

Understanding youth group participation in rural Kenya

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Today's presentation

- Introduction
 - Why participation?
 - About the research
- Findings
 1. Differences between global and local interpretations of participation
 2. Young people “in limbo”
- Implications and recommendations
- Discussion

Why participation?

- Global efforts to improve youth sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) increasingly place 'meaningful youth participation' (MYP) at their heart.
- MYP engages young people in issues that concern their lives in interactive ways and seeks to achieve a shared goal.
- Youth participation has the potential to empower young people and to achieve social change.
- However, the universalist stance of rights-based approaches often fails to consider local interpretations of participation.
- How can understanding differences between global and local interpretations of participation help us to improve SRHR?



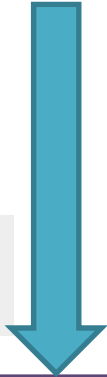
SRHR alliance

Rutgers WPF • AMREF Flying Doctors • CHOICE • dance4life • Simavi



Basic health for all.

Access, Services and Knowledge (ASK) Programme



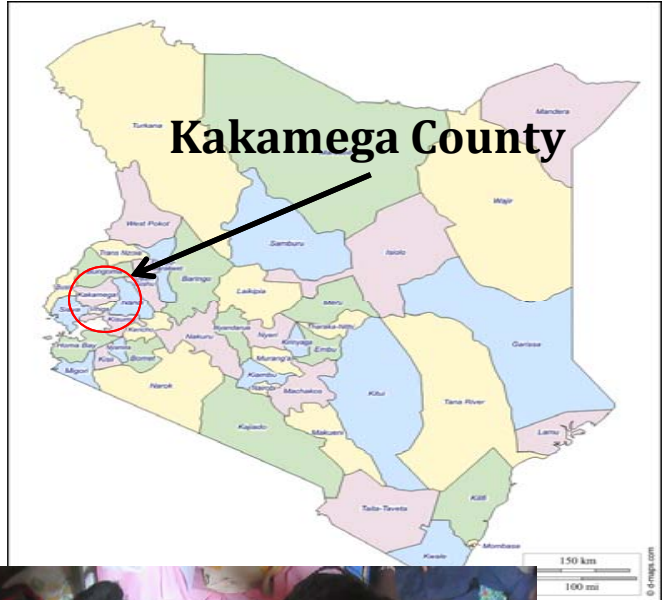
TICH Tropical Institute of Community Health and Development (TICH) in Africa



YOUTH GROUPS
Drama, Sport, Community outreach, Youth Health Volunteers



Participatory research methods
Volunteer youth research team
Interviews and group discussions



Maps courtesy of www.d-maps.com

1. Understanding participation

- Locally, participation is about:
 1. ‘taking part’: doing activities
 2. ‘being part’: a space for identity development and support

- What about shared decision-making?

- Young people feel in control

“Anything that is happening to the group at this centre ... we are the one who make it [the decision]. There is nobody who can come from outside and decides what will be done in this group.” (Kelvin, member, 22)

- Young people in leadership positions e.g. chair, secretary, youth centre manager

- However depth of involvement in decision-making seems limited by cultural norms positioning young people as subservient to adults

The impact of cultural norms

“[Being a ‘good girl’ is] to respect others, to obey them, and to follow what they say” (Jane, 20, member)

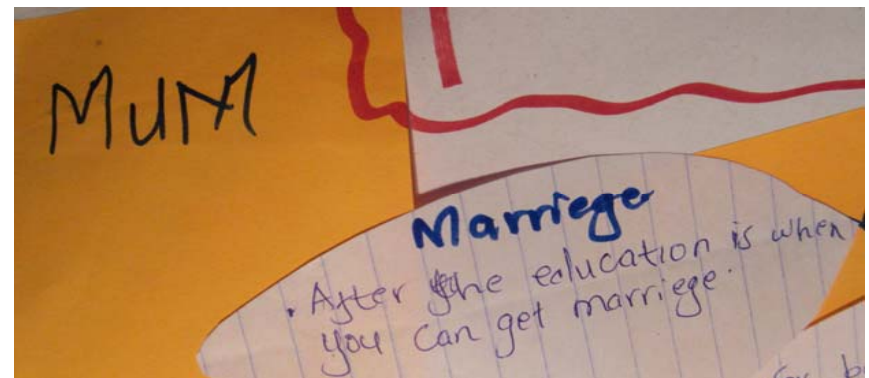
- Adults and young people used language of ‘tell’ and ‘direct’

“We were told to go, we could join in with anything, but we were not the one to plan for it” (Patrick, 20, former member)

- Respect and obedience at home and at school. Young people not accustomed to being involved in decision-making.

