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Childhood, Youthhood and Social Inclusion in the Construction of African Future Identities

Joseph Lah Lo-oh
Faculty of Education, The University of Bamenda, PO box 39,
Bambili, Northwest Region, Cameroon
* E-mail: jlooh233@gmail.com

Abstract
Besides placed at the margins of the public sphere and major political, socio-economic, and cultural processes, where their voices are rarely heard, African children and youth have many pressing development, health, education, economic and social needs that apparently stand on their way to positive, functional and productive future identities. Despite their critical value for future wellbeing, many of them still suffer minimal investments towards their healthy development, leaving them most of the time vulnerable. An argument around the construction of positive and productive futures in the continent becomes crucial in understanding African childhoods, adolescence and youth, and the perspectives and pathways that become key when young people transition to full adulthood. A major concern is the need for social inclusion in the policies, practices and frames of reference that characterise the context of child and youth development. This article profiles the way African childhood and youthhood are constructed, youth livelihoods and transition experiences, perspectives for flourishing and avoiding floundering as well as those for social inclusion and development policy orientations for African youth futures. The essence is to expand the theoretical position that childhood and adulthood are the today and tomorrow of any society, while youthhood is the bridge between them. And if childhood and youth are a mistake, then adulthood will be a struggle while old age will definitely be regretted. And that the lines etched in childhood and the years of adolescence and youth certainly draw the wrinkles of adulthood and ageing. A major conclusion is that major investments in children and youth as well as their social inclusion in the construction of their future identities is a profitable trajectory and pathway to positive and productive futures for today's children and youth.
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1. Introduction

Africa is hailed as a fast-growing continent, with GDP growth rate averaging 5% per year and a remarkable increase of its middle class. That is why it is often seen today as a continent of vast opportunities and no longer the hopeless rural and primitive continent of war, famine and disaster (Mbembe, 2016). On the flip-side, the paradox of rapid economic growth lingers with poverty and inequalities especially devouring Africa's children and youth. The labour market discontent, characterised by rising skills mismatch and explained by limited relevance of education and training, low productivity in the informal sector, unemployment and underemployment against a rising youth population depicts a generation at-risk (Soucat et al., 2013). Although Africa is witnessing a growing share of its youth being educated, it still records the world's lowest school enrollment and quality, leaving over 90 million young people with little or no skills, struggling for employment in low-paid, informal sector jobs (Asford, 2007). Ensuring equitable access to quality education is still concerning. Some challenges include limited infrastructure, teacher shortages, and gender disparities in educational opportunities. Many of them are leaving the education system with limited basic literacy and numeracy skills, under-qualified or with qualifications that do not match the needs of the contemporary labour market. In addition to these, many African children and youth face health challenges related to preventable diseases such as malaria, HIV/AIDS, and vaccine-preventable illnesses (Madhi & Rees, 2018). Malnutrition paradoxically remains a significant issue, affecting both physical and cognitive development even though affected young people originate from largely agrarian communities. Adequate healthcare infrastructure, access to immunization programmes, and adequate nutrition, especially during the early years, is crucial for overall health. Whereas, high rates of youth unemployment and underemployment present challenges for economic stability. Besides these, children and youth are often placed at the margins of the public sphere, where their voices are rarely heard in major political, socio-economic, and cultural processes, except in the rhetoric of crime, violence, war and anti-social behaviour.

This challenging situation makes young people, including children and youth particularly vulnerable today. Despite their critical value for future well-being, many African countries still have minimal investments towards the healthy development of its youth (Knowles & Behrman, 2005). Many have little or no access to education, employment and livelihoods, healthcare and basic nutrition (Honwana & Boeck, 2005). And over the past two

decades, political conflict, armed violence, and the HIV/AIDS pandemic created a crisis of unprecedented proportions for younger generations of Africans. According to du Plessis (2010), they experience high levels of poverty and unemployment, low levels of literacy, skills and education attainment, high levels of HIV/AIDS infections, and are highly vulnerable to committing crime due to poverty, societal alienation and substance use/abuse, high rates of teenage pregnancy, and lack of information. And according to a WHO (2006) report, a child born in Africa faces more health risks than a child born in other parts of the world. The report maintains that such a child has more than a 50% chance of being malnourished, a high risk of being HIV-positive at birth while malaria, diarrhea diseases, and acute respiratory infections account for 51% of deaths. Additionally, a child born in the African region is more likely to lose his/her mother due to complications in childbirth or HIV/AIDS while that child has a life-expectancy of just 47 years and is very likely-at least once in their short life-to be affected by drought, famine, flood or civil war, or become a refugee (WHO, 2006). Sub-Saharan Africa remains the world's poorest region with almost half of its people living on less than one dollar a day (USAID, 2006; UNDP, 2007). The region also bears the brunt of global health inequalities, with high levels of under-nutrition, 50% of maternal and child deaths, and a high burden of infectious diseases, including HIV and AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis (WHO, 2006; UNDP, 2007).

In line with these, new development risks and patterns have emerged for today's young people globally and in the continent who have seen education extended into the late twenties and early thirties; family formation being postponed; and many youth than ever, planning to remain single and childless well into their thirties and even indefinitely (Casper & Bianchi, 2002). The median age for marriage and first birth has risen steadily since the 1970s and it has become more common to have a child before marrying and to re-enter school after spending some time at work. Late marriage has become a shared contemporary phenomenon. Social and economic inequalities and difficult school-to-work transitions are also rife. The implication of these social changes is that it has become increasingly difficult for young people to effectively define themselves and their life courses; their definitions are highly contested, uncertain and not mapped out so that everything is almost possible and impossible, yet with no clear direction of where and how they are going (Lo-oh, 2017). Therefore, an argument around the construction of future identities in the continent becomes crucial in understanding African childhood, adolescence and youth, and the perspectives and pathways that become key in going to adulthood. A major concern either in constructing African childhoods or youth identities for positive and productive futures is the need for social inclusion in the policies, practices and frames of reference that characterise the context of child and youth development in the continent. This article therefore profiles the way African childhood is constructed, youth livelihoods and transition experiences, perspectives for flourishing and avoiding floundering as well as those for social inclusion and development policy orientations for African future identities.

