1. Introduction

Our presence here today is a momentous one given the appropriateness of the theme: “Policy Options for Youth empowerment in Ghana” and the sensitivity of the topic: “National Youth Entrepreneurship Policy” to our individual and collective lives.

The youth phase of life is an interesting and an important phase of the development of any human society. This phase of life shows signs to the end of an era (childhood) and the beginning of a new phase that transcends into adulthood. The state of adulthood is one overwhelmed with a plethora of challenges of which the African youth is not left out.

The issues, problems and the focus on youth became a world issue in 1965 when the General Assembly of the United Nations (UN) adopted the declaration on the promotion among youth, the ideals of peace, mutual respect and understanding between people: stressing the importance of the role of youth in today’s world, especially its contribution to development (UNDP, 1995:172).

Since that conference, youth and their issues have attracted considerable attention from all sectors of national economies, though a mantra with little or no understanding of its true potential for national development.

2. Conceptualizing the term Youth

Mr. Chairman, the term ‘Youth’ has no universally accepted definition. To some youth is a threat to existing status quo, while to others they constitute a hope of the future.
In Africa, like most developed countries, a person is defined as youth when the individual reaches the age which is generally referred to as the age of majority. This age is often 18 in most countries and therefore that particular individual becomes an adult member of society. The concept, youth, has been defined variously along different perspectives, backgrounds and for different purposes. The UN General Assembly, the Commonwealth and the World Bank have tried to homogenize the categorization of youth age to be persons between the ages of 15 and 24 (UN and World Bank) and 15-29 (the Commonwealth).

For some countries like Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, and Sierra Leone, this categorisation has been extended to 35 years.

The Ghana National Youth Policy (August, 2010) defines the term ‘youth’ as “persons who are within the age bracket of fifteen (15) and thirty-five (35)”\(^1\). This definition, as is clearly seen, is analogous to the definitions by the African Youth Charter, United Nations Organization and the Commonwealth Secretariat. It is in line with the above definition that our understanding of the term ‘youth’ in this presentation will revolve around.

Mr. Chairman, there is no gainsaying that the youth remains the bedrock on which every nation’s development thrives. The youth are the most exuberant, the sharpest in memory, the most talented, the most innovative and the healthiest in most societies. These qualities have made them the most potent resource without which society is lifeless. Despite these positive attributes, they are arguably the most vulnerable, the most deprived, most discriminated against, the most marginalized, mostly exploited particularly by politicians, the most counterproductive, and the most endangered species in society especially in Africa. The recent development profile of young people of countries in the northern parts of Africa and in our own back yard, Ivory Coast, is an issue of concern for academia, political and social circles.

3. Youth Development Profile of Ghana

Mr. Chairman, before I proceed, it is crucial to evaluate the youth development profile of Ghana against the global youth development in recent times. The recent dynamics between youth unemployment and youth population growth are beginning to show gloomy signals for the future which must be of major concern to all well meaning and loving Ghanaians.

Generally, the youth unemployment rate worldwide is high, with a global average of 11.9% in 2007. This is almost three times higher than the adult unemployment rate. In 2009, however, it shot up to 13 per cent. The ILO SEED Working Paper No.76 in 2006 estimated that about 40% of the world’s population was below the age of 20 and 47% of all unemployed people globally are young men and women. The same report further postulated that about 660 million young people will either be working or looking for work by 2015. Reports now indicate that of the world’s 620 million economically active youth between the ages of 15 and 24, 81 million were out of work at the end of 2009, which is the highest number ever. Such trends, the report noted, will have "significant consequences for young people as upcoming cohorts of new entrants join the ranks of the already unemployed. This may subsequently lead to a 'lost generation' of young people dropping out of the labour market.

Statistics from the United Nations Secretariat, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, World Population Prospects (2008 Revision) reveals that the population of young people (15 - 24 years) in Africa has recorded unprecedented growth overtaking Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the Caribbean in 2010 and would show an astronomical growth between 2030 and 2050.

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4 http://www.ecademy.com/node.php
Of the total number of unemployed youth in Africa, however, majority are below the age of 30 years\textsuperscript{5}. These statistics indicate a galloping growth trend of youth population at a time that youth unemployment shows deteriorating growth trends.

