




Chapter 26

The African Union at 20: Youth Inclusivity and Agenda 2063

Lennon Monyae 

African Peer Review Mechanism, South Africa 
lennon.monyae@aprm-au.org

Introduction

Africa is endowed with innovative and inventive dynamism that should not be relegated to the margins of statistics. Mo Ibrahim Foundation (2019) findings indicate that Africa is currently experiencing a massive youth bulge, with approximately 60% of Africa's population less than 25 years old, and this population is expected to grow by more than 180% by the end of the century. On the other hand, Europe's youth will shrink by 21% and Asia's by 28%. Projections by the same study project that by 2100, Africa's youth population will be equivalent to twice Europe's entire population.

However, against this backdrop of a growing human capital, Africa still faces a myriad of challenges in harnessing transformative leadership, consolidating social cohesion, peacebuilding, economic development, and good governance in the pursuit of "The Africa We Want", as enshrined in Agenda 2063, African Union (AU)'s long-term development plan. The challenges faced by Africa can be mitigated if the youth, who form Africa's demographic majority, are strategically included in the drive towards a peaceful, secure, and developed Africa in line with the AU's development agenda.

The president of Rwanda, Paul Kagame, once remarked at the annual Transform Africa Summit YouthConnekt session that, "We need a new generation of problem solvers, who see

further and work smarter” (UN-Habitat n.d.). This statement captures a fundamental truth: the future of Africa hinges on the active involvement of its youth, who make up the continent’s demographic majority. Therefore, for Africa to progress and thrive, the youth must be integral to the renewal and revitalisation of the continent’s development agenda as envisioned in the AU’s Agenda 2063. Aspiration 6 of the AU agenda highlights the place of the youth in the continental development initiatives: “an Africa whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential offered by African people, especially its women, and youth, and caring for children” (AU 2015:12).

The concept of youth inclusivity is etched in African history such that the contemporary calls to action have become a revival more than a conceptualisation. Late paragons such as Tafawa Balewa of Nigeria, Ahmed Sekou Toure of Guinea, Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, Nelson Mandela of South Africa, Patrice Lumumba of Congo, Amilcar Cabral of Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde, Ntsu Mokhehle of Lesotho, Sam Nujoma of Namibia, and numerous others were in their youth when they bolstered movements for freedom, liberation, and independence. Additionally, figures like Abdel Nasser of Egypt and Thomas Sankara of Burkina Faso assumed power as youth. They spearheaded radical and transformative changes that left indelible marks on their nations and the continent.

This chapter aims to conduct a thorough examination of the AU’s policies and programmes on young people. This analysis underscores the essential and deliberate inclusion of young people to attain the AU’s strategic objectives of Agenda 2063. To substantiate this argument, this chapter commences by providing a brief overview of the state of the youth in Africa, which is a critical element in Agenda 2063’s quest for inclusivity. It then critically assesses the policies and programme the AU has implemented over the past two decades to foster youth inclusion, before concluding with recommendations for enhancing the reform pathways that can amplify the AU’s youth agenda.

Understanding Youth and Youth Participation

The AU defines youth as persons between the ages of 15 and 35, as outlined in the African Youth Charter (AYC). This age-based definition, although important for measurement, begins to fall short when context-based classifications of youth are applied, as discussed in the situational analysis below. Scholars focusing on African youth, such as Gebremariam (2017), have previously requested African governments and relevant institutions to adopt a more nuanced understanding of youth beyond the age-based category.

Hart (1992) explains that the term “participation” holds a variety of meanings, including the right to express oneself and take part in the arena of decisions and actions that are concerned with one’s life and society. In line with this understanding, it is noteworthy that international organisations, such as the AU and its regional economic communities (RECs), have been progressively enabling participation through various normative frameworks that open up spaces for the youth to participate. Despite this, young people have called for meaningful participation, which is largely a political phenomenon that appeals to those who traditionally wield administrative power to dispense some of their controls, including listening to the purported dissenting voices of the youth. Oliver *et al* (2006) argue that “whilst youth participation may occur in recognition of young people’s rights to be involved in all decisions that affect them, meaningful participation can itself enhance a young person’s sense of connectedness, belonging and valued participation, and thereby impact on mental health and wellbeing”.

Beyond any definitions and efforts to deliberately contextualise this to Africa, the African Charter for Human and People’s Rights advocates for the promotion and protection of all human rights regardless of age or sex, and for everyone to have equal access, which intuitively becomes participation (OAU 1981:3). Crucially, the Constitutive Act of the AU mandates the AU to build partnerships with all segments of society, including women and youth.

State of the Youth in Africa – a Situational Analysis

The youth in Africa have been branded as the group with the worst quality of life. Although this might come across as desperate and forlorn, the observation that they constitute a demographic majority, yet lack equal access to participation, validates and justifies this assertion. Several other labels have been given to this demographic, including ‘stuck in waithood’, which connotes a somewhat sedentary existence.

Honwana and Boeck (2005) describe this waithood as the lack of opportunities to be actively involved in mainstream economics and governance towards the attainment of basic living conditions and escaping the cycles of poverty. Findings from the Mo Ibrahim Foundation (2019a) indicate that waithood has been compounded by the inescapable socio-cultural expectations that assume a fluid course of progression from education to work, starting a family, and retirement; however, this order has been rearranged due to exogenous factors within the continent. Added to this is the scourge of irregular migration to Europe through the Mediterranean Sea in a desperate attempt to attain an undefined, elusive improvement in their circumstances (AfDB 2023:6).