2. Conceptualising and constructing future identities

Identity refers to how people answer the question, "Who am I?" This question may be posed explicitly or implicitly, at a personal or a collective level, to others or to oneself, but could also be posed in futuristic terms as to what people desire or wish to be or become over time. This normally begins to occur during adolescence when cognitive development allows for an individual to construct a 'theory of self' (Elkind, 1967) based on exposure to role models and identity options (Erikson, 1980). When the question of identity is posed in futuristic terms, "Who do I want to be?" then, the construct of future identity is implied, being the anticipated or envisioned sense of self that individuals anticipate or project for themselves in the future (McAdams, 2013). Future identity therefore, encompasses the way individuals perceive their roles, goals, relationships, and contributions to society as they evolve over time. In it, people envision and form ideas about the ways they see themselves, their roles, and their contributions to the world in the years to come (Lawy, 2003; Buckingham, 2008). Future identity is therefore, a forward-looking process that integrates personal aspirations, values, and goals. Arguably, future identities are usually shaped by personal aspirations, values, and the vision individuals have for their lives. Like all forms of identity, future identities are never static, rather, they are dynamic and subject to change as individuals grow, learn, and experience various life events. Key components of future identity may include defining the goals that one hopes to achieve in the future, whether in terms of education, career, relationships, personal development, or other areas of life; defining personal values and principles by which people consider how their future actions align with their deeply held beliefs; determining envisioned roles and achievements in the professional sphere, including aspirations for career growth, leadership, and the impact people want to make in their chosen fields; deciding on envisioned roles in relationships, including family dynamics, friendships, and romantic partnerships; having the ability to adapt to changing circumstances and unforeseen challenges; and considerations for holistic well-being, encompassing physical, mental, and emotional health, and the adoption of self-care practices (e.g., McAdams, 2013; Stern, 2008; Adams & Marshall, 1996; Marcia, 1966).

Since they are not static, constructing future identities is a lifelong, dynamic and complex process that involves the development, adaptation, expression, and shaping of one's sense of self, aspirations, values, and goals for the future (Adams & Marshall, 1996). The process is characterised by dedicated effort by which

individuals not only look to the future but become agents and key actors in processes taking them there. Constructing future identity can be influenced by various factors, including personal experiences, societal expectations, cultural context, and individual agency (e.g., Vu et al., 2023; McAdams, 2013; Adams & Marshall, 1996). Individuals often construct their future identities based on their personal values, beliefs, and principles. Their value systems guide decision-making and shape the direction in which they envision their lives. Therefore, future identities, whether related to career, relationships, or personal development, are chosen in a way that resonates with one's core beliefs and value system (Kay, 2023; McHugh, 2023). In this light, personal values serve as a moral compass, providing a framework for ethical decision-making, and helping individuals navigate complex situations and ensure stability to the course. When faced with choices, individuals often turn to their values to guide them in aligning their actions with their principles, helping them to maintain consistency in their behaviour and reinforcing a sense of integrity, which is vital for building trust and self-respect (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016). In fact, turning to personal values in decision-making helps individuals stay dedicated to their chosen course by providing a foundation for ethical, purposeful, and authentic living. This dedication to values not only influences individual actions but also shapes the overall trajectory of one's life and the impact they may have on others and the world at large.

Educational and career goals are integral components in shaping the future identities of children, adolescents, and youth. According to Arhin (2018), the pursuit of education and career aspirations contributes not only to personal development but also to the construction of a person's sense of self and their role in the world. As young people pursue education and career pathways, they develop a sense of competence, achievement, and identity associated with their chosen fields. In fact, several future life achievements are rooted in educational and career goals which usually provide a sense of purpose and direction in life and give individuals a roadmap for personal growth, achievement, and contribution to society. In doing so, personal interests and passions also become important factors that contribute to the construction of future identities, especially with regards to educational and career pursuits. For example, hobbies, artistic pursuits, and recreational activities often reflect people's unique expressions of self and influence their visions and wishes for their lives and for the future. However, understanding personal interests to drive the construction of future identity requires engaging in self-reflection and developing self-awareness. It is through self-awareness that individuals come to realise their values, personal interests or even their strengths, weaknesses, and aspirations. Self-knowledge also fosters intentional identity development and therefore is a foundational element in the construction of future identity. In relation to these, significant life experiences, both positive and challenging, can also significantly contribute to the construction of future identities (e.g., Crocetti et al., 2023; Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016; Sang et al., 2012). Milestones and life transitions such as graduations, achievements, and overcoming obstacles may shape individuals' narratives about who they are, who they aspire to become, and how they are conducting themselves towards their futures.

Not only personal experiences, educational and career goals do shape the construction of future identities. Cultural background and social environment also play a crucial role since developing individuals often become products of their environment, cultures, and societies. In this direction, cultural values, societal expectations, and community norms do influence how individuals perceive themselves and envision their roles in society. Cultural values are the core principles and beliefs that guide a community or group. According to UKEssays (2018), individuals often internalize these values, influencing their sense of cultural identity which in turn shapes how they see themselves in relation to their cultural heritage. Besides cultural values, societal expectations also drive the construction of future identities. Denissen et al. (2013) suggest that societal expectations are the unwritten rules and norms that govern behaviour within a society and individuals learn these expectations through socialization, which occurs within families, schools, and communities. Supportive relationships within families, schools, and communities can therefore, provide a foundation for personal growth, while conflicts or strained relationships may pose challenges. Therefore, meeting societal expectations contributes to a sense of belonging and acceptance. In traditional African societies, cultural values and societal expectations often prescribe gender roles and norms which influence how individuals perceive their roles as men or women, impacting career choices, family responsibilities, social interactions, and even the development of future identities.

Moreover, the ability to adapt to changing circumstances and resilience in the face of adversity and setbacks may have strong explanatory power over the construction of future identities. The future is inherently uncertain, and the ability to adapt allows individuals to navigate unexpected changes and occurrences. Individuals that embrace adaptability are more likely to construct identities that are flexible and open to evolving circumstances, and may be able to develop a sense of strength, resilience, and agency. Resilience is the ability to bounce back from adversity, adapt to challenges, and endure and grow in the face of stress and setbacks (Sutton, 2019; Smith et al., 2010). It involves the capacity to recover from difficult experiences, cope with stress, and maintain a sense of well-being and effectiveness despite life's ups and downs. Resilience is not only about enduring hardships but also about learning from them and becoming stronger and more capable as a result. Therefore, individuals who demonstrate resilience view difficulties as learning experiences, contributing to personal development and the

construction of a resilient identity. As resilient individuals, therefore, young people can adapt to changing circumstances, are flexible and can adjust their strategies when faced with new challenges. They maintain a positive outlook, focusing on strengths and possibilities rather than dwelling on limitations and difficulties. That is why such young people approach challenges with a solution-oriented mindset, driven by a sense of purpose and meaning. However, resilience is not a fixed or static trait but rather a dynamic process that can be cultivated and strengthened over time. Building resilience involves developing coping skills, fostering supportive relationships, maintaining a positive mindset, and learning from challenges (Sutton, 2019). It is an essential quality that contributes to mental and emotional well-being, enabling individuals to navigate the complexities of life with greater strength and adaptability.

