

Current situations affecting the lives of young people in Africa and their expectations

By Tendai Karombo (National Catholic Youth Council Chairperson, Zimbabwe)



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Zimbabwe just like any other African country, young people are facing many situations in their day to day lives and also hope for the best from both the Church and Society. The change in times has never made it easy for us young people to have a steady life and also the rise of many challenges I will explain in this presentation shadows the opportunities young people have.

I am greatly honoured to be presenting my experience from where I come from, in Zimbabwe, as a youth leader and also relating to Africa as a whole. In this presentation I have highlighted major challenges faced by young people in the Church and Society also expectation young people have from the Church and society.

Challenges faced by young people in the society

1. Socio-economic conditions blocks growth

In most of African countries economic crisis has brought about many challenges and problems. Poor economies, largely due to mismanagement of resources (especially natural resources) has led to poor performance of economies resulting in:

- High levels of unemployment (e.g. in Zimbabwe it is estimated to be between 80%-95%) therefore it means there is no stable source of income.

- Young people have developed dependency syndrome on parents, politicians and donor aid stalling youths' active and meaning participation in societal transformation.
- Young people are now failing to live a dream of their own, their dreams and aspirations are controlled by the one who has an upper hand in their knives or based on how much the family can earn to make their dreams come true.

2. Child labour

The concept of child labour is becoming a common practice in Africa. Young people are being used to provide cheap labour. Many of them, especially girls, still have challenges to access basic education, many fail to get specialised trainings.

Instead of one help young ones earn and further their education, young boys and girls are 'employed' as house helpers and in some production companies and are then deprived their chance to develop their future.

3. Family disintegration and society chaos

The family is the first cell of formation where human values are instilled in young people, however, in Africa most families are under constant attack from various factors;

- Poverty
- Regional and international migration
- Domestic and political violence
- Divorce
- Materialism, only to mention a few.

The effects of destabilised families are detrimental to the growth and success of young people and leads to society chaos. Family members especially parents leave families for greener pasture or for safety and better living conditions which affect the psychological and even physical wellness of youths.

Technology coming in between families not as a strength but being a threat to the communion of a family, taking the place where attention is now shifted more to technical gadgets and less to the behavioural changes of young people in families.

Challenges facing the young people in the Church

The Church as a body of Christ plays a very important role in the formation, growth and development of young people. In my time being involved in the process of coming up with the Pastoral Plan for the Archdiocese I come from, I realized that there are certain areas that young people would wish to be addressed.

1. Formation

From the time one gets baptised (most of young people gets to be baptised just a few months after being born) to the time one receives the sacrament of confirmation, there seems to be lack of proper and continuous formation in spiritual and other human development matters after receiving the sacrament of confirmation. There is little or no sustainable and comprehensive faith formation programmes for the youth. I appreciate the various youth guild we have but in some areas youth groups are not so common especially when they do not receive support from the parish councils and the Parish Priest hence no substantive platforms for youth formation.

This often leads to youths being lured to new mushrooming churches (and the question is there Faith or Fiction in these new churches).

2. Lack of space and engagement

Due to generational differences the older generation of believers have failed to create sustainable dialogues with young people hence no space for youths to grow. Youths are often side lined to minor responsibilities and duties in Catholic institutions.

Lack of proper platforms for youths to exercise and utilise their talents and gifts to minister to other youths and the universal Church. In many cases the Church in Africa is led and run by the 'seasoned Catholics' who have all sacraments, all the experience and know it all.

Not much trust is given to young people in terms of involving them in decision making process and roles of leading in the Church.

3. Lack of human development formation

Socio economic conditions in Africa have led to youths lacking creativity, not fully utilising their potential and less is being done on a long term bases to help the youths. There is little effects to get support from the Church in dealing with social challenges like addiction, homosexuality, pornography, alcohol and child abuse. Most young people who are affected by the social challenges I have just mentioned above have seized to attend and join other youths in parishes, leaving no option but for the Church to go and reach to the society.

Many things are happening in the world and time spent at the church grants the young people an opportunity to realise what Gods wants for them to do. Also helping the young people to discern on their vocations as a process not an event means the religious, clergy and members of the Church needs to intervene a lot.

Hopes and expectations of young people from the Society

Young people in this generation lives with hope for a better future. As much as there are challenges faced but platforms like this Synod that we gather here today to plan and discuss gives more hope and shades more light. There are a number of expectations I have highlighted that the young expect from the Society and the Church

Expectations from the Society and Church

- The society to support young people and give them platform to show their strength, and learn from their mistakes.
- To acknowledge and appreciate responsibilities that some young people are carrying.
- To assist young people discern carefully about their vocations, their career and their aspirations.
- To constantly revise and improve the education system to prepare the young in dealing with potential challenges of the Church, society and the respective countries /regions.
- To give full moral and social support.
- To advance evidence based policy making in order to address the needs of the young people.
- The society should embrace the generation and find ways to address to the generational gap so as to develop an understanding of our needs.
- To understand that being young is a transitional period and it will not remain permanent so there is great need for the society to help in preparing the young be responsible adults especially during this transitional period.
- Every being to feel partly responsible in the lives of young people. An African proverb says **"It takes an entire village to educate a child."**

Young people hope for:

- An inclusive society
- A Church that is ready and willing to transform itself and its youths
- Peaceful and conflict free societies
- To have access to basic and advanced education and to live in developed communities
- . The Church to be always be vocal in raising these critical issues and advise the society on better alternatives
- A chance to be able to contribute and engage meaningfully in the growth and development of the local Church in Africa.

Conclusion

To conclude I would like to thank the Holy Father, Pope Francis for having us young people at heart, believing in us and giving us this chance to introspect ourselves, to challenge ourselves into being young and responsible. I am very grateful and so is every young person in Africa, we strongly hope that this is the **Chance** to make a **Change** in our lives as young people, in our societies that we live in, in our Church and mostly in our families.