The 2000 Ghana Population and Housing Census estimates show that the youth constitute about 33\% of Ghana’s total population\textsuperscript{6} with an annual growth rate of 2.7\%. The World Bank country statistics for youth unemployment in Ghana indicates that 65\% of Ghanaian youth are unemployed. This is quite worrying considering the fact that, every year, the number of unemployed youth increases by 250,000\textsuperscript{7}.

This situation appears to be even more complex when one looks at the huge number of graduates who come out on a yearly basis and subsequently enter the job market seeking jobs. Unfortunately, they end up very helpless, vulnerable and in some extreme cases very impatient as a result of factors I will be referring to shortly in my presentation.

For example in the year 2010 a whooping 27,710 graduates were said to have graduated from the publicly funded Universities. The question we should ask ourselves is ‘How many of these graduates are in employment?’ I bet you they may be less than ten percent of the number graduated. This, calls for stringent policy measures to address the situation.

4. **Youth Entrepreneurship Policy**

The term ‘\textit{Entrepreneurship}’ just like the term ‘\textit{Youth}’ does not have a universally accepted definition. Generally, entrepreneurship can be defined as identifying the challenges of society and organizing human and capital resources to solve those challenges through the creative and innovative production of goods and services. Entrepreneurs are people who see challenges as


\textsuperscript{6} Ghana Statistical Services. 2000 Ghana Population and Housing Census

\textsuperscript{7} The Ghana Trade Union Congress
opportunities and take practical steps to turn these challenges into solutions and get profit or social recognition as their reward.

They are adventurers and risk takers. They challenge their minds and the status quo to change society’s present and future prepositions and fortunes. Youth entrepreneurs are therefore young people (within the age bracket under consideration) who use their creativity, training, skills, youthful exuberance, and attitude to mobilize scarce resources to create new ideas, values, products and services to address society’s pressing needs. Achieving these will require policy guidelines that will provide a friendly environment for young entrepreneurs to thrive in.

The ILO defines entrepreneurship policy as “Policy measures taken to foster entrepreneurial activities of young people; aimed at the pre-start-up (including entrepreneurship education), start-up and post-start-up phases of the entrepreneurial process; designed and delivered to address the areas of motivation, opportunity and skills with the main objective of encouraging more young people to start an entrepreneurial undertaking or venture and at the same time to improve young peoples’ general employability”.

Thus, the main focus and processes of developing a youth entrepreneurial policy is unambiguously clear and it is to "encourage more young people to start an entrepreneurial undertaking or venture and at the same time to improve young peoples’ general employability". In attaining these, however, the three phases of the policy development processes: pre-start (entrepreneurship education, start up and post start-up phases) must be of topmost priority.

Permit me to underscore the need to state that any youth entrepreneurship policy must ensure that programmes under the policy includes the development of entrepreneurial attitudes, skills

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and opportunities for young people, from senior high through to university when they are more matured. **It is important though for us to appreciate that entrepreneurship is not only about economic profitability; otherwise we risk raising young men and women who will grow up thinking money justify the means.**

**4.1 Types of Entrepreneurs**

The ILO Working Paper classifies entrepreneurship into four types: Economic and social entrepreneurship; Public entrepreneurship; Intrapreneurship; and Co-operatives.

Economic entrepreneurs focus on wealth creation and profit maximization through the provision of products and services.

Social entrepreneurs are more focused on addressing social problems and achieving the public good. Public entrepreneurs on the other hand are those who function as intrapreneurs in the public organizations and within established large corporation and institutions.

Mr. Chairman, it is also worthwhile to acknowledge that entrepreneurs are the agents of change and the drivers of the world economy. If the world today is considered a global village, entrepreneurs must be given the credit. Entrepreneurs, rather than politicians, are the world’s pacesetters and they transform and direct society. A country without entrepreneurs, particularly young entrepreneurs, is threading on dangerous grounds. New things must be created to satisfy the booming markets, the rising population and changing times. The issue of developing young entrepreneurs and if I may add **entreleaders**, for our economy is not just about destroying the unemployment monster, but even more importantly it is about ensuring that public institutions, civil and public services who formulate public policies to drive government decisions and programmes, academia, and others incorporate youth development and entrepreneurship issues in the policies.
The rising phenomena of youth unemployment, brain drain, and juvenile crime and youth agitations in Ghana in recent times are manifestations of a distasteful youth development profile. Armed robbery, drug abuse, cybercrime, prostitution, violence and arrogance are the pictures that come up in our minds when the term ‘youth’ is mentioned in Ghana.