Constructing future identities is not a linear process but a dynamic journey that unfolds over time. It involves continuous self-exploration, adaptation to life's changes, and the integration of diverse influences. The evolving nature of identity reflects the richness and complexity of human experiences and the ongoing quest for self-discovery and fulfillment. Constructing future identities therefore involves a balance between personal agency and external influences, and individuals may navigate multiple identities throughout their lives as they respond to changing circumstances and personal growth. The process involves continuous learning, self-discovery, and people usually accumulate knowledge, skills, and insights over time, contributing to the evolution of their identity. Normally, life is marked by transitions in education, career changes, relationships, and personal milestones. Each transition presents opportunities for individuals to reassess and redefine aspects of their identity. Meanwhile, also engaging in regular self-reflection allows individuals to explore their values, aspirations, and evolving priorities, contributing to the refinement and adaptation of one's identity. But how this effectively unfolds and manifests also depends a lot on the nature of parenting, socialization practices, and how children are generally raised. This somehow suggests that future identities are partly cultivated in how childhoods are constructed, and how children and adolescents are intentionally programmed to grow up.

3. Constructing African childhoods and transition to the world of adolescence and youth

The African worldview conceives of adolescence or youth as a "person-project", growing out of childhood and poised for an adulthood (identity) that lies in the future (Araria, 2007; Nsamenang, 2002). In African social ontogeny, adolescence, the youth age is regarded as a "way station" between the stages of social apprenticeship in childhood and full social integration in adulthood beginning with social entré, a brief transitional period that marks the beginning of adult identity (Nsamenang, 2002; Serpell, 1994). The modus operandi is that while childhood is a period of project training, characterised by social apprenticeship, adolescence or "youthhood" is conceived as a period of initiation into adult status and identities. In that light, African young people are considered the bridge to Africa's future, the continent's next generation and its future hope. Transitions during this period are typically characterised by rituals, rites of passage, and initiations into diverse sacred societies as a way of building African cultural and customary future identities (Tchombe & Lo-oh, 2012; Shumba & Seeco, 2007; Araria, 2007). It is a time when children are taken away to learn the ways of adulthood in their society, returning with the skills that are necessary to fulfill that role in their respective communities. For example, there is "goat sacrifice" and "corn flour sacrifice" for deceased maternal aunt or uncle and for deceased father among the Kom people of Cameroon (Tchombe & Lo-oh, 2012); bogwera (for boys) and bojale (for girls) among the Setswana of Botswana (Shumba & Seeco, 2007); and among the Nara ethnic group of Eritrea, there is a ceremony to celebrate manhood and womanhood at age 14 (Araria, 2007). Young people enter these rites as children and emerge from them as adults. However, how they negotiate and navigate these processes to build their future identities is apparently no business of their own. In the African "person project", child and youth voices, perspectives, and visions still wait to be heard as pathways remain the prerogative of others, including the adult class, cultural norms and practices and the wishes of parents and family.

This is typical in sub-Sahara Africa where very little is yet to be known about young people and their developmental assets and strivings, even though they constitute more than 70% of the region's population (Erny, 1987) and remain the continent's greatest resource, investment and hope for its future (Lo-oh, 2017). Very little is known about their personal strivings, assets and the huge psychological capital they incarnate as children and youth. This, of course, is consistent with mainstream developmental science conceptions of young people who have always been regarded and understood from the perspective of the adult society. In that connection, they are often quickly judged as "silent others", the voiceless enfants terribles (Caputo 1995; Gottlieb 2000) and the incompetent category, blinded, confused and without a focused sense of vision (Lo-oh, 2017). Discourse on children and youth has not transcended the rhetoric of "calamity" that visualizes, casts and intervenes the young as problematic cohorts in the tedium of global imperatives offered to humanity by western civilization (Nsamenang, 2007). They are often constructed from the outside and from above as a "problem" or a "lost generation" (O'Brien, 1996), living a life in "crisis" (Everatt & Sisulu, 1992) and thus incompetent in participating in the making of their futures. In recent adolescence and emerging adulthood literature, they are conceived as a "black box", a "generation x" or uncertain and doubtful "twenty somethings…" (e.g., Arnett,

2004; Lo-oh, 2012) to demonstrate the emptiness in this age category. With such deficit and exclusive speculations, African children and youth are rarely listened to, and their voices reach a broader platform only in rare and sometimes tragic and debasing circumstances (Lo-oh, 2017) such as resistance and political uprisings. But even when this happens, their "sorry voices" are often immediately recuperated, transformed, and re-inserted into different narratives and agendas set by other interest groups, particularly the adult and political elite to drive an elitist meaning that is never originally of the youth. In most cases, the young are perceived through opposition to the old and as "people in the process of becoming rather than being" (Honwana & Boeck, 2005). They are perceived and regarded as nothing on their own. Their identity is often defined in reference to their parents, teachers, models and adult significant others. For example, "child of this or that person" or "the son or daughter of this or that person."

Besides these, growing up African is no easy task as visions for adulthood are ill-fated and constraint by difficult socio-economic, political and health conditions which have left most youth hopeless and with uncertain futures. Health care services, economic resources, and social services are unevenly distributed and a majority of the continent's youth are languishing in abject poverty, unemployment, under-achievement, and a difficult labour market economy (Lo-oh, 2009). For most young people, it is increasingly difficult to manage the economics of adulthood which require more stable identity features such as autonomous behaviour, financial independence, personal and social responsibility, emotional stability and self-reliance. As a result, several changes have occurred in youth life courses. For some, education has extended into the late twenties and early thirties, family formation has been postponed, and many young people plan on remaining single and childless well into their thirties, if not indefinitely (Casper & Bianchi, 2002). The transition to adult status has been transformed from a relatively clear-cut, linear pathway to a complex, fragmented and individualised process dependent on the ability of each young person to navigate their way through a set of landmark events (Lo-oh, 2012).

