

2020: SA's youth policy needs a reality test

By [Siphelele Chirwa](#)

12 Dec 2019

South Africa's economic success is intricately tied to whether it can effectively implement youth policy and get young people educated, skilled and employed over the next decade.



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The missing link currently between the implementation of youth policy in South Africa and the reality at grassroots level could sink all South Africa's future economic prospects. Strong leadership and accountability are needed in the coming decade to give South Africa's youth a hopeful future and sustainable economic growth.

There is excellent policy out there – from the United Nations' 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to South Africa's own National Development Policy (NDP) – but converting that vision into reality is where the disconnect is and where the work needs to focus on.

Accountable, accessible leadership

We need accountability around everything: from leadership to policy. Strong leadership that is accountable and accessible and implementation that is measurable. Young people do not trust leadership. They are not willing to engage because there is no accountability.

If we don't come together as civil society, as business and as government, within this decade, South Africa faces a future of increasing poverty and hopelessness. We speak about young people not in school, not in education, not in skills development; youth in our communities doing nothing; and that gap is getting wider.

The other issue of contention is the fourth industrial revolution (4IR). Young people are told to join the 4IR, but they are not told how it will benefit them and how they can contribute. The assumption is that robots will come and take our jobs. It is presented as something to fear, rather than something to plug into with our skills and innovation to take further.

Inclusion and access needed

So how do we move forward? Inclusion and access. We celebrate the young people who are already doing their best. We listen to those young voices who want to change things. We stay afloat as a country by finding those who want to play a role.

It is appalling that things have to get so bad in South Africa, that young people have to get angry and start a movement like #FeesMustFall to get the attention of those in power. Let us have those conversations before we get there. We cannot only respond as a country in reaction to when things fall apart.

Young people should have a seat at the table because they should have a stake in influencing the national conversation on youth policy. Young people are out there, getting on with creating meaningful change in their communities, but nobody speaks about it in the bigger context of South Africa, only in negative terms of what the youth are going through.



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Showcasing youth leadership, talents

Young people need a voice. Now is the time to have young people involved at every aspect of government, business and society. We have to give the youth platforms to showcase their leadership and talents. Somehow, we have to meet halfway in changing the conversation from talking about the problems, to the impact already being created.

As part of our 2020 strategy within Activate, we will be pushing for the inclusion of South Africa's youth at every level; as well as for government, business and civil society to connect with the youth at grassroots level.

There are issues affecting our youth that no one even addresses in the national discourse: issues of mental health affecting our young people across the board; issues of how we train and support our youth within the workplace after we secure all those internships that are being publicised at a national level; issues of connectivity and access to the promises of the fourth industrial revolution; and issues around the political will to involve the youth in drawing up effective youth policy.

Young people know their potential and what they have to offer South Africa. We need to help them realise their potential. South Africa, as a collective, has not tapped into what young people can do for our country. We need to rectify that as a matter of urgency in 2020.

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