

Chapter 6

Development and Distributive Politics: Multiple Rationalities in Governance and the Youth Empowerment Factor in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

This chapter seeks to demonstrate how urban land has often been used by Zimbabwean politicians to trap the youth. In light of this, the chapter argues that the interplay of the factors of production (land, labor, capital, and enterprise) crystallizes into a matrix of persuasions, contradictions and thought that explain multiple rationalities behind the development and distributive politics. It engages document review and a case study approach in which various policies and programs and project initiatives have been started by the government since 1980, including the building brigades and cooperative housing production in the early 1980s, the institution of the national youth ministry and policy and the administration of the kurera/ukondla youth fund. The chapter suggests that the distributive arrangements for resources be based on innovativeness, acumen and skill by the youth, based on merit and credibility.

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INTRODUCTION

The youth (like women, children and the elderly) is a motley of a demographic segment of the population that is used as ‘bait’ in looking for opportunities and promises. Usually, this group lacks in financial and network ties that make the bulk of them have the capacity to ‘be on their own; and define their destiny’ (Okorie 2018). Politicians like the elite take advantage of this missing link in their self-definition and self-determination towards exploitation, abuse and creation of dependency syndrome. The ‘big man’ is created because the youth are disadvantaged hence making them apron-tied to the whims and tides deliberately created by the ‘big men’ (Chirisa, Mavhima and Matamanda 2018). The youth have also their reasons for being in this condition. It is underscored that youth as a state in life is a passing phenomenon subject to various interpretations. From an educational and vocational level, the bulk of university and college students are the youth, being ages 16-25 years. The volume of universities has increased and the technical, vocational education and training (TVET) thrust seem to be dwindling (African Union Commission 2015). The question of what effect that has on the long-term sustenance of economic activity remains unanswered. This may partly explain why, the country is said to be laden with people of high literacy yet without the relevant skills, based on recent National Skills Audit. Moreover, the economic challenges that Zimbabwe has undergone the past two decades or so, has had a debilitating effect on the youth, who have been denied access or paying jobs hence a lot of underemployment (Tibajuka 2005; Biti 2014; Nyarota 2018).

Even when funds are provided to allow for youth business start-ups, the generality of youth fails to access these. This is either because the application process is too cumbersome (or leaves them with a feeling of exclusion) or that the information is never conveyed to them. For instance, it is argued that each bank in the country has to avail up to five per cent of its income to youth projects. Quite a number end up as foot soldiers of politicians towards elections (Chirisa *et al.* 2018). A good number fall to sexual and drug abuse (UNICEF Zimbabwe 2016). The chapter demonstrates how urban land has often been used by Zimbabwean politicians to trap the youth. In light of this, the chapter argues that the interplay of the factors of production (land, labor, capital and enterprise) crystallizes into a matrix of persuasions, contradictions and thought that explain multiple rationalities behind the development and distributive politics. However, this situation raises many questions which this chapter explores: do the youth really want land? If they do, want it, how ready and prepared are they to develop it? Is the youth empowerment drive genuine? What are the ideologies behind youth empowerment? Can the youth really organize themselves and get empowered?

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