Difficulties in understanding developmental trajectories and experiences of African young people are compounded by absence or scarcity of specific studies where there has been little or no discourse on growing up African. This is understandably so as developmental psychology, or better-still, child and adolescent psychology is branded a "Eurocentric enterprise" whose efforts have focused more on Euro-Americans and failed to capture the reality of growing up in Africa (Lo-oh, 2009; Nsamenang, 2002) and in other majority world regions. Developmental psychologists, for example, those who focus on adolescence and emerging adulthood have demonstrated visible and remarkable ethnocentrism, and have claimed, just as they did adolescence, that emerging adulthood is essentially a Euro-American enterprise. Their findings have also largely heralded young people in industrialised economies (e.g, Arnett, 2000), segregating those in developing and emerging economies, as if to say that they have nothing to do with their futures. New and dedicated research on African children and youth life courses is therefore a course that will not only produce developmental literature, but will share Africentric knowledge and practices in the construction of African childhoods and the transition to the future of adulthood. A lot is unheard of these youth, who, often exposed to adversities and difficult and challenging life circumstances, grow up personally challenged to make a difference, to do better than their parents did, and to "make a name" for themselves, their family or their community (Lo-oh, 2017). Little research has valorized the psychological assets/capital in them, their ability to tap from and benefit from resilience, agency, personhood, social support systems, life skills development, competence and asset building initiatives and the eco-cultural context. More and more, African youth are becoming increasingly aware that they carry their destinies and futures in their own hands; and either enthusiastically or reluctantly, posit themselves as a category that must shape their lives in an affirmative manner to build responsible and productive futures for themselves, their family, and their community. They are raised not to just live life for the sake of it, but they also become key actors and agents of their own development. Yet these positive orientations are hardly known aside the highly valorized rhetoric of adversity, and the difficulty of growing up in that continent.

4.Floundering and flourishing through childhood, adolescence and youthhood

According to Bandura (2005), each period of human development brings with it new competency requirements, challenges, and opportunities for personal growth. As already seen, development throughout childhood and adolescence in most of Africa is replete with all kinds of adversities suggesting a more floundering experience for most young people. In spite of this, many children and youth nurture resilient behaviours and become agents of their own development and futures. While some of them fall to the adversities and flounder, a lot more live above their difficult and challenging circumstances and flourish through childhood and youthhood to become responsible and productive in adulthood. Whether they flounder or flourish is usually partly the responsibility of their societies, with or without support practices in parenting and education. In nearly all African cultures, a child is perceived as sacred and in need of physical and spiritual protection and guidance (Asford, 2007). The value accorded to bearing and raising healthy children is supreme. Traditional greetings exchanged between neighbours and friends celebrate the importance and identity of the family and its children. Older kin share the

responsibilities of nurturing and raising children, a task of utmost importance on which the future well-being of all the family may rest. Unless circumstances weigh in, extraordinary sacrifices and investments are typically made for children by their parents and families in the hope that they become successful in life. This may justify the use of garden metaphors in many African cultures to refer to the young as "buds of hope and expectation" (Zimba, 2002), gradually "becoming" (Erny, 1973), and socialized agents of their culture (Nsamenang, 2008) and adult futures. They are regarded as the hope and future of their society and are brought up in the spirit and culture of hard work, commitment to and striving for a positive and well-deserving future identity.

Often, positive factors of flourishing include supportive family and friends, making money, satisfying leisure activities, personal achievements, and educational success. Meanwhile common negative factors for floundering among African youth may include relationship problems, career confusion, financial difficulties, unemployment, lack of satisfying work, lack of post-secondary and postgraduate educational opportunities, and difficulty in adjusting to post-secondary educational demands. But developing positive identities and flourishing is key to transitioning to positive and productive adult futures. For one thing, a positive sense of identity is a prerequisite for developing the resilience that enables a child or a young person to meet and deal with the challenges of growing up, especially for young people developing in adverse environments (Brooker & Woodhead, 2008). This, because positive identity is often multifaceted, enabling individuals to call on different strengths, and different selves in the different circumstances they meet on their way to adulthood. Of course, these selves are usually shaped by local environments and values, by the unique developmental niches that individuals inhabit (Super & Harkness, 1977) and by their encounters with a succession of micro-systems in their daily lives, including at home, with peers, in school and so on (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Besides, researchers have found that developmental paths during emerging adulthood are heterogeneous, raising the possibility that those risks may be variably related to future outcomes (Arnett, 1998; Schulenberg et al., 2004). It means that there is an apparent greater latitude for emerging adults to choose their pathways; they are making choices and interpreting their own successes and failures in their own way and also understand that their current stage of life is fraught with a lot of risks and adversities but within which gains and opportunities might be buried.

In recent decades, the extended family structure has been negatively affected by socio-economic changes. Traditional forms of rural livelihood and lifestyles are gradually being eroded. In the context of poverty, socio-political and civil conflict, terror, displacement, environmental disasters, and changing patterns of land ownership and use, many families face significant social and economic stressors with overbearing consequences on their children and youth (du Plessis, 2010). Nonetheless, many of the traditional values governing childhood endure in spite of the upheavals cultures have undergone. Therefore, although some reasons for violence against children and youth in Africa are grounded in cultural and traditional childcare practices, others are deeply rooted in the breakdown of old and alien systems of protection due to social and cultural shocks, and developmental changes (Asford, 2007). For example, joblessness and unemployment was one of the main issues that drove Senegal's many young people into the streets and to the voting stations to press for a change of government in the 2012 Presidential elections (Ighobor, 2013). At least six young people died in the protests, and President Wade was defeated by the current leader, Macky Sall. The same has been reported of the Arab Spring in 2011 where young people broke down class barriers and joined together to protest unjust governments in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt (Lo-oh, 2017). We also referred to the youth in Cameroon who took to the streets in 2008 to protest against rising prices of food and basic commodities; and the youth-led up-rising to overthrow the 27-year-old regime of Blaise Compaoré of Burkina Faso in 2013**.**

But childhood, adolescence and emerging adulthood in Africa is generally difficult, tough and problem-centred. Patriarchal power is typically an established norm and children and youth are taught to show duty and respect towards parents and elders, whose patronage governs their lives (Asford, 2007). From an early age, they are expected to perform certain tasks, and behave as directed by their parents and elders. As they grow older, in certain societies it is usual to send children to live and work with other members of the extended family, as an opportunity for training or because they reside where opportunities such as schooling and employment are greater. The behaviour of young people is usually subject to strong controls, exercised by whoever is in a guardianship role. Today, this may not be a close family member but someone charged with the child's care in return for performance of household duties or paid work. Many elements of the African traditional system of child care and protection have important benefits. However, some traditional norms include negative and harmful aspects and practices which affect the African child's right to survival, development, health, education and protection. That is why Bourdillon & Mutambwa (2014) in *The Place of Work in African Childhoods* maintain that African societies raise their children on the ingrained notion that children must work as part of their process of growing up; and work is perceived as part of their education and preparation for adulthood. And findings from the volume showed that gainful work for most African children and youth is frequently the result of their initiative to deal with adversity and difficult life circumstances. In some of the chapters, for instance, Lo-oh (2014b) records perceptions of domestic working children who say they are currently working to better their lives. Meanwhile Kimpolo (2014) describes young Congolese children and youth selling bottled water in the

streets of Brazzaville to improve on the quality of their lives. And similar findings report of young people in Burkina Faso and Ghana who have left home (migration) to fend for themselves and also support their families (Thorsen, 2014; Ofosu-Kusi, 2014).