Despite this, there are outlier youth who have managed to navigate the socio-cultural circumstances and record a modest and ‘normal’ course of life without the barriers afflicting the majority. Regardless, having a new generation of problem solvers requires a shared objective for the emancipation of all. Data from Afrobarometer (2022) in Round 9 Survey of 39 African countries reveal the following about the state of youth:

1. Unemployment is the biggest problem that youth are facing.
2. African governments are poorly rated for their efforts in creating jobs for young people.
3. The youth are more likely than elders to express dissatisfaction with democracy, mistrust in elected leaders, and to be willing to access military intervention of elected leaders who abuse power.
4. The youth report lower rates of political engagement than their elders across various indicators, including voting in national elections.

5. Young women’s political engagement lags behind their male peers across all the indicators under consideration.

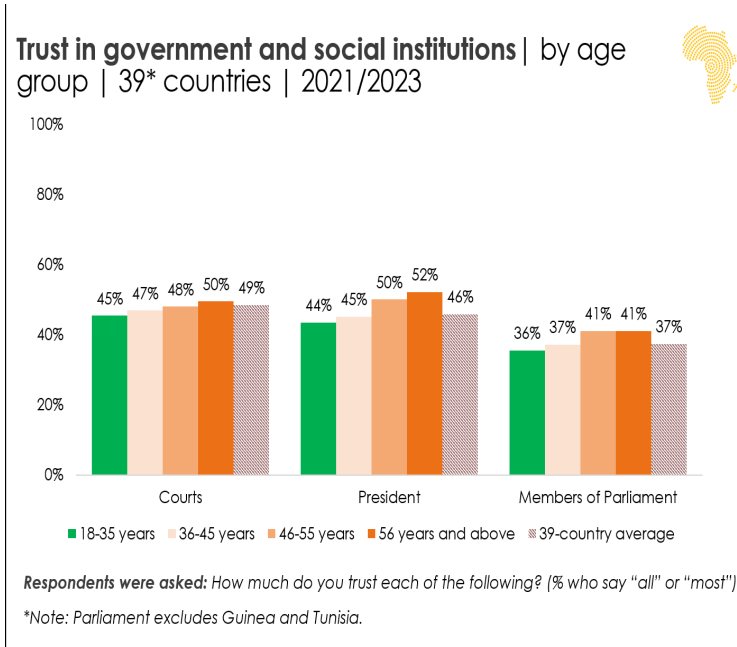


Figure 26.1: Trust in Government and Social Institutions

Source: Data for Governance Alliance/Highlights of Afrobarometer Data on the Youth’s Perspectives

Findings from Afrobarometer indicate that the outlook of young people in democracy and state institutions is increasingly nudging towards a state of distrust. As illustrated in Image 6, youth trust in courts, the president, and parliament are lower than that of the older generation. Therefore, it is not surprising that civic and political participation amongst the youth has dropped in nearly 39 Afrobarometer-surveyed AU member states and voter apathy is on the rise. Considering the above, it becomes important to understand that when policies are instituted for youth development, they seek to (and should) address the

needs and perils of the majority, thereby ensuring inclusive good governance.

A Critical Assessment of AU Youth Policies

The following policies have been utilised by the AU in attempting to bring about an inclusive development framework while implementing Agenda 2063: the AU Constitutive Act (2000), the African Youth Charter (2006), Decade of African Youth and its Decade Plan of Action (DPoA 2009–2018), the AU Theme on Youth (2017), and the African Plan of Action on Youth Empowerment (APAYE 2019–2023), amongst others.

The African Youth Charter

The African Youth Charter (AYC), which was ratified in 2006 and came into force in 2009, holds a paramount position as the cornerstone of all normative frameworks for guiding youth development and fostering their inclusive involvement in the pursuit of African development. The AYC is the foundation of all AU policies and programmes, including the youth and attainment of the AU's Agenda 2063 goals.

This political and legal document serves as a comprehensive strategic guide, offering direction for the advancement of youth empowerment and development. It is noteworthy that the AYC was adopted three years after the establishment of the AU, underscoring the organisation's commitment to prioritising youth development within its broader strategy. The African Union Commission (AUC) further emphasised the significance of the AYC by making it a central focus of its work plan during its strategic plan for 2004 to 2007. Out of the 55 African countries, only 41 have ratified the African Youth Charter.

As highlighted earlier, the African Youth Charter plays a central role in being a conduit for the effective and inclusive engagement of youth in inclusive governance and African developmental agendas. Article 26 of the AYC provides that every young person shall have responsibilities towards his family and society, the state, and the international community. It further states that youth shall have the duty to:

1. become the custodians of their own development;
2. protect and work for family life and cohesion;
3. have full respect for parents and elders and assist them anytime in cases of need in the context of positive African values;
4. partake fully in citizenship duties, including voting, decision making and governance;
5. engage in peer-to-peer education to promote youth development in areas such as literacy, use of information and communication technology, HIV/AIDS prevention, violence prevention and peacebuilding;
6. contribute to the promotion of the economic development of states parties and Africa by placing their physical and intellectual abilities at its service;
7. espouse an honest work ethic and reject and expose corruption;
8. work towards a society free from substance abuse, violence, coercion, crime, degradation, exploitation, and intimidation;
9. promote tolerance, understanding, dialogue, consultation and respect for others, regardless of age, race, ethnicity, colour, gender, ability, religion, status, or political affiliation;
10. defend democracy, the rule of law, and all human rights and fundamental freedoms;
11. encourage a culture of voluntarism and human rights protection, as well as participation in civil society activities;
12. promote patriotism towards and unity and cohesion of Africa;
13. promote, preserve, and respect African traditions and cultural heritage and pass on this legacy to future generations;
14. become the vanguard of representing cultural heritage in languages and in forms to which youth are able to relate; and
15. protect the environment and conserve nature.

