



POLICY BRIEF

Mainstreaming youth into AU's peace and security agenda

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The African Union, keen to mainstream the continent's youth into the peace and security arena, inaugurated its Youth for Peace Africa Program in September 2018. This policy brief interrogates some of the consequent developments in Africa's youth, peace and security agenda. It calls on all stakeholders to recognise their individual and collective roles both to enable and to promote active contributions by youth to peace and security – two prerequisites for Africa's development.

Key findings

- ▶ The continent's youth, peace and security (YPS) agenda has evolved significantly since the inauguration of the Youth for Peace Africa Program by the African Union (AU) in September 2018.
- ▶ The AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government as well as its Peace and Security Council remain pivotal in promoting the active participation of youth in Africa's peace and security sector.
- ▶ All stakeholders in Africa's YPS agenda must play their respective roles in promoting and achieving the domestication and mainstreaming of accepted normative and institutional frameworks. Stakeholders include the AU, the Regional Economic Communities and Regional Mechanisms for conflict prevention, management and resolution, member states, youth networks, developmental and international partners and civil society organisations.
- ▶ Africa's youth must take cognisance of the fast-evolving normative principles and institutional arrangements on YPS if they are to fully achieve their goals at the national, regional and continental levels.

Recommendations

To RECs/RMs:

- ▶ Align all regional, legal and institutional frameworks on YPS with that of the African Union.
- ▶ Advance collaboration with member states to promote the YPS agenda.
- ▶ Create opportunities to collaborate with youth networks on peace and security.

To member states:

- ▶ Promote the meaningful participation of youth in peace and security. Among the ways this may be exercised is the appointment and inclusion of the youth in key decision-making and implementation processes.

- ▶ Designate a national focal person to lead the development and implementation of national action plans on YPS in line with national youth policies, regional as well as the continental framework on YPS.

To youth:

- ▶ Promote familiarity with institutional frameworks on YPS.
- ▶ Forge collaborations with continental, regional and national institutions on YPS.
- ▶ Encourage collaboration between and among youth networks to leverage their comparative advantages.

Introduction

The African Union's (AU) Youth for Peace (Y4P) Africa Program was inaugurated in September 2018 as a concrete step towards mainstreaming the youth into Africa's peace and security discourse and practice. In essence, the Program was set up to realise existing provisions on youth, peace and security (YPS). Prominent among them were the African Youth Charter (AYC), which expressly recognises the important role of youth in promoting peace and security in Africa, and the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2250.¹

Notably, the Program's priorities were set in consultation with youth and representatives of the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and Regional Mechanisms for conflict prevention, management and resolution (RMs) that attended the inaugural meeting.

Four of these priorities were drawn from the main hindrances to the ability of youth and their networks to optimise their contributions to peace and security. The priorities are: finalise a continental framework to facilitate meaningful youth participation in peace and security; change the predominantly negative and false narrative that 'youth' is synonymous with trouble; build youth capacity and optimise their contributions to peace and security; and publicise the positive role and contributions of youth to peace and security on the continent. The Y4P Africa Program has included these four issues in its priorities with notable results.

All hands must be on deck to move beyond tokenistic gestures of 'youth involvement'

This policy brief, the first in a series to be published on the YPS agenda in Africa, examines two related issues. The first is the recent transformation of principles to concrete actions within the AU. The second is the amplified responsibility of the RECs/RMs, member states and youth that are integral to achieving that transformation.

This policy brief calls on RECs/RMs, member states and youth networks to seize the continental momentum – in collaboration with other actors such as development

partners, civil society organisations (CSOs), and research institutions/academia – to promote and achieve their active participation in peace and security. This may not be easy taking into consideration the number and variety of multilateral and state institutions required to fully implement the vision, as well as the divergence of regional circumstances and peculiarities. But all hands must be on deck to move beyond the current tokenistic gestures of ticking boxes for 'youth involvement'.