To complement these, Pembema (2017) after a critical analysis of difficult circumstances around her life concluded that her

> "…destiny is in my own hands, and that all it takes is resilience to move on. All I did was to accept my background, take bold steps, and forge through in spite of hard times and challenges. I have been supported by my mum, relatives, and other significant persons in my life up until now. I believe I will soon be at a top management position…" (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2017, p. 391).

Afumbom (2017) in another support essay in Padilla-Walker & Nelson (2017) referred to several challenges growing up and the strategies he adopted through paid work, usually in difficult circumstances to overcome them. He writes:

> "The wages I earned permitted me to register at the university, and today,…I am about to complete my Masters program…I work as a peace and youth empowerment volunteer, part-time gatekeeper, and sales person, earning less than $40 per month, yet I struggle for myself…The experience has made me realize who I am, what my strengths and weaknesses are, and made me to develop an independent self…It has boosted the inner desire to get to the top and serve my nation in the future…"(Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2017, p. 391).

These make up meaning-making efforts common to African children and youth and which they are utilizing to engage their futures. They challenge the negative disparaging and narcissistic Peter Pan generational reading of young people: "they won't grow up" (Kalkan et al., 2021) or frequent adult reference to the "glory days" of past generations or negative narratives that open with sentences as "When I was young…" or "the problem with today's young people." There is a lot of contemporary literature detailing incredible African young people whose voices and stories of how they are shaping their own lives should re-shape developmental literature. Most contemporary African youth indeed want to grow up and characteristically make intentional strides to move their lives forward. They are not only resilient but are also agents of their development, taking their lives and destinies in their own hands.

6. The transition to productive adult futures

Prior research has concluded that the majority of 18–25-year-olds around the world do not consider themselves to be adults (Arnett & Schwab, 2012), and researchers have begun to focus on the specific criteria young adults consider as necessary to achieve full adult status and identity (e.g., Arnett, 2000; Nelson & Barry, 2005; Shanahan, 2000). However, in contemporary society, whether in the northern or southern countries, the transition to adulthood is far from uniform. The life stage of emerging adulthood is wrought with uncertainty as young people navigate educational and employment opportunities, living arrangements, as well as relationships with parents and intimate partners (Arnett, 2004). Unlike members of earlier generations who were eager and able to be independent from parents very early, young individuals in recent cohorts are now delaying marriage and parenthood (Furstenberg, 2010), often embarking on a journey of self-exploration and identity formation (Arnett, 2004). Consequently, unburdened by the responsibilities brought on by marriage and parenthood, many emerging adults are relatively free to experiment with life choices with the understanding that their parents' home is a viable safe-haven should difficulties arise (Qian, 2010).Life transitions during this period can exhibit a degree of flexibility, but the extent of flexibility can also vary based on individual circumstances, cultural influences, and external factors. However, some individuals may experience more structured transitions based on cultural definitions and expectations, economic factors, or personal preferences.

With reference to difficulties, older adolescents and emerging adults face a range of developmental issues. Havighurst (1952) suggested issues of work and relationships; Levinson (1978) focused on changing relationships and on exploration, while Erikson (1968) commented on issues of intimacy and commitment to goals. Super (1963) indicated that exploring and crystallizing vocational choice are important to older adolescents and young adults. What seems evident is that older adolescents and emerging adults enter transitions with the goal of becoming independently functioning adults, as they strive to meet evolving personal and career related needs. Rapid and escalating changes in labour market and post-secondary educational opportunities mean that adolescents are now confronted with the challenge of meeting their personal and career needs when neither can offer certainty or a sense of personal control. A lot of young people leave high school and universities today unprepared for current career realities and evidence shows that both the career and personal areas of their lives are in a state of change and uncertainty (Lo-oh, 2009). Before graduation, most of them express optimism about entering the career area of their choice and they expect to be successful workers in challenging and highly placed jobs that would generate personal life satisfaction. If they hope to pursue postgraduate education, a significant portion of them would generally be positive about meeting postgraduate entry qualifications and standards in

some of the best universities around the world. In fact, they leave school with apparent exaggerated ambition for success and achievement. A reality upon graduation in most African countries for most young people is a range of problems, including poverty, lack of support from family and friends, internal attribution of general transition problems, external attribution of career/employment difficulties, lack of job satisfaction, if at all they got a job, depression, anxiety, and failed dreams and unachieved goals. In fact, they hardly ever realise their hopes for the future when they get to that future.

Generally, adolescence and emerging adulthood are a highly valorised time of transition when young people are actively engaged in defining themselves and their future roles in preparation for desired and aspired future adult identities. It is largely seen therefore, as a time of preparation for adulthood, during which youth begin to make critical life decisions that shape their future identities (e.g., in education, career, and life-style). Those raised in difficult circumstances and in impoverished environments like in some parts of Africa are at elevated and heightened risk of making poor life decisions and transitions since they are highly exposed to exaggerated levels of adversity (Broomfield, 2007). While school-to-work transitions are typically long and difficult, poverty and large income shocks often push children very early into the work force (Garcia & Fares, 2008). Despite facing these risks, many youth strive for excellence and through agentic and resilient behaviours record successes and build formidable futures for themselves and their community. They become more positively oriented towards positive and productive futures. Examples are replete in the African continent showing how many success stories were written on wary and disparaging circumstances; and young people who have turned risk factors into life opportunities (Lo-oh, 2017) and have benefitted from these to make great strides in school and work careers.