The AYC is one of the most progressive legal frameworks adopted by AU member states, because not only does it provide youth with rights, but it is also inclusive in its recognition of African youth in the diaspora, and protects the mentally and physically challenged youth, young girls and women (AU 2006:20–21).

Globally, the AYC and the Ibero-American Youth Convention are the only regional normative frameworks adopted

by regional multilateral institutions with domestic implications for member states. Therefore, the AU can be commended for being a norm setter in youth development policy formulation in the broader international community.

On the African continent, the AYC has achieved notable success in fostering policy commitments to youth development at both national and regional levels. It has served as a valuable framework for African nations to craft policies and initiatives that consider the unique needs and aspirations of their young populations. However, despite these achievements, the AYC has fallen short of ensuring equitable access to resources for young people and actively involving them in decisionmaking processes. Remarkably, the AYC, often regarded as a Magna Carta document for youth empowerment in Africa, has faced challenges in its implementation. It is equally perplexing to observe that some countries that have yet to ratify the AYC appear to be more closely aligned with its principles than some of those who have officially pledged their commitments to the effective implementation of the AYC. For example, Botswana remains the only Southern African Development Community (SADC) member state that has not yet signed the AYC; however, its youth policies appear more progressive than some of its counterparts in the region.

AU Youth Decade Plan of Action (2009-2018)

Under the leadership of the Gabonese chairperson of the AU Commission, Jean Ping, the regional body adopted the Youth Decade Plan of Action (DPoA) (2009-2018), focusing on five key priority areas, namely: education and skills development, youth employment and entrepreneurship, governance, peace, and security (SADC, 2019). The Assembly of Heads of States and Governments of the AU declared 2009-2018 the “African Youth Decade” and endorsed the DPoA as the roadmap for the implementation of the AYC. Subsequently, in 2017, the AU Assembly dedicated the theme of “Harnessing the Demographic Dividend through Investments in Youth” and a roadmap was developed to outline the key actions for empowering young people in Africa from 2017 and beyond (AU 2017:9). The AU theme was influenced and driven by prior youth empowerment normative

frameworks and decisions, particularly Aspiration 6 of Agenda 2063. As contained in Aspiration 6, the AU wanted “An Africa whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children” (AU n.d.).

The specialised technical committee (STC) of AU member states responsible for youth affairs, with the backing of development partners, donors, and civil society, engaged in consultations and endorsed the DPoA. Essentially, the implementation of the DPoA was designed to adopt a grassroots approach while also considering the importance of augmenting support from the RECs and development partners. At the heart of the DPoA was the principle of comprehensive youth involvement in all facets of Agenda 2063, encompassing peace and security, the removal of barriers hindering youth participation in leadership roles, addressing exploitation and discrimination, and ageism. Through this ten-year action plan, the AU established youth empowerment and inclusivity as a key priority within its scope of work.

When the DPoA expired in 2018, the AU made a strategic and forward-looking choice to strengthen its initiatives for youth development and empowerment by appointing a youth envoy. A much-needed boost was received by the African youth ecosystem when the AU Assembly passed the declaration on the 2017 AU theme ‘Harnessing the Demographic Dividend through Investments in Youth’ (AU 2017:3). The attention by policymakers, bureaucrats, and diplomats to the plight of African youth during the AU Year of Youth culminated in the noteworthy appointment of Ms Aya Chebbi from Tunisia as the first-ever African Union Special Envoy on Youth in the AUC chairperson’s cabinet (2018–2021).

The establishment of the Youth Envoy Office was a testament to the political will of the AU to take young people seriously; however, serious concerns were raised over the lack of administrative and financial support for this newly established office. Indeed, the office of the youth envoy, upon its establishment, became a rallying point for the voice of youth and

was successful in bringing much-needed advocacy and lobbying for youth issues within the AU system and beyond. Records from the first youth envoy's two-year mandate indicate that she had achieved the following:

1. lobbying for the operationalisation of the AU Youth Fund;
2. advancing the youth, peace, and security (YPS), agenda leading to the briefing of the United Nations Security Council in 2019 and 2020 as well as the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) briefing in 2019 and 2020;
3. collaborating with over 170 private sector partners to raise financial and administrative support for AU youth programmes and initiatives;
4. supporting the establishment of youth engagement programmes i.e. Saleema Youth Victorious Ambassadors and African Youth Ambassadors for Peace; and
5. working with 35 AU member states in all African regions in organising intergenerational dialogues through town halls, meetings, and consultations for youth.

Regardless, critics have emphasised that the appointment of the youth envoy was primarily symbolic and a continuation of tokenism in the youth development ecosystem, given that the Youth Envoy Office lacked the financial and administrative backing necessary to effectively implement its projects at the onset.