Youth unemployment has become one of the most exigent developmental dilemmas that Ghana and most countries in Sub-Saharan Africa are confronted with. This has been the catalyst for the geometrical growth in crime among Ghanaian youth. To salvage this situation, youth entrepreneurship development and promotion is the most potent pathway to surmount the challenge.

5. Challenges that Frustrate the Efforts of Young Entrepreneurs in Ghana

Mr. Chairman, among the factors that pose a major threat to young entrepreneurs in Ghana and most sub-Saharan states are Social/Cultural attitudes towards youth entrepreneurship, Entrepreneurship education; Access to finance/start-up financing; unhealthy Administrative and regulatory framework; and Business assistance and support.

5.1 Socio/cultural Attitudes

The fear to take risk and the stigma of failure are two of the core disincentives that deter young people from starting new business enterprises in Ghana and most developing countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) 2010 Report reveals that Ghana has 24.6% “New Business Ownership Rate” and 25.7% “Discontinuation of Business”. Established businesses discontinue more than new businesses are started. The report further reveals Ghana’s “Fear of Failure” for new enterprises stand at 10.4%

Again Mr. Chairman, the flooding of our local Ghanaian markets with foreign goods and corresponding unfortunate development of the uncontrollable local demand for foreign goods are disincentives that militate against the growth of start-up businesses by Ghanaian youth.

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9 The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) 2010 Report
5.2 Entrepreneurship education

Access to entrepreneurship education and training is another very key factor to youth enterprise development in Ghana. Entrepreneurship education involves the use of structured learning environments and support tools and systems to help individuals develop entrepreneurial skills and become entrepreneurs. Any entrepreneurship programme that aims at developing the youth to become entrepreneurs in Ghana must of a necessity focus more on the development of **attitudes and skills** than paper certification.

I am of the view that any such training should take into consideration our socio/cultural dimensions as a people and the peculiar nature of the enterprises involved.

Perhaps, it’s about time we took steps to streamline the various entrepreneurship programmes offered in our academic institutions and made them skills and attitude development oriented. And for this, graduate business students for instance could be made to, for their project works, start up small businesses to enable them test theories studied in the classroom in a more practical environment. This might be a herculean task, but I strongly believe can be done.

Also, the development of entrepreneurial attitudes and skills can be made an integral part of all youth focused public interventions. For example, a working relationship can be established between the National Board for Small Scale Industries and the National Youth Employment Programme so that issues of entrepreneurship education targeting the pre-start, on-going and the post programme can be well streamlined.

Likewise, the National Service Scheme can also develop a very comprehensive and a well structured entrepreneurship programme into the scheme so that service personnel can undertake a six month training programme on entrepreneurship before completion of the programme.

5.3 Business assistance and support systems

The absence of adequate youth enterprise development support systems such as easily accessible and flexible credit schemes for start companies; youth enterprise research centres;
well resourced vocational and skills training institutions and policy framework for enterprise
development are challenges that must necessarily be prevailed over.

Mr. Chairman, the high lending rates in Ghana today is another factor that has aggravated the
already appalling situation of unavailability of credit facilities for potential young entrepreneurs
passionately seeking to start their own businesses. Grooming young entrepreneurs in Ghana
and in sub-Saharan Africa ought to be a major poverty alleviation and wealth creation strategy
of any government. Governments ought to show commitment and a high sense of leadership and courage by
investing in youth entrepreneurship development as a major strategy to demonstrate its
commitment to the eradication of poverty

5.4 Poor savings Culture among the youth

The poor saving culture among the youth serves as a major setback for accessing credit for
start-ups in Ghana and within the sub-Saharan Africa. Young people hoping to be entrepreneurs
must be made to understand that commercial banks and lending institutions are there primarily
to protect and add value to shareholders’ investment. They are neither charity institutions nor
funding agencies. To access financial assistance, therefore, they must prove to such banks that
they own equities in their enterprises rather than expecting full scale financing of their
enterprises.