Youth across Africa are enthusiastic about the urgent need to scale up their participation. But they still need to develop their internal capacity and momentum and to fully understand the nature of the political, economic, social and security environments in which they are required to drive such important ambitions. Further, understanding the relevant frameworks and institutional arrangements that shape the options available to them is crucial to advancing key youth initiatives and participation.

Evolution of YPS in Africa

There are two broad angles for best appreciating the evolution of YPS in Africa: the development of the principles that underpin YPS; and the institutional initiatives and activities arranged to give concrete expression to those principles.

The importance of youth was recognised as the Organisation of African Unity transitioned into the African Union with the adoption of the Constitutive Act, which expressly took cognisance of youth as important partners to strengthen solidarity and cohesion among 'our peoples'. The adoption of the AYC by the 7th ordinary session of the Assembly in Banjul, The Gambia, on 2 July 2006 became the first wholesale expression of this imperative. Article 17 of the AYC specifically recognises the role of youth in promoting peace and security in Africa.

Article 20 of the AU Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council encourages non-governmental organisations – community-based and other CSOs, which includes youth networks – to participate actively in efforts aimed at promoting peace, security and stability in Africa. Finally, the AU Agenda 2063 which articulates the pan-African vision of an 'integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa' makes express reference to the role of youth in promoting

the continent's long-term development agenda. Aspirations 4 and 6 explicitly recognise the agency of youth as drivers of development, peace and security.

Apart from these milestones, key AU decisions have contributed to the development of a body of principles on YPS. In 2017, the Assembly adopted a youth theme for the year titled: 'Harnessing the Demographic Dividend through Investments in the Youth'² which accelerated the mainstreaming of youth in the programmes of the AUC.³

The PSC dedicated its 807th meeting on 9 November 2018 to YPS; it decided to carry out annual sessions on the theme. Further, the PSC mandated the conduct of a study on the role and contributions of the youth to peace and security in Africa. The PSC also underscored the need for the selection of five regional African Youth Ambassadors for Peace (AYAP) to work with the AU Youth Envoy in the promotion of peace and security and called for the expeditious drafting of a final version of the framework on YPS for consideration and appropriate action.

At the second PSC session on YPS on 15 November 2019, Council was updated on the above mandates, including the presentation of the five selected AYAPs for consideration and approval. While taking note of the substantial progress made, the PSC requested that its committee of experts work closely with the Program in the finalisation of the YPS framework and the study on 'the roles and contributions of youth to peace and security in Africa'.

Key AU decisions have contributed to the development of a body of principles on YPS

More recently, the 33rd Ordinary Session of the Assembly of February 2020 acknowledged developments in the YPS. It requested the Commission to institutionalise the Y4P Africa Program within the Peace and Security Department with a dedicated desk to coordinate the efforts of all stakeholders and facilitate its full operation, with a view to meeting the increasing expectations of youth across the continent.

Also, the Assembly endorsed the five AYAPs representing each of the five regions of the AU.⁴ The AYAPs will, amongst other tasks, work with the AU Youth Envoy – appointed by the AU chairperson in November 2018 – in promoting peace and security.

The Role of the Y4P Africa Program

The Y4P Africa Program has made visible progress in the mainstreaming of youth into peace and security issues in Africa, particularly in the four areas earlier identified. In essence, the youth demographic, the primary beneficiaries of the Program, were integral to setting the Y4P Africa's priorities from inception, and would continue to do so in the future, to foster inclusivity and ownership of the policies and programmes aimed at addressing their most felt needs.

This methodology avoids one of the main criticisms regarding youth mainstreaming; that is, that youth participation is often symbolic, or even tokenistic. Certainly, as experience has shown, this inclusive methodology also encourages buy-in by the beneficiaries because they are also active participants in agenda-setting from the very beginning. The Program's role in the pursuit and achievement of the four 'youth-identified priority issues' will be highlighted in the rest of this section.

The decision to institutionalise the Y4P Africa Program by the Assembly of AU Heads of State and Government in February 2020 accords impetus for the operation of the program at continental, regional and national levels. In this context, the draft continental YPS framework and its 10-year implementation plan serves as a blueprint for member states, RECs/RMs and youth to promote the meaningful inclusion of youth in all spectrums of peace and security via five priority areas. These are: participation, prevention, protection, partnership and coordination – as well as disengagement and reintegration.