One can argue that the DPoA had mixed success, as some goals were achieved, while others were left unfulfilled. Achievement of the indicators set in the DPoA could have been aligned with the achievement of Agenda 2063 and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In this way, reporting and tracking progress of the set goals would have been incorporated into existing tracking tools such as the Voluntary National Reports (VNRs). Member states of the AU already have development reporting responsibilities to various national and international organisations. Integrating monitoring and evaluation into existing mechanisms could have prevented the underreporting of DPoA achievements, mitigating development reporting fatigue.

The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), a monitoring and evaluating institution of the AU, was mandated to track progress and maintain accountability. Unfortunately, the DPoA lacked clear financing or budget lines to fund the ten years of its implementation, and this shortfall affected the monitoring and evaluation of the plan.

Funding for the ten-year implementation of DPoA was left to the member states of the AU, without finding alternative ways of sourcing resources to drive the DPoA. The plan was for member states to explore innovative ways of raising the required funds internally, including the mobilisation of resources from the private sector. The plan did not explicitly explain the model for sourcing the funds. The initiative seemed ‘dead on arrival’, as the majority of African countries already have serious challenges with financing for development. Since the AU was launched, member states have had arrears in their annual contributions to support the activities of the continental institution, which is an indicator that financing for youth programmes could have been a non-priority.

African Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment (APAYE)

Following the conclusion of the Youth Decade Plan of Action (2009–2018), the African Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment (2019–2023) was introduced by the AU. APAYE, a policy for youth development at the AU, is an attempt to consolidate and streamline all the activities and programmes under the African Youth Division within the AUC. Moreover, the AU’s guiding programmatic document influences all efforts and contributions of youth empowerment actors on the continent.

APAYE’s primary motivation stemmed from the 1 Million by 2021 initiative, launched in 2019 by AUC Chairperson Mousa Faki. This programme aimed to provide 1 million young Africans with opportunities in education, employment, entrepreneurship, engagement, and health. The project was driven by the African Union Youth Division and gained momentum at a continental level with launches at different platforms. Ugandan President Kaguta Yoweri Museveni launched the initiative on the margins

of the third APRM International Youth Symposium in 2022, which was hosted in Kampala under the theme, “AU @20: Repositioning the Youth Agenda for Transformative Continent”. The symposium was attended by over 800 international and local delegates to bring youth and decisionmakers together for an intergenerational dialogue to upscale youth participation in democracy and good governance.

Since the launch of 1 Million by 2021 – now rebranded as 1 Million Next Level – there has been slow ownership at a national level. Very little has been achieved at the national level by the African states as far as the 1 Million by 2021 is concerned. Uganda is the only country that has made noticeable strides in implementing the initiative, with President Museveni having made pledges and national taskforces for implementation established. More can be achieved with this initiative if African heads of state provide support and if more support is solicited from local stakeholders such as ministries of youth, national youth councils, and the private sector. Without national-level ownership of ‘1 Million Next Level’, the initiative will not succeed.

Moreover, the assertion that 1 million youth were impacted by the programme from 2019 to 2021 cannot be easily verified, as there were no proper tracking mechanisms for verification. In essence, while the political will to initiate the programme for youth was impressive, the appetite by the AU member states to domesticate and financially support the AU’s initiative has been relatively low. Much more can be achieved by streamlining and building the required political and financial support ownership and domestication of the AU youth programmes at the regional and national levels, for maximum impact.

Analysis of AU Policy and Normative Frameworks

When the AU emerged from the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in 2002, it was evident that African leaders had intentionally agreed to reshape the new institution’s focus on political affairs, peace and security, economic integration, and bolstering the African continent’s global influence. Importantly, the AU was intended to represent the interests of African people,

rather than prioritising the concerns of national political elites. It was designed to increase the performance of the multilateral institution, especially around responsiveness to the mirage of the challenges confronting contemporary Africa. The AU also spelled out a division of labour towards a more effective working relationship between the AU, RECs, the regional mechanisms (RMs), the member states, and other continental institutions, following the principle of subsidiarity. The extent to which this vision and strategy has been achieved through the implementation of youth policies and programmes remains questionable.

The AU boasts a wealth of impressive and forward-thinking youth development instruments, including the AYC, the DPoA, and APAYE. However, the effective execution of these continental interventions at the national level has faced several shortcomings. There have been significant gaps in monitoring and evaluating the implementation of these programmes, with irregular reporting and, in some cases, a complete absence of reporting on their progress. For example, since the inception of the AYC, there has been no regional or continental study or feedback mechanism to assess its impact on improving the lives of young people. An appraisal of the AYC before its 20th anniversary in 2026 is necessary for the AU to take stock of its achievements and shortcomings.

In the realm of youth development and empowerment, it is crucial to prioritise evidence-based approaches. Africa's future and leadership largely hinge on its youth, who form the backbone of its human and political capital. By relying on evidence-based indicators, Africa can improve its outcomes in key areas, such as quality education, skills development, and healthcare service delivery. These pillars are fundamental to both national and continental development. Indeed, data-driven strategies play a pivotal role in achieving progress in these domains.

Reflection on AU Key Programmes

The AU, through Agenda 2063, has made strides and noticeable progress towards advancing the vital role of youth in Africa's socio-economic development, peace, and security. This

commitment is acknowledged and emphasised by various African institutions, including the RECs, RMs, and their respective member states. There has been growing momentum on the role of youth in the actualisation of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), which is one of Agenda 2063's flagship projects. The AU, through the AfCFTA secretariat based in Accra, Ghana, has taken a positive step by introducing the AfCFTA Protocol on Women and Youth in Trade, which will aim to broaden inclusiveness through interventions that address constraints and barriers women and youth face when trading on the continent.