Although emerging adulthood is characterised by varied and indirect routes to adulthood (Arnett 2000; Furstenberg, 2010; Shanahan, 2000), at the top of the list of criteria for adulthood is self-reliance, including financial independence from parents and significant others. Yet in recent years, the prevalence of adult children living with parents has increased, and appears to contradict the traditional marker associated with self-reliance and independent living (Shanahan, 2000). In most African societies, marriage was the turning point signaling the establishment of independent living; but today, the average age of marriage has increased to the mid-30s for men and late 20s for women (National Institute of Statistics, 2007). It is perhaps not surprising that delays in marriage also influence delays in leaving the parental home. Rather than marriage, young adults are increasingly leaving their parents' home for other reasons (Furstenberg, 2000; Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1999) including employment and educational opportunities, and to cohabit with intimate partners. One difference between earlier and more recent generations is that in the past, young adults who moved out for reasons other than marriage were rarely welcomed back into the parents' home (Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1999). In contrast, many young adults currently rely on their parents' home as a safety net because these increasingly common non-marital paths to independence are characterised by high levels of instability that may jeopardize independent living. It is very common now to have young people back in with their parents when the reasons for their moving out fail or become too challenging for them to handle.

At the top of these experiences which ultimately put young people at variance with their futures, African youth are also largely excluded from any developmental agendas intended to accompany them there. Exclusion can take several forms, and it often results from a combination of social, economic, and political factors. For example, inadequate educational infrastructure and resources normally limit the access of African youth to quality education. High dropout rates, especially among girls and those in rural areas, can hinder their educational progress. If they do not benefit from quality education, employment opportunities also become difficult to find in a context where limited job opportunities and a lack of skills matching the job market already contribute to high rates of unemployment among African youth. In terms of inclusive access to employment opportunities therefore, many young people appear to be highly excluded from opportunities that can quickly facilitate access to paid employment. Many of them end up in informal and precarious employment, with low wages and job insecurity. Also common is gender-based discrimination which also disproportionately affect young women, limiting their access to education, employment, and decision-making roles. As earlier mention, access to healthcare services, including sexual and reproductive health services is also limited impacting the well-being and future prospects of many excluded young people. Even if these services were available, the decision to provide which services to them in many African countries is never theirs. Too bad, this age category is inadvertently excluded from national development efforts.

7. The social inclusion of children and youth in Africa's development agenda

As seen elsewhere in this article, young people account for nearly one third of the current global population; and today's youth generation is the largest cohort of young people ever; 1.2 billion people aged 15-24 (Beyond 2015, 2013). Just fewer than 90% live in developing countries and close to half of these young people live in poverty, on less than USD 2 per day (UNFPA, 2010). Many countries in the developing world, particularly in Africa, the Middle East and South Asia, are experiencing a "youth bulge" (Pereznieto & Harding, 2013), yet with fewer

socially inclusive policies (World Bank, 2013), presenting both risks and opportunities to children and youth and to adult futures. This is to say that fewer inclusive policies and practices exist to accommodate young people into societal happenings. According to the World Bank (2017), individuals take part in society through three interrelated domains: markets (e.g., labour, land, housing, credit), services (e.g. electricity, health, education, water) and spaces (e.g. political, cultural, physical, social). To improve the terms on which people take part in society means to enhance their ability, opportunity and dignity. With the right policies and programs in place, children and youth offer tremendous opportunities for a "demographic dividend". Yet, the World Bank (2014) predicted that over the next 10 years, only one in four of Africa's youth are expected to find a paid job, and only a few will have access to education, health and perhaps none will have access to public spaces. This lack of opportunities not only threatens the realization of the demographic dividend but it can contribute to radicalization and violence (World Bank, 2017). Examples are rife in Africa where young people have been seen at the centre of socio-political transformative processes, notably in Kenya in 2008, the Arab Spring in 2011, in Burkina Faso in 2013 and most recently in Zimbabwe in 2018.

Investing in young people therefore require that resources and policies are channeled to areas that can improve the lives of young people, their communities, and their countries. Some of the necessary improvements include better post-primary education, more work opportunities, expansion of access to sexual and reproductive health services and more generally to a healthy life, advances toward sustainability, a reduction of conflict and crime, and enhancement of young people's civic engagement (Pereznieto & Harding, 2013). In this connection, all children and youth have a right to an acceptable standard of living, access to social services and to a life free from bias and stigma. As poverty and discrimination are obstacles to improved development standards, poor and marginalized young people are more malnourished, less healthy, have fewer opportunities to education and are at greater risk of exploitation (UNICEF, 2015) leading to more difficult transitions and hopeless futures. Attempts to provide social services are necessary but are rarely sufficient. For instance, if health care is free but a child's family cannot afford transport, health care seeking still suffers; and if the school is ready to take a child with disability but the community does not believe in her right to education, she probably will not have it (UNICEF, 2015). Commitment and acceptable levels of political will are therefore necessary in the provision of social services that become drivers of child and youth future identities.

Despite global efforts to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and the provision of lifelong learning opportunities for all, more than 260 million children and youth between the ages of 6 and 17 remain out of school (UNESCO, 2018). In addition, many children who attend school continue to be excluded from effective learning opportunities. UNESCO's most recent figures indicate that some 263 million children and youth aged between 6 and 17 years, most of them girls, are not in school today (Global Education Monitoring Report, 2016). Projections indicate that 25 million of these children will remain out of school for life. Significant gender disparities exist, with girls representing two-thirds of the total number of children out of school (UNESCO, 2018). Compared with the world's richest children, the poorest children, found mostly in the Africa sub region are four times more likely to be out of school and five times more likely not to complete primary education (Global Education Monitoring Report, 2016). In terms of employment/unemployment dichotomy, young people on the continent are the most adversely affected by unemployment. According to the International Labour Organization (2014), for instance, the average youth unemployment is currently about 11.8% against a regional total of 7.7% and an average of 6.0% for adults. Despite projections of marginal improvements for young people, of up to 11.7% by 2018, youth unemployment on the continent is still expected to be much higher than the projected total regional average of 7.5% and 6.0% for adults.

While the situation is most acute in the developing world, growing inequalities are also present in many wealthier countries, compounded mainly by increasing globalization and international migration. Sustainable Development Goal 4 calls for countries to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education, and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. And on the strength of this, the Education 2030 framework stresses the need to address all forms of exclusion and marginalization in the education, development and employment sectors, specifically stressing the need to address inequalities related to access, participation, and learning processes and outcomes, paying particular attention to gender equality. This includes efforts to enable education systems and development agencies to serve all children and youth, with a particular focus on those who have traditionally been excluded from educational, development and employment opportunities. Excluded learners, children and youth include those from the poorest households, ethnic and linguistic minorities, indigenous people, and persons with special needs and disabilities. Jolley et al. (2017) argued that poverty and disability as well as disadvantaged circumstances are closely linked and that in low-income settings such as sub-Saharan Africa and among young people in particular, the relationship between the two is extremely strong. The limited resources available in these settings coupled with the lack of knowledge on disability have apparently limited governments' capacity to invest in social inclusion, leaving this group increasingly marginalized and vulnerable. As a result, efforts to improve the lives of people with disabilities in many African settings have traditionally fallen on faith-based organizations and charities that have provided education, livelihood and healthcare services

through a range of targeted but often small-scale programs.