5.5 Entrepreneurial Educational Lapses in Educational Curriculum

The inherent weaknesses in our educational institutions are disincentives to youth enterprise
development. The current educational system, although to some extent, teaches
entrepreneurship, does not promote youth entrepreneurship development in any sense. As a
result, the educational curriculum should be reviewed to include comprehensive
entrepreneurial education in all disciplines so that if one reads zoology or archaeology or music
or dance, he or she can learn how to make money from these.
5.6 Get Rich Quick Menace
The desire for quick riches and material gains by young Ghanaians has made the initiation of their enterprises unattractive and delaying. This “get rich quick” mindset is a major hindrance to youth enterprise promotion and growth in Ghana. This attitude has led many youth to engage in vices such as prostitution, armed robbery, murder, ‘sakawa’ and so on. These vices are inimical not only to the wellbeing of these youth, but more importantly, the development of the nation as a whole.

6. Opportunities for Youth Enterprise Development in Ghana
Mr. Chairman, notwithstanding these challenges that confront youth enterprise development in Ghana, there are several opportunities that offer pathways for Ghanaian youth to actively engage themselves in entrepreneurship activities. These include the following:

6.1 Oil and Gas
The discovery and extraction of oil and gas resources in Ghana have shown prospects for an expanded economy as a result of capital inflows by foreign direct investors and local enterprises. The service industry in these areas is a major opportunity for youth enterprise development.

6.2 ICT Innovations
Abundant technological and scientific innovations and facilities such as the fast growing telecommunication industry, diversified internet service models and adoption of reliable electronic business transaction processes have to a very marginal extend reduced the cost of doing business in the 21st century. This is an area that offers great opportunities for youth entrepreneurship development.

6.3 Agric sector
The agricultural sector offers a brighter opportunity for youth entrepreneurs than any other sector of the economy. The access to land, farming tools, and the skills required are cheaper and establishing an enterprise in the sector is less costly and more rewarding than many other unrelated ventures. On this, I must commend the National Service Scheme for promoting the agriculture sector among the youth through its agricultural projects.


Mr. Chairman, to address the numerous impediments that frustrate youth enterprise development effort and overcome the phenomenal growth in the youth/graduate unemployment rate in Ghana, the crafting of a comprehensive youth entrepreneurship policy with a multi-sectoral action plan towards its implementation is long overdue.

The main objective of such a policy, Mr. Chairman, should be:

“To foster entrepreneurial activities of young people; aimed at the pre-start-up, start-up and post-start-up phases of the entrepreneurial process; designed and delivered to address the areas of motivation, opportunity and skills with the aim of encouraging more young people to start an entrepreneurial undertaking or venture and at the same time to improve young peoples’ general employability”.

The policy must, in the short term, critically address the current astronomical and continued rise of youth unemployment in Ghana. In the medium and long term, there should be a redirecting of the focus of the youth from seeking non-existing jobs to creating their own enterprises.

7.1 Establishment of a Youth Enterprise Support and Development Financial Scheme:

Similarly, the policy should address the critical issue of start-up capital and suggest creative ways of supporting young people who want to go into entrepreneurship. Access to credit and start up seed capital has been and still is the major head ache of most young entrepreneurs. Any policy aimed at streamlining youth entrepreneurship development ought to take this into
consideration. I therefore recommend to government the setting up of a Youth Entrepreneurship Development Fund aimed at supporting young entrepreneurs.

Mr. Chairman, such a fund would be a trust fund to spearhead the development of youth projects and also the injection of start up capital in youth enterprises especially during the formative stages.

**7.2 Youth Enterprise Research and Training Centres:**

The policy must also look at the setting up of a youth enterprise research centre that will research into barriers of youth enterprises development in order to provide a more empirically based direction to entrepreneurship development in the country. A research centre will enhance scientific and technological exploration which will accelerate growth and reduce cost of managing business enterprises. Such a center must seek a closer collaboration among the critical developmental stakeholders, particularly academia and industry to ensure that graduates coming out of training institutions understand entrepreneurship development.

**7.3 Harmonized Government Policies and Programmes for Development:**

Mr. Chairman, before such a policy is formulated, very bold and important structural decisions should be taken. This may not be politically convenient though humanly and developmentally prudent.