In response to the AU's attempts to include them in AfCFTA policy formulation and implementation, young people have come to the party by being at the forefront of popularising the Agenda 2063 flagship project. Youth have also gone further by advocating for the Free Movement of Persons Protocol, which remains a barrier to trade and travel for all Africans. Young creatives such as Nigerian David Akwara have begun showcasing the benefits of AfCFTA through films like the *The Rise Documentary*.

Over the past two decades, Africa has achieved noticeable progress in enhancing youth representation in governance spheres, particularly within the AU system. Efforts are in place to implement the AU assembly decision on gender parity and youth quotas by 2025. By 2025, the AU aims to have 50% of the AU workforce made up of women, and 35% made up of young people. Special provisions and assignments have been created for young individuals at the national, regional, and continental levels. These include roles such as the AU Youth Envoy, youth advisory panels, and youth ambassadors in various international entities. At a national level, some heads of state, such as President Museveni of Uganda, President Hage of Namibia, and President Akufo-Addo of Ghana, have appointed special aides in charge of youth affairs.

RECs have established platforms and initiatives for engaging with youth, such as the East African Youth Ambassadors and the co-convened You lead Summit organised by the EAC and MS Training Centre for Development Co-operation in Arusha, Tanzania. However, these platforms are mainly in areas of democracy and political governance, and areas such as

entrepreneurship, sports development, and creative arts need to be developed. Importantly, young people should not only be relegated to be representative tools that fill quotas, but they should also be the epicentre of driving Agenda 2063.

While recognising the AU's progress in youth representation, it is imperative to acknowledge that there is still much work to be done to mobilise and secure the active participation of youth in achieving Agenda 2063, especially in the area of economic development. Here, AfCFTA – a flagship of Agenda 2063 – should be the backbone of African youth's contributions to continental development. The ease of doing business, particularly through easing up visa restrictions through the implementation of the Free Movement of Persons Protocol is central and cannot be overstressed. Moreover, the cost of travelling could be reduced – air travel remains disproportionately expensive on the African continent, compared to other regions in the world. The latter is taking place without any progress in the implementation of the Single African Air Transport Market, a flagship project of Agenda 2063.

Youth are the custodians of Agenda 2063 and the implementation and success of AfCFTA, the Single African Air Transport Market, the Integrated High Speed Train Network, the Pan-African E Network, the African Virtual and e-University, and others will have a profound impact on continental peace, cohesion, stability, and prosperity, directly influencing sustainable peace and reconciliation efforts across the continent. Ultimately, it is young people who will be beneficiaries of Agenda 2063. Without the effective implementation of AU policies and programmes by AU member states, development partners/donors, the private sector, and civil society organisations, urgent issues such as youth unemployment and underemployment, climate change, youth exclusion from democratic projects and good governance, education, peace and security, skills depletion, lack of entrepreneurship, dilapidating health infrastructures, as well as adolescent youth health, will continue to hinder the achievement of Agenda 2063.

African Governance Architecture and Youth Engagement Strategy (Regional and Continental Youth Consultations)

Over the past decade, the secretariat of the African Governance Architecture (AGA) – now merged with the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) – has been at the forefront within the AU system, spearheading the efforts to promote youth inclusivity, particularly in the realms of democracy and good governance. This endeavour is realised through the AGA Youth Engagement Strategy (AGA YES), which involves regional and continental consultations preceding high-level dialogues. During these dialogues, the findings from youth consultations are presented to senior AU officials and hosting member states' heads of state for their consideration. The youth also are provided with an opportunity to co-create solutions to emerging challenges. For instance, the 11th edition of AGA, hosted in Cotonou, Benin in 2022, had themes that focused on youth perspectives on the resurgence of unconstitutional changes of government in Africa. The latter was in response to the rapid increase of coups in the predominately francophone zone and Sudan.

The AGA youth consultations, now in their 12th edition, have been conducted in various African capitals with a diverse participation of the youth. These consultations primarily focus on advancing the implementation of the principles enshrined in the African Charter for Democracy, Elections, and Governance (ACDEG). They consistently engage youth stakeholders from diverse backgrounds, often leveraging the participation of popular African musicians and celebrities to amplify key messages in favour of youth empowerment.

The AGA YES has achieved notable success and serves as a model for other AU institutions seeking innovative ways to engage with young people. This model has been embraced by various AGA platform institutions, including the APRM, the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC), and the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSSOC), which also have the mandate to mobilise and engage with young individuals.

African Union Youth Volunteer Corps (AU-YVC)

In 2010, the heads of state and government of the AU mandated the AUC to establish a continental volunteer initiative. The African Union Youth Volunteer Corps (AU-YVC), in its 12th cohort in 2023, has played a crucial role in providing skills and knowledge to university graduates across the African continent. Importantly, the AU system has been the primary beneficiary of the AU-YVC, as a significant number of volunteers ultimately find employment within various AU organs where they serve. This programme has effectively connected and integrated African youth with continental initiatives, contributing to increased people-to-people relations and fostering robust networks and cultural exchange.

The RECs, such as SADC, should consider replicating this model to promote the development of stronger regional youth networks. At the national level, the National Youth Service is being utilised by various AU member states. Ironically, the National Youth Services have often been politicised, thereby losing their relevance.