As earlier seen, the process of becoming adult that emerged in the middle of the twentieth century came to be associated with the acquisition of social roles and responsibilities, particularly what we might call the "Big Five" traditional social markers of adulthood: finishing school, which once meant high school but now generally means higher education; finding a job, leaving home, getting married, and having children (Hogan & Astone, 1986). This model was characterized by a relatively fast march through these markers, generally in that order and for both men and women alike, but with most women primarily in roles of wife and mother and men as breadwinners. Relative to today, young people were quick to leave home, marry, and parent (Settersten, Jr. et al., 2015). Economic opportunities made a fast path more possible, as higher education was not required to secure well-paying jobs with good benefits. Economic independence mattered because marriage and parenthood required it, full-time jobs provided it, and cultural norms about gender reinforced this division of labour (Settersten, Jr. et al., 2015). But the situation is much different today, suggesting a non-linear and more socially exclusive than inclusive societal trajectory for young people, even though cultural norms associated with these transitions have loosened.

Today, albeit these, there are new freedoms to live in accordance with one's hopes and wishes, but there are also new risks and challenges since individuals are subject to socially exclusive institutions and policies that were designed in and for an earlier generation, today's adult and ageing society. Of course, these new freedoms are fertile ground for tension as different generations have different ideas about how the course to adulthood is supposed to look and feel. In the most part, today's adult and ageing society still strongly holds to the institutions, policies and values of yesterday, without consideration of today's realities and nature of young people. And so, for most young people, development efforts are not only exclusive of them, but do not reflect their circumstances and realities. It is therefore imperative to realise that decisions made during this period affect young people's acquisition of human capital. These decisions have enormous consequences for their future prospects, as well as those of their communities. For example, the difficulties youth encounter in entering the work force and developing the skills needed to ensure gainful and productive employment can have profound effects on countries' investment climates and prospects for growth (Garcia & Fares, 2008). An educated and healthy work force provides incentives for investment whereas unskilled and disillusioned youth make returns to investment low and uncertain. It therefore makes no sense to introduce policies and practices that socially exclude young people at the expense of the country's progress and wellbeing. Rather, socially inclusive patterns should be valorized to facilitate the transition process and the development of positive, functional and productive future identities among young people.

8. Policy orientations and the construction of future identities

The demographic transition in Sub-Saharan Africa makes youth the most abundant asset the region has or will have in the near future. About 200 million young people between the ages of 12 and 24 live in Africa today; unlike in the rest of the developing world, the share of youth in the population will continue to rise in Africa (Garcia & Fares, 2008). Since the 1950s, the youth population in Sub-Saharan Africa has more than quadrupled (UN, 2005). This rapid rate of growth has pushed the absolute size of the youth population in Sub-Saharan Africa beyond that of many other regions. By 2010 youth represented about 28 percent of Sub-Saharan Africa's population, making it the "youngest" region in the world. By 2030 Africa is projected to have as many youths as East Asia and by 2050 could also exceed the youth population in South Asia. With such a large population of young people, supportive policies and programs on inclusive youth development are critical now more than ever. Harnessing the demographic dividend and expanding opportunities for young people-to the benefit of all Africans-will require sound data and evidence on the status of African youth.

This largest-ever youth cohort is more educated and healthier than previous cohorts, yet the cohort with the largest unemployment statistics globally (ILO, 2016). In fact, more than 6 million youths have given up looking for a job in Africa and it is evident that prolonged unemployment entails higher risk of future unemployment since prospective employers usually have negative perceptions of youth who have been without employment for a long period of time. However, the ILO (2016) has predicted that out of 600 million young people entering the labour market by 2030, one in three will be a young African. Therefore, a rethink now on how to better prepare African youth for the future of work is essential if the continent is to strategically implement Agenda 2063 of the African Union and 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. Knowing that investing in youth employment pays off, the International Labour Organisation promotes locally developed youth programs aimed at supporting young people to adjust to the changing world of work in the continent. This requires that nation states develop and implement youth policy agenda that are localized and that capture the developmental needs of young people without bias of any kind, from advantaged to disadvantaged youth.

Generally, the transition to working life unfolds in two paths among Africa's youth which require policy orientations that support those pathways. According to Garcia & Fares (2008), some go to work directly, with little benefit of formal schooling; others join the work force after a time in the formal school system; while many

enter the labour market unprepared, making them more vulnerable to demographic and demand changes affecting the labour market. They argue that few others earn wages and many work in the informal sector. While most young people in rural areas are in unpaid family work, underemployed, or both, those in urban areas are unemployed, some of them for long time periods (Garcia & Fares, 2008). Those who work are more likely than adults to be stuck in low-productivity jobs while the low-skilled are most vulnerable to weakening demand. The risks are that early entry into the labour market limits Africans from accumulating the human capital they need to get good and decent jobs.

African youth enter the labour market without skills that can support their stay there or yield dividends that are enough to sustain them and their dependents. Illiteracy among 15- to 24-year-olds is alarmingly high; in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, and Mozambique, more than 75 percent of out-of-school youth have no education at all (World Bank, 2013). Despite enormous improvements in education over the past decade, the primary completion rates in the region-59 percent-remains the lowest in the world and such an education gap remains a major hindrance for Africa's youth as they transition into their futures. Each year, 10 to 12 million young Africans enter the labour market, requiring that regions better support youth empowerment for the future through quality education, skills development and creation of decent jobs and opportunities (ILO, 2016). Dependable policy frameworks require increasing employment opportunities for youth in order to safe-guard and further develop their skills; providing them with the capability to choose among opportunities by equipping them with the right skills and improving their access to information and funding; and giving them second chances so that no one is left behind. According to Lo-oh (2014a), economic growth is the key to broadening opportunities for transitioning young people. To them, economic growth increases employment for everyone and has a disproportionately large effect on young people.

In this regard, youth need to be prepared to take advantage of potential opportunities and to create opportunities on their own through self-employment and entrepreneurial activities. Preparation for employment starts with basic good-quality education, which provides the foundation for future human capital accumulation and the later acquisition of vocational skills in schools, training institutes, and the workplace (World Bank, 2006). In general, higher levels of education are associated with easier transition to the world of work. But for youth in Africa, education does not always reduce unemployment; in some countries the unemployment rate among educated youth is very high (Garcia & Fares, 2008). Over time, however, as youth gain work experience, higher levels of education increase the employment incidence and enhance occupational mobility. Presently, less than 10 percent of African students are enrolled in higher education, and of those that pursue post-basic education, less than 30 percent major in science, medical care, information and communications technology, and engineering (Ghanem, 2018). He asserts that China's experience and that of other Asian countries of building scientific capacity and improving global rankings of universities, offers important examples that can be applied throughout Sub-Saharan Africa.