The famous Albert Einstein said” we cannot change the situation we have created using the same mindsets and strategies we used to create them”. (Emphasise mine)

Ghana is 54 years old and for the greatest part of our political history, we have always had sports and youth development under the same Ministry. Youth unemployment is choking the entire nation to death. I think it is time to show leadership and courage in the face of such a threatening situation and take this bold step.

The National Youth Authority ACT (Act 201) that establishes the Youth Authority should be re-looked to give the Authority a mandate that guarantees its independence from any partisan or political interference. If that is done, I am convinced:
• The Authority will be free from any political interference to freely and genuinely pursue a development philosophy that focuses on developing the youth to become nationalistic and patriotic citizens who would put Ghana first and eschew destructive partisan politics we find ourselves in today that only brings in its wake division.

• The Authority would also more effectively and efficiently provide oversight responsibility and harmonization of any programme that aims at youth development and empowerment as part of its core mandate. For this matter, the NYEP, NSS and NBSSI can have more room to formulate and implement youth entrepreneurship development policy.

7.4 Embark on a Sensitization at Changing Attitudes:
Mr. Chairman, attitude, they say is everything. And if we must succeed in this enterprise then there must be a need for a conscious effort on the part of everyone to embark on a major attitudinal change for the incorporation of entrepreneurial attitudes on the part of the youth and the adult population as a whole. The focus of such a campaign should be to break the cultural, social and bureaucratic barriers and myths that hinder youth enterprise initiatives in the country.

7.5 Creation of an Enabling Environment
Mr. Chairman, co-presenters, lecturers, and representatives of the media, ladies and gentlemen, another critical issue that a national youth entrepreneurship policy will seek to address is the creation of an enabling environment for young entrepreneurs.
To accomplish this objective, the policy should enjoin the government to protect young entrepreneurs against the intimidation by international and multinational business enterprises and cartels, radical trade policies such as import substitution industrialization policy, south-south trade policy and so on.
8. Strategies to Promote Youth Enterprise Development

Mr. Chairman, equally crucial in a national youth entrepreneurship policy is the strategies that should be put in place to facilitate and achieve the policy goals. Below are some proposed strategies:

- Young entrepreneurs must be given media and public attention in order to project their image and market their products to the public through the organization of programmes such as national youth entrepreneurs’ award programme annually and national youth entrepreneurship celebration week, etc. Successful youth entrepreneurs should be given platforms in the media to inspire other young people to become entrepreneurs.

- Industrial attachments should be made compulsory for tertiary students during long vacations and placement should be made in organizations that can impart technical and entrepreneurial skills to them rather than only administrative and managerial skills. The universities and polytechnics should further put in place mechanisms to ensure that students stay at post and if possible, government should also offer allowance package for students doing industrial attachments. Project works should be an avenue to develop the entrepreneurial skills of the youth.

- Networking and mentoring are very effective ways of promoting youth entrepreneurial activities in Ghana. Creation of business channels and linkages between young entrepreneurs and successful entrepreneurs within and outside the country can facilitate youth enterprise development in the country.

9. Conclusion

Mr. Chairman, the need to formulating a National Entrepreneurship Policy for Ghana is an urgent need. The emergence of the Unemployed Graduates Association in recent times is not only a sign of a system unresponsive to youth employment but also a potential confrontational body that could pose a threat to the political and social stability of this country. Pragmatic policy inventions must, therefore, be put in place immediately to curb the menace of the escalating rise in graduate unemployment in order to provide a decent living and life for
ambitious youth seeking jobs. Lessons must be learnt from the political cacophonies that transpired in countries like Tunisia, Egypt, and now in Libya as well as the looting spree in London in recent the past. The youth have reserved energy to work. The Government of Ghana must pull the trigger for total youth empowerment and transformation in social, economic and political endeavours. The youth have always offered their societies and governments two options to choose from.

The first option is creation and the second, destruction.

Today, if we see Ghanaian youth vandalising offices, fuelling conflicts, engaged in armed robbery and looting, it is as a consequence of the absence of a youth entrepreneurship policy that streamlines various business ventures and empowers young Ghanaian entrepreneurs to expand and grow their business ambitions. As a developing country, the government of Ghana must invest in the youth now so that they can contribute significantly to national development. This, I must say, calls for an urgent need for a national youth entrepreneurship policy to be formulated for Ghana which must be now!

Thanks you for your time.