AU Youth Ambassadors

Over the past decade, the AU has significantly increased its practice of appointing young individuals as ambassadors to advocate for the integration of the youth into regional initiatives such as Agenda 2063 and to mobilise the youth for developmental actions across the continent. Notably, the AU has designated Youth 4 Peace ambassadors and an AUC chairperson youth envoy. This selection of young individuals for crucial ambassadorial roles reflects a strong belief in their capability to take the lead in essential matters, marking a significant step towards incorporating youth perspectives into the mainstream of continental, regional, and national policymaking.

Youth for Peace

The Youth for Peace (Y4P) Africa Programme was launched in September 2018 in Lagos, Nigeria, as part of the efforts to implement Article 17 of the AU Youth Charter, the 665th

Communiqué of the Peace and Security Council (PSC), United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR 2250 and 2419). This initiative was undertaken by the Peace and Security Department in collaboration with the Youth Division and African Governance Architecture of the Department for Political Affairs of the AU. The activities and programmes, led by the youth ambassadors for peace under the Peace, Security, and Political Affairs Department of the AU, have significantly contributed to a better understanding of Africa's peace agenda.

The inception of Y4P Africa aimed to actively engage, involve, and collaborate with young African boys, girls, women, and men. The Y4P ambassadors have already begun making strides toward changing the narrative that often portrays the youth as potential instigators of violence. Some notable achievements that can be scaled up are training trainers and the popularisation of AU manuals for youth participation in African political and electoral processes. These trainings provide national trainers with the capacity to disseminate tools aimed at fostering increasing youth involvement in elections through voting, electoral observation, and monitoring. The Gambia, Sierra Leone, and Zimbabwe have already benefited through the training of trainers through the manuals and the outcome of youth participation in their general elections would indicate if the trainings had an immediate impact.

APRM Youth Programme

In 2017, the APRM embarked on a youth mainstreaming agenda, following a request from the late President Idriss Derby that the youth be integrated into the APRM's activities. The APRM's youth mainstreaming initiative aligns with the Declaration on Democracy, Political, Economic, and Corporate Governance, and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance (ACDEG) as well as its expanded mandate on tracking and monitoring the implementation of Agenda 2063 and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The annual youth symposium organised by the APRM secretariat with the support of hosting member states aims to fulfil the APRM's mandate of being an African-owned and African-led platform for self-assessment, peer learning, and experience sharing in democracy and good

governance. This is done while upholding democratic principles, human rights, and the rule of law, and promoting political, social, and economic integration in Africa.

Building on the success of three previous international youth symposiums held in Chad, Kenya, and Uganda, the 2022 Youth Symposium Outcome Report was presented at the AU Heads of States Assembly. This led to the adoption of Assembly/AU/Dec.851(XXXVI), which calls for the continuation of the annual youth gathering and the training of youth leaders at the national level. The stakeholders of this initiative include members of the APRM national secretariat, national youth councils, leaders of political parties' youth wings, and civil society organisations.

Namibia joined the APRM in 2017 as its 37th member state and immediately volunteered to undertake a targeted review on youth unemployment. The Namibia Targeted Review was undertaken and peer-reviewed in 2009 and aimed at addressing the scourge of youth unemployment. Youth unemployment is a cross-cutting issue in Africa's governance and remains an urgent issue in nearly all the AU member states. Therefore, Namibia's initiative to open up its governance to APRM reviewers made the country the first APRM member state to undertake a review that focused on the youth. This is an important endeavour; it deserves recognition and can be replicated by other AU member states struggling with youth unemployment.

Youth Programme by RECs: Case Studies

Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA)

In 2019, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), one of the RECs, covering Eastern and Southern Africa, initiated a collaborative project with AGA, aimed at enhancing youth inclusion in Agenda 2063. This joint effort has already begun to yield positive results by boosting youth engagement in democratic processes and socio-economic development in Africa. One notable accomplishment of this project is the election of 11 young individuals who now constitute the COMESA Youth Advisory Panel (COMYAP). Their roles and responsibilities include,

among other things, offering advice to the COMESA Council of Ministers regarding youth governance, through the submission of bi-annual reports with recommendations.

The East Africa Community (EAC) launched its EAC Youth Ambassadors programme in 2012 to engage and empower youth to enhance their contribution to the EAC integration agenda. The EAC has focused on peer training and establishing EAC youth clubs in universities across the EAC. Other RECs have also established similar platforms for the youth to thrive. Through debates and public meetings, youth learning exchange programmes, and university debate programmes, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) has orchestrated initiatives aimed at enhancing the skills and knowledge of the youth in its member states. These programmes focus on areas such as peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and leadership development. Notably, in 2022 IGAD conducted a training programme specifically for the Council of the IGAD Youth Peace Forum, aiming to bolster its expertise in peacebuilding and conflict resolution.

Moreover, IGAD introduced the IGAD Youth Forum for Peace, serving as a dedicated platform for youth involvement in discussions concerning regional peace and security. This platform is firmly rooted in a shared vision for fostering peace and security within the region. Furthermore, IGAD actively participates in regional consultative forums dedicated to shaping youth policies. The goal is to ensure meaningful engagement and participation of all stakeholders in the region's youth policy development. For instance, in 2021, IGAD took part in a regional consultative forum focused on youth policy matters (IGAD 2022:2)

Nexus between Continental, Regional, and National Youth Policies

This section creates a linkage between the continental, regional, and national initiatives for empowering the youth, through the national youth councils (NYCs). In 1962, the Pan-African Youth Movement (PYM) was founded as a youth organisation comprising the youth wings of various liberation movements across the African continent. The PYM was established before

the formation of the OAU in May 1963 and is currently located in Rabat, Morocco. The creation of the PYM as the first continental youth organisation before the establishment of the OAU underscores the argument that young people have been actively and purposefully contributing to African affairs and development since time immemorial.