Again, with increasing technological advancements, and corresponding changes in the employment landscape, generating jobs that demand a range of digital skills, there is no doubt that many jobs would be taken by machines in the future (Sumah, 2019; Ghanem, 2018). In fact, this has manifested itself already as computers are now doing jobs that were once performed by people. This disadvantage by technological advancement is a threat to the whole world and Africa stands to suffer, most especially, the continent's young people who are already suffering with the current trends. The unavailability of jobs, skills and knowledge and the inability of African governments to cater for their youthful population are some of the problems (Sumah, 2019). There is therefore the need for policy that would enable African governments invest heavily on developing the innovative skills of its youth. Observations show that many African countries have not done enough to develop skills in the area of science and technology and this has resulted in the continent largely dependent on the importation of technological products. If Africans invest in youth to learn how to make these products, that can help them secure jobs in the future. African governments must also embark on massive industrialization. According to Sumah (2019), the absence of industries in the continent is one of the biggest reasons for lack of jobs, to countries losing young people and its raw materials to other continents. Africa has to therefore redirect their focus on the creation of industries to massively create jobs for its youths now and in the future.

Poverty, adverse economic conditions, ill health, employment shocks, and inadequate schools force many young people to leave school, bringing early investment to a halt and frustrating their efforts to prepare for work and develop their livelihoods. Such young people need a second chance and there is the need to stop looking at youth as a problem and instead look at them as an opportunity to grow Africa's continent. Unfortunately, policy response to the problem has been fragmented and confined to limited interventions without a somewhat clear-cut youth agenda. A review of such policy interventions shows that most second-chance interventions in most African countries are small in scale, unevaluated, and face severe challenges for sustainability and scalability. Being one of Africa's most abundant assets, it is only by safeguarding early investments and further developing this resource that the continent will be able to reap the benefits of its unprecedented demographic transition. This window of opportunity is wide open for policies that ensure that countries can move forward to achieve more

rapid growth and poverty reduction. Failing to do so will be costly for this generation and for future generations. And Bussey (2019) avers that it is up to today's parents, educators and guardians to ensure that younger generations have the tools and the mindset to identify and harness these opportunities when they arise-that their children and students are adaptive, curious and experimental in a way that they are able to determine when opportunity strikes.

9. Conclusion

A modified quote of Benjamin Franklin that if childhood and youth are a mistake, then adulthood will be a struggle while old age will be regretted seems most appropriate at the end of the argument presented in this article. The argument is that the lines etched in childhood and the years of adolescence and youth certainly draw the wrinkles of adulthood and ageing. There is therefore a claim of causality in the nexus between Africa's development and the situation of its children and youth. The state of Africa's development and the situation of its children and youth are infinitely entwined and cannot be isolated or excluded from each other (Odoh et al. 2014). As such, they mutually reinforce and simultaneously weaken each other, while their effects are seen not only in the present but also in the future (Okorie, 2018). Childhood and adulthood have been contextualized, respectively, as the today and tomorrow of any society, while youthhood is the bridge between them. This is even more relevant as the African worldview conceives of the youth as a "person-project", growing out of childhood and poised for an adulthood (identity) that lies in the future (Araria, 2007; Nsamenang, 2002). Accordingly, therefore, the inclusion of children and youth in development agenda is a sure path to continuous and sustainable improvements in human progress and well-being for any society. Okorie (2018) believes that non-inclusion of young people in development agenda is a proven recipe for perpetual underdevelopment and crises; and effective linkages between the past, the present and the future of Africa are achieved chiefly through enculturation, socialization and the proper integration of children and youth into the formal structures, thereby harnessing and unleashing their youthful energy in the growth and development process of the continent.

As the number of children and youth in Africa is growing rapidly, presenting both opportunities and risks; and in the middle of several adversities, the need to invest in the youth as a way of accompanying them becomes more than ever compelling. With the right policies and programs in place, a young population offers tremendous opportunities for a demographic dividend, but statistics show only one in four of Africa's youth are expected to find a wage job at best in 10 years (World Bank 2014). This lack of opportunities not only threatens the realization of the demographic dividend but can contribute to radicalization and violence, leading to disturbing future identities. Ending global poverty that is seriously affecting African children and youth requires urgent action and a social inclusion lens is indispensable towards this (World Bank, 2017). Social inclusion is the process of improving the terms for children and youth to take part in society (World Bank 2013), usually in three interrelated domains: markets, services and spaces which also enhance their ability, opportunity and dignity as human beings. Troubled economies, lack of governmental programs, and barriers to education are examples of dysfunctions within social institutions that contribute to youth exclusion by making it more difficult for youth to transition into adulthood. In this regard, the African continent is full of promise as its young people are its most valuable asset. And Ghanem (2018) argues that Africa is a region of entrepreneurs and engineers, students and scholars, farmers and future leaders eager who are to help transform themselves and the continent.

Therefore, positive future identities are essential to the personal and collective well-being of African children and youth. In this wise, children and adolescents must develop a positive sense of self in a society that unfortunately often devalues them through negative stereotypes, assumptions, and expectations of others (Cross, 1995). Negative identity in individual groups has been theoretically linked to low self-esteem, problems with psychological adjustment, low school achievement, school dropout, teenage pregnancy, gang involvement, eating disorders, drug abuse, and involvement in crime (Cross, 1991; Poussaint, 1990). In this connection, African parents are instrumental in transmitting values, beliefs, and ideas about lifestyles based on cultural knowledge of the adult tasks and competencies needed for appropriate functioning in the adult society. Despite the stressors common in the lives of African young people, most of them remain positive about the present and future, and desire support from significant others for achieving their goals. Having a supportive relationship with an adult has been linked to more positive future orientation, increased educational success and decreased delinquency and substance use (e.g., Steinberg, 2001). Similarly, future orientation is positively associated with academic achievement, delaying or abstaining from sex, and later upward mobility (Agnew & Loving, 1998; Bandura, 1986). Future orientation is also negatively associated with sensation seeking, substance use, and aggression (Somers & Gizzi, 2001). The construction of African future identities is therefore rooted in and dependent on the nature of African childhoods which require child-care practices that are more socially inclusive and pointing to the future.

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