“In class, people are not creative, they wait for instruction from the teacher” (David, older adult)

- Young adults positioned as children until married. Trend towards later marriage delays transition to adulthood. Extended period of ‘waithood’ (Honwana, 2014)



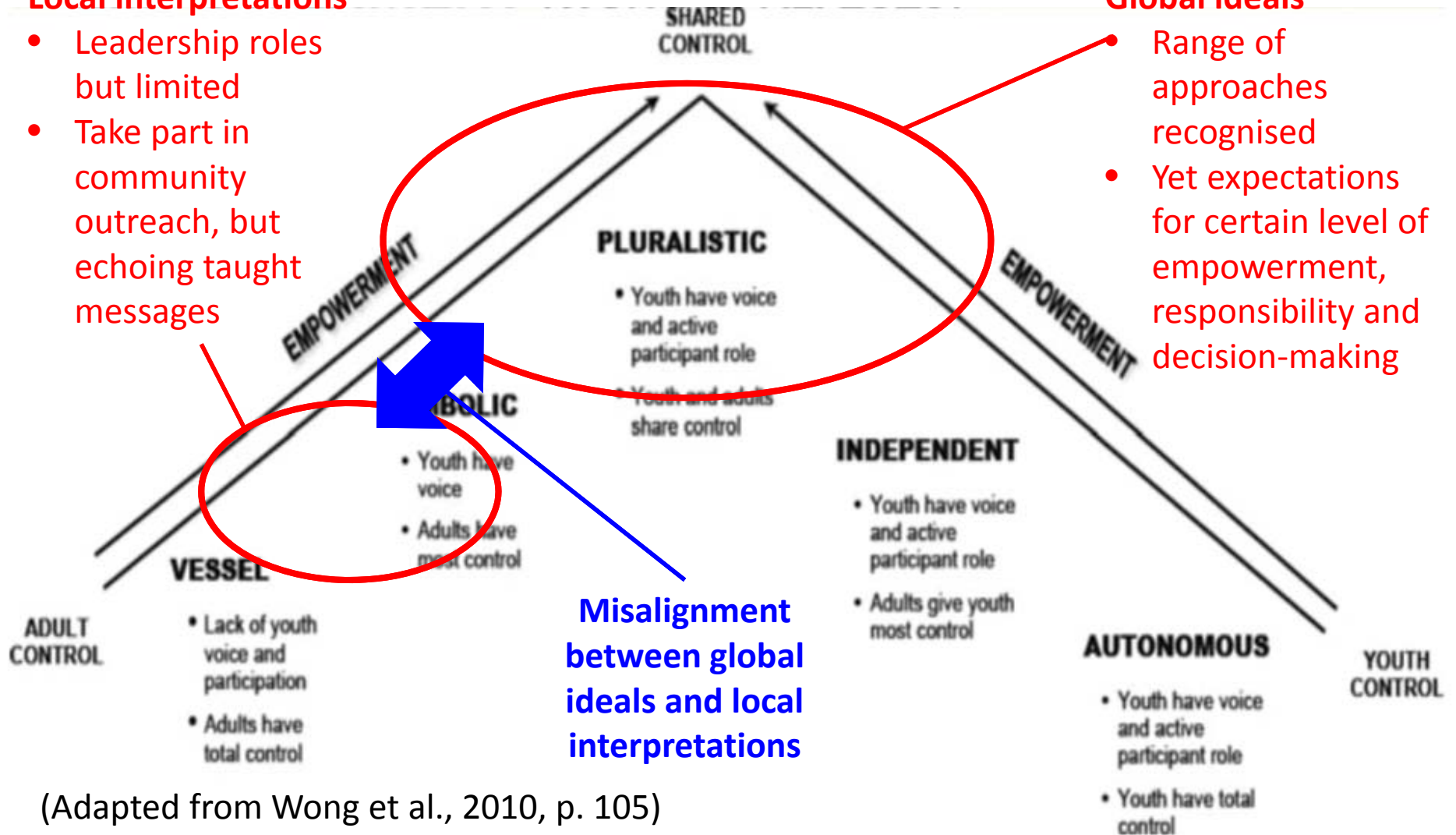
Analysing different understandings of participation

