run, *staggers*, if supported, will find their feet and innovative hats and flourish as well as the *starters*. Social justice and infrastructure as underlying frames for youth development thus have potential to contribute to making real the goal in the SDGs of leaving no one behind.

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