Following its adoption by the PSC, the Y4P Africa program in collaboration with RECs/RMs, member states and youth shall foster its popularisation, domestication and implementation including through the development of national action plans as mandated by the PSC.

Changing the dominant but incorrect narrative that youth in Africa are perpetrators of violence and insecurity required a radically different mindset and a fair amount of innovation in approach. To achieve this, the Program lobbied for a PSC session on YPS in order to draw attention to the positive roles and contributions of youth to peace and security in the continent.

This platform provided the basis for the PSC to make the pronouncements that have drastically changed the narrative around the YPS agenda in Africa. The first PSC session, for instance, afforded young African peacebuilders the opportunity to make their voices heard by policymakers. This development facilitated the PSC's request for a study on the roles and contributions of youth to peace and security in Africa to inform necessary policy pronouncements. Further, the PSC's decision to hold annual sessions on YPS has created the opportunity to change the stereotypes against youth through meaningful engagement and recognition of their increasing contributions to peace and security.

Changing the dominant but incorrect narrative that youth in Africa are perpetrators of violence and insecurity required a radically different mindset

There are two noteworthy points regarding the study. First, as a product of the PSC, it gains official recognition by the AU's highest decision-making organ on peace and security and the endorsement of the positive contributions of young people in this sphere. Secondly, as a product of empirical research, the study will fill the lacunae in the literature that ought to describe the positive impacts of youth initiatives and activities to promote peace and security in Africa. These two impacts are germane in the quest to counter the dominant but misleading narrative that African youth generally are perpetrators of acts that endanger peace.

Notably, these points also contribute to achieving the third priority of publicising the positive roles of youth in peace and security. Remarkably, the five regional consultations that fed into the PSC-mandated continental study afforded the Y4P Africa Program and their counterparts in RECs/RMs the opportunity to interact with youth networks in their respective regions. These consultations and other Y4P youth activities have provided independent researchers – including the consultants that worked on the study – with primary and empirical data on YPS in Africa.⁵ The research products – including the policy briefs in this series – are expected not only to contribute to publicising the positive roles that youth play in peace and security, but also to inform debate and policy.

With regards to the fourth priority, the Y4P Africa Program has integrated capacity-building initiatives into its programming to enable youth groups to deepen their contributions to peace and security. Some of the programmes



THE PSC'S DECISION TO HOLD ANNUAL SESSIONS ON YPS HAS CREATED THE OPPORTUNITY TO CHANGE THE STEREOTYPES AGAINST YOUTH

have been developed with the relevant institutional and developmental partners in the fields of human rights, gender, peace and security and project management as well as normative and institutional frameworks on peace and security.⁶

In addition, the Program has facilitated opportunities for youth to attend training in key institutions within and beyond the continent in order to enhance their capacities in various aspects of peace and security.⁷ Youth and their networks are increasingly in a better position than before to engage in peer learning and exchanges as well as in information sharing across various formal and informal platforms, including those created by the Y4P Africa Program. And they are becoming more aware of what their peers are doing in other parts of the continent and how leveraging collective expertise and competences can be beneficial.

In a nutshell, there has been considerable progress in efforts and initiatives to mainstream youth into peace and security at the continental level, with the AU ensuring that the requisite standards and institutional frameworks are in place that RECs/RMs and member states as well as youth could build upon. It is important that they – in collaboration with key stakeholders within and beyond the continent – take advantage of the milestones already reached to work towards the sustainability of the YPS mandate in Africa.

Conclusion

The evolution of the framework for YPS has gained significant traction over the last decade. The inauguration of the AU Y4P Africa Program in September 2018 is momentous for Africa's recognition of the potential role and contributions the continent's youth could make to peace and security. Since then, the Assembly of Heads of State and Government as well as the PSC have continued to play pivotal roles in furthering practical aspects to ensure the active participation of youth in Africa's peace and security sector.