Local interpretations

- Leadership roles but limited
- Take part in community outreach, but echoing taught messages

Global ideals

- Range of approaches recognised
- Yet expectations for certain level of empowerment, responsibility and decision-making



(Adapted from Wong et al., 2010, p. 105)

Implications

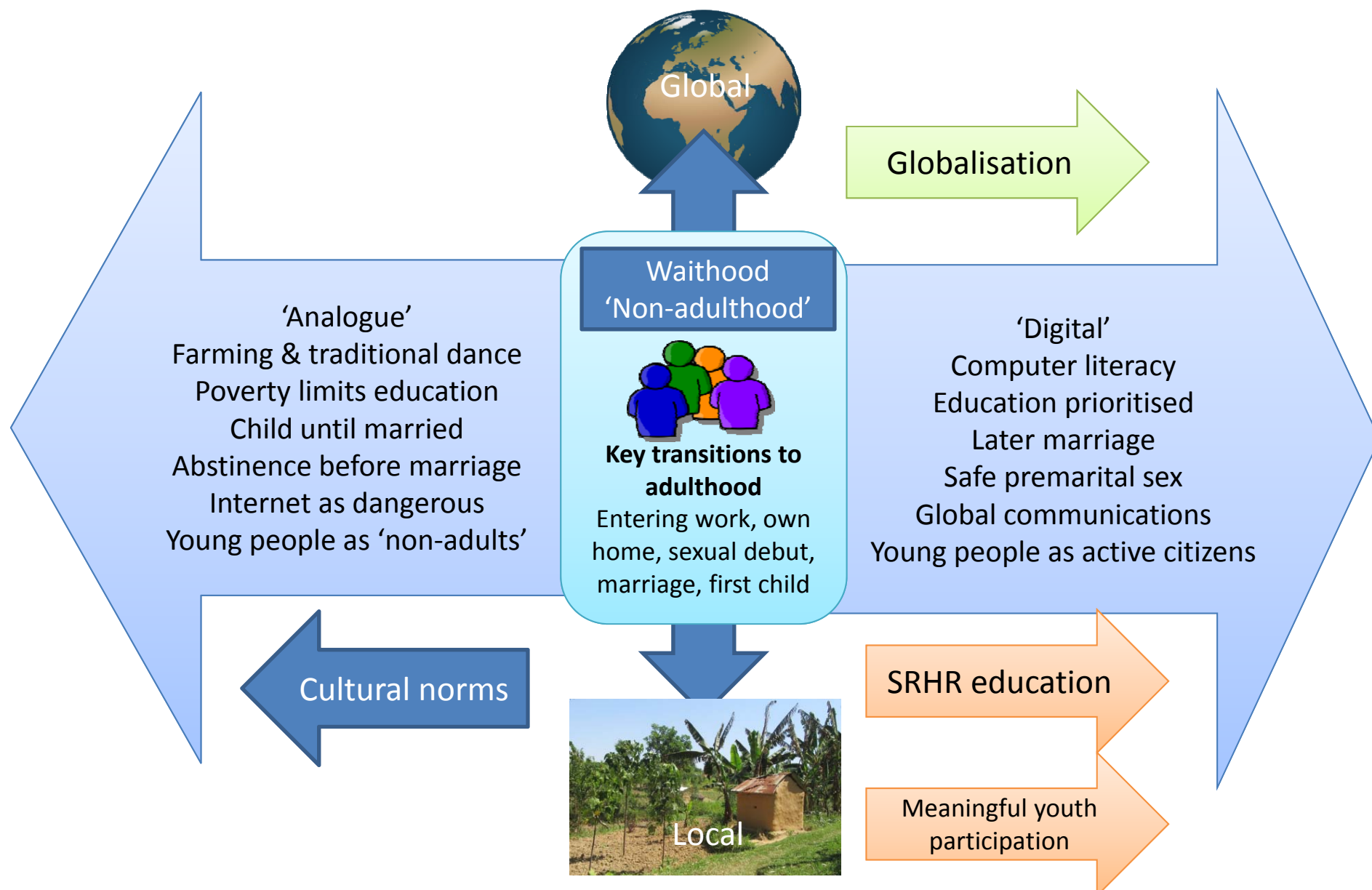
- The divergence reflects a *“fundamental paradigm of globalization ... a balancing act between universality and local particularities”* (Ahmed, 2011, p. 152)
- The incongruence suggests that the concept of MYP may be being applied without sufficient consideration of what ‘meaningful’ means in the local context.
- Risk of applying a universal concept developed in the North, hence enforcing cultural imperialism by presenting experiences of the privileged – in this case the possibility of young people being equal decision-making partners – as universal.
- Therefore vital that MYP is not implemented rhetorically, but with
 - consideration of the broader social contexts
 - engagement with local philosophical theories on rights and
 - a plural perspective considering local power dynamics and social relationships