Amapunda (2018) explains that the PYM has changed its name to the Pan-African Youth Union (PYU) and underwent the relocation of its headquarters several times. The continental youth organisation has moved from Conakry, Guinea to Algiers, Algeria in 1967; to Khartoum, Sudan in 2008; and, most recently, to Rabat, Morocco in 2022. It is important to note that the PYU is the amalgamation of all national youth councils in Africa.

However, the AU has not made significant progress in institutionalising the PYU, resulting in several misalignments and gaps. Regrettably, in 2017, the AU distanced itself from the PYU. Organisations like the PYU and NYCs could be instrumental in advancing Agenda 2063 at the national level and utilising state resources for its implementation. The responsibility for promoting, implementing, and monitoring youth-related issues, as outlined in all AU development policies and programmes, including the targets for Aspiration 6, lies with youth structures such as the NYCs at the member state level.

In South Africa, the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) was established through the National Youth Development Agency Act of 2008 (South African Government 2023). It subsequently receives significant budgets to support youth development. In many African countries, youth structures possess substantial resources and capacity to reach young people in urban, suburban, and rural communities. Additionally, they maintain direct lines of communication with government structures, including the presidency. However, not enough has been done to leverage NYCs to play their rightful roles in educating young people about Agenda 2063, its vision, and how the youth can inclusively participate at the local and national levels to achieve the goals of the agenda. Young Africans often relate more to the global UN SDGs; thus, this highlights the need to bridge this gap.

To enhance youth inclusivity and bring young people closer to the AU, the AU must consider formalising the institutional status of the PYU. Structures such as the PYU ought to be professionalised, capacitated, depoliticised, and made fit for purpose to lead in advancing the interest of the youth. The AU could potentially work towards making the PYU a specialised agency of the AU, rightly positioning the youth-led organisation to play a more prominent role in supporting the implementation of Agenda 2063.

Conclusion

The chapter has engaged the place of the youth in continental initiatives within the 20-year lifespan of the AU. As highlighted in the chapter, the AU has established different platforms, instruments, and policies for the integration of the youth into governance, peace, and developmental programmes, including Agenda 2063. The first ten-year implementation phase of Agenda 2063 has concluded, and the AU is now gearing up to implement the next phase. This presents an opportunity for the AU to reconsider how the youth have been incorporated into the broader strategy for implementing Agenda 2063. It is also essential to assess the effectiveness of the African Youth Charter and determine whether certain areas require reviews and further intervention. These interventions should focus on priority areas such as the enhancement of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) colleges, sports development, the prevention of drug abuse, the promotion of mental health, and the 4th Industrial Revolution. These issues are integral to many AU policies and should be given more attention.

While recognising the significance of governance issues, which are often at the root of challenges faced by young people, there is a pressing need to expand economic-oriented policies and programmes at all levels. Initiatives like the implementation of AfCFTA, the development of an Africa commodity strategy, the African passport, the free movement of people, and the Pan-African e-Network – as well as cybersecurity measures, as contained in Agenda 2063 – should be championed by young

people who directly benefit from their implementations at the domestic level.

Youth inclusivity is not just an option, but a necessity in the implementation of Agenda 2063. The active participation and empowerment of young people are essential for the success of this ambitious agenda and the realisation of a prosperous, united, and sustainable African continent by 2063. Africa's so-called demographic dependence has already started showing signs of being a 'ticking time bomb' through young people's support for coups and unconstitutional changes of government in the Sahel region of Africa. Africa needs to inject vibrancy into its youthful population for effective and positive contribution to its development.

As the common phrase says, "an idle mind is the devil's workshop"; therefore, the AU needs to influence its member states to keep their youthful population actively involved in productive endeavours. Any contrary disposition of the political elites to this will be disastrous for Africa.

Recommendations for Inclusive Youth Contributions towards Agenda 2063

1. The AU, through its member states, can begin to involve the youth more in governance issues and create enabling environments for more meaningful and robust political participation. Africa's youth political participation has been relatively low compared to other regions of the world. The AU and its organs could therefore design mechanisms to enhance the engagement of the youth in the political processes of its member states and RECs through inclusive governance structures to foster a sense of ownership and responsibility. Scaling youth participation could result in the emergence of a new generation of leaders and youth population who are more attuned to responding to the needs and aspirations of the continent.
2. The AU can consider identifying areas for fostering accountability in youth leadership, particularly those in public administration. Dynamic youth leaders with strong