To build upon the progress made so far, it is imperative that all stakeholders – the AU, RECs/RMs, member states, youth networks, developmental and international partners and CSOs, among others – play their respective roles to promote and achieve the domestication and mainstreaming of normative and institutional frameworks.

This will form the necessary foundation for youth and youth organisations to optimise their contributions towards promoting and attaining peace and security – two prerequisites for Africa's development.

Further, the youth as the primary targets of the YPS agenda must take advantage of the continental momentum and be at the leading edge of the constantly evolving youth sector, in general, and in peace and security, in particular. They must take note of norms and institutional arrangements, which are fast evolving, and find innovative ways to adapt to them.

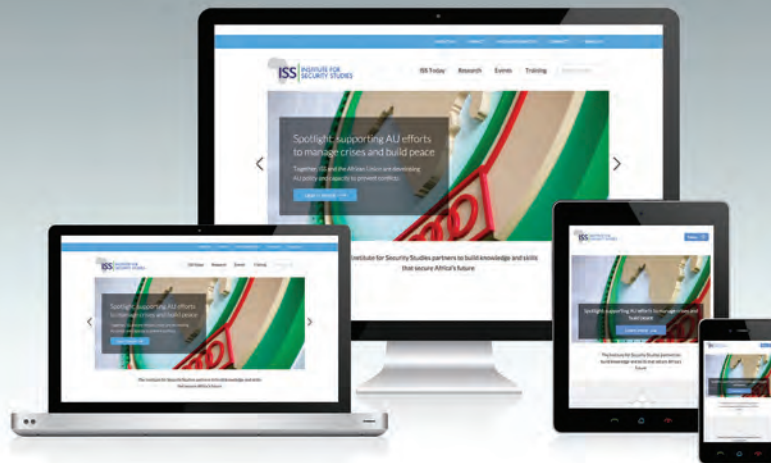
In the short term, youth groups face a significant risk if they miss the opportunity of identifying, understanding and appreciating how to engage effectively, acknowledging norms and taking advantage of existing institutional arrangements to achieve their goals at the national, regional and continental levels.

Notes

- 1 These include the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 2250 (adopted by the Security Council at its 7 573rd meeting, on 9 December 2015) and 2419 (adopted by the Security Council at its 8 277th meeting, on 6 June 2018); the African Youth Charter (AYC) adopted by the 7th Ordinary Session of the African Union Assembly held in Banjul, The Gambia, on 2 July 2006; AU PSC Communiqué [PSC/PR/COMM. (DCLXV)] adopted at its 665th meeting held on 13 March 2017; and the AU PSC Communiqué [PSC/PR/COMM. (DCCCIV)] adopted at its 807th meeting on 17 November 2018.
- 2 Decision Assembly/AU/Dec.591 (XXVI) adopted by the 26th Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia from 30 to 31 January 2016.
- 3 AU PSC Communiqué PSC/PR/COMM. (DCCCIV) adopted at its 807th meeting held on 9 November 2018.
- 4 Thirty-Third Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the Union, 9–10 February 2020, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia Assembly/AU/Dec 753(XXXIII), Paragraph 18.
- 5 See, for examples, M Kujeke, Africa's youth gain recognition as peacemakers, *ISS Today*, 1 November 2018, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/africas-youth-gain-recognition-as-peacemakers>; and G Atuhaire, African Union's Securitized Youth: A Milestone for Regional Coordination of Youth Programmes in Peace and Security, *IPSS Policy Brief* 2019 13(5).
- 6 The programme in partnership with the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights – East Africa Regional Office (OHCHR-EARO) carried out capacity building on human rights alongside some of the regional consultations for the study on youth roles and contributions to peace and security in Africa. Also, with OHCHR-EARO and GIZ, held a Continental Dialogue with youth on Strengthening Capacities to Integrate Youth Perceptions on Conflict Prevention, Human Rights and Peacebuilding in Addis Ababa, 3–4 December 2019.
- 7 For example, the Y4P Africa Program has collaborated with the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC), Accra, Ghana to provide youth to participate in a several training programmes.

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