Recommendations

- Attitudes towards and understands of youth participation should be seen as **part of an enabling environment**
- Programmes should forefront **dialogue-based training for older adults** to develop **shared understandings** of:
 - purpose of MYP
 - what ‘meaningful’ means locally
 - barriers and solutions



2. Young adults “in limbo”

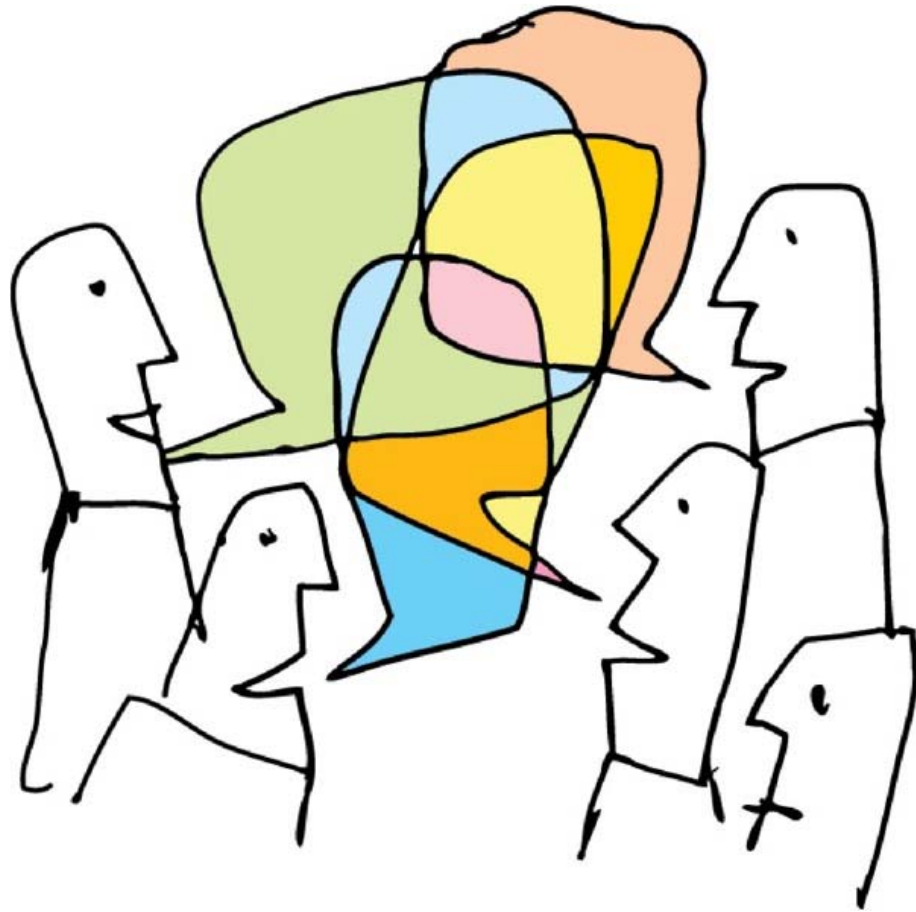


Implications and recommendations

“Young people constantly shake and shape society but are also shaped and shaken by it ... [They are] ... pushed, pulled and coerced into various actions by encompassing structures and processes over which they have little control ... in the process they are frequently broken.” (Honwana & de Boeck, 2005, p. 3)

- Youth SRHR organisations should recognise the specific challenges faced by young people in transition to adulthood.
- Particular consideration should be given to the tension between a cultural view of young people are seen as children until marriage and a trend towards later marriage leaving young people in a ‘limbo’ position as neither children or adults.
- There is scope for investigation of the extent to which young people are served by concepts of children’s and youth participation in academic literature and programmes

Discussion and questions



Thank you



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References

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