- Pan-African ideology can be identified and integrated into regional and national political institutions through structures such as the NYCs, the Office of the Youth Envoy, the PYU, and ambassadorial positions.
3. The AU can consider the reinforcement of Aspiration 6 in Agenda 2063 and its goals by consolidating a continental vision for leadership. This can be implemented through engagement with national schools of government, which will recognise potential leaders.
 4. The AU may promote frequent dialogue between the youth and institutions of governance (state and non-state), which will drive accountability and create trust between the youth, government officials, and other political representatives. Youth leaders on the African continent, especially those working with national governments, require capacity-building and more platforms to share experiences, benchmark, and peer-learn. Institutions such as the APRM can play a more dynamic role in providing spaces for young people to exchange ideas and share best practices.
 5. The AU youth programmes could focus on upscaling programmes and activities such as the promotion of TVET colleges for skills development, entrepreneurial education, and adoption of skills in line with the 4th Industrial Revolution. The AUDA NEPAD, AfCFTA secretariat, African Union Commission Department of Trade and Industry, and other relevant institutions will need to work closely with technology hubs and the private sector. In this way, youth unemployment will be curbed.
 6. While the focus has been on the AU, it is also important for member states to partner with the continental institution in enhancing the potential of the youth in the attainment of Aspiration 6 of Agenda 2063. Member states of the AU need to upscale their domestication and support for programmes by the AU. The '1 Million Next Level' initiative is a good opportunity to showcase this support.
 7. Continental and regional institutions should consider a turnaround strategy for boosting science, technology and innovation investments amongst the youth to harness the benefits of the digital and creative economy – an area in which

Africa has great potential. The AU could consider investing in a proactive research and development entity focused on African youth's comparative advantage in introducing emerging technology and innovation happening at the edge, such as synthetic biology, nano technology, blockchain, AI, quantum computing, nuclear fusion, genome editing and geo-engineering and 3D printing, amongst others.

8. The operationalisation of the AU youth fund is overdue and needs prioritisation as funding for youth programmes remains a bottleneck within the AU.
9. The AU should enhance skills development initiatives by expanding government and AU programmes to include opportunities for students to attend leading global universities, fostering a more comprehensive and globally competitive learning experience. African students should be provided with the opportunity to compete with the best of this world.
10. Africa's culture – especially the creative arts – is in high demand. South Africa's *amapiano* and Nigeria's afrobeats could be used to reach the youth and sensitise them to key messages. Influencers such as musicians and sports personalities could be solicited to influence young people to support the implementation of Agenda 2063 and its flagship projects.

References

- ADB. (2023). "Improve the Quality of Life for the People of Africa". Available at <https://www.afdb.org/en/the-high-5/improve-the-quality-of-life-for-the-people-of-africa>.
- Afrobarometer. (2022). "Round 9 Online Analysis of Youth Surveys". Available at <https://www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis/>.
- Amupanda, J.S. (2018). "The African Union (AU), the African Youth Commission (AYC) and the Pan-African Youth Union (PYU): Sabotaging or Bureaucratizing the Youth?"

- AU. (2006). "African Youth Charter". Available at https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/7789-treaty-0033_-_african_youth_charter_e.pdf.
- AU. (2015). "Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want". Available at https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/33126-doc-framework_document_book.pdf.
- AU. (2017). "Harnessing the Demographic Dividend Through Investments in Youth". *AUC Directorate of Information and Communication*. Available at <https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/32665-doc-au-echo-magazine-2017-23june17-1.pdf>.
- AU. (n.d.) "Our Aspirations for the Africa We Want". Available at <https://au.int/en/agenda2063/aspirations>.
- Gebremariam, E.B. (2017). "The Politics of youth employment and policy processes in Ethiopia". In Ayele, S., Khan, S. & Sumberg, J. (eds). *Africa's Youth employment Challenge: New Perspectives*, IDS Bulletin. pp. 33-50.
- Hart, R. (1992). *Children's Participation from Tokenism to Citizenship*. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre. As cited in the Government of Australia's "Better Together: A Practical Guide to Effective Engagement with Young People". Available at https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/childrens_participation.pdf.
- Honwana, A. & De Boeck, F. (2005). "Makers & Breakers: Children and Youth in Postcolonial Africa". In Abbink, J. & Van Kessel, I. (eds). *Vanguard or Vandals: Youth politics and conflict in Africa*. Brill.
- IGAD. (2022). "IGAD Builds Capacities of the Council of the IGAD Youth Peace Forum". Available at <https://igad.int/igad-builds-capacities-of-the-council-of-the-igad-youth-peace-forum/>.
- Mo Ibrahim Foundation. (2019). "Africa's Youth: Jobs or Migration? 2019 Ibrahim Forum Key Findings". Available at <https://mo.ibrahim.foundation/sites/default/files/2021-06/2019-en-key-findings.pdf>.
- Mo Ibrahim Foundation. (2019a). "Africa's First Challenge: The Youth Bulge Stuck in 'Waithood'". 10 July. Available at <https://mo.ibrahim.foundation/news/2019/africas-first-challenge-youth-bulge-stuck-waithood>.

- OAU. (1981). "African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights". African Union. Available at https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/36390-treaty-0011_-_african_charter_on_human_and_peoples_rights_e.pdf.
- Oliver, K.G., Collin, P., Burns, J. & Nicholas, J. (2006). "Building Resilience in Young People through meaningful Participation". *Australian e-Journal for the Advancement of Mental Health*, 5(1), 34-40.
- UNECA. (2017). "Africa's Youth and Prospects for Inclusive Development: Regional Situation Analysis Report". UNECA. Available at <https://repository.uneca.org/bitstream/handle/10855/24011/b11869318%20.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.
- UN-Habitat. (n.d.). "African Leaders seek to Transform Africa through Connecting with Youth". Available at <https://unhabitat.org/african-leaders-seek-to-transform-africa-through-connecting-with-youth>.