



AGA
African Governance Architecture

**2017 REGIONAL YOUTH CONSULTATIONS ON THE THEME OF THE YEAR: HARNESSING THE
DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND THROUGH INVESTMENTS IN YOUTH**

THEME:
***ENHANCING YOUNG PEOPLE'S MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION IN ELECTORAL PROCESSES IN
AFRICA***

CONCEPT NOTE

AUGUST – SEPTEMBER 2017

A. Contextual Background

The transformation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) to the African Union (AU) in 2002 ushered in a paradigm shift, particularly in the promotion of democratic principles and institutions, popular participation and good governance. This is in recognition of democratic developmental governance as a foundation for sustainable peace and pre-condition for inclusive and participative development. The paradigm shift infused new energy and impetus into efforts towards establishing the necessary conditions to facilitate the continent's ability to play its rightful role in the global socio-political and economic stage. As such, the AU adopted several methods of work and principles over the years, including transformation from a Union of Governments to that of the African people.

As a guide towards the consolidation of gains of decolonization and the renewed commitment to Africa's development, the AU Assembly of Heads of State, in 2013, adopted a Solemn Declaration. The Solemn Declaration called for the articulation of a continental development agenda towards the realisation of an integrated, people-centered and prosperous Africa at peace with itself¹. This proclamation significantly demonstrates the commitment of African leaders to anchor the development agenda on the dreams, aspirations, energies and capabilities of the African people. Thus, the AU adopted Agenda 2063 as its long-term development vision, with the goal of "an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena."

Agenda 2063 signals the commitment of African leaders to bequeath a united, democratically governed and peaceful continent to coming generations through a set of seven aspirations. Specifically, Aspiration 3 calls for *an Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law*, while Aspiration 6 of Agenda 2063 calls for *an Africa where development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and with well care for children*.

Youth are key stakeholders in the attainment of the goal and aspirations of Agenda 2063. This is premised on the youth bulge currently experienced on the continent, with over 60% of the population under 30 years², and the promise of a demographic dividend it holds if adequate investments are made in their social, economic and political agency.

Cognizant of the value young people bring to Africa's development and democratisation process, AU recognizes young people as partners, leaders, and beneficiaries in building a democratic culture on the continent.

The adoption of several normative frameworks has reinforced this recognition and further commit AU Member States to engage young people in all spheres of life meaningfully. These include the African

¹ African Union. (2013). 50th Anniversary Solemn Declaration <https://www.au.int/en/newsevents/29149/50th-anniversary-solemn-declaration>

² United Nations. (). Population 2030 Demographic challenges and opportunities for sustainable development planning <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/trends/Population2030.pdf>

Youth Charter (2006); the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG) (2007), the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (1981); the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990); and the Constitutive Act of the AU (2002). These frameworks spell out rights, freedoms, and duties that accrue to young people and provide guidance on how to effectively and meaningfully explore their potential at all levels. Specifically, these among other AU normative frameworks collectively call for young people's participation and meaningful engagement in decision-making at sub-national, national, regional and continental levels of governance.

Following these normative constructs, AU Member States have made significant strides towards enhancing young people's participation in decision-making processes and engagement in governance processes. Several AU Member States have adopted national youth policies and established national structures like national youth councils and ministries/agencies dedicated to youth issues. Also, several countries and political parties have established special youth quotas to deliberately guarantee youth participation in political processes for instance in Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda.

Despite these success stories, several critics of the youth participation discourse continue to note that these initiatives have not adequately deepened nor enhanced young people's participation in political and governance processes. For instance, young people are under-represented in formal public offices and political spaces, often leading to sidelining of their concerns and realities. Invariably, they are more involved in ad-hoc engagements or mobilisation, which are often the informal avenues for them to express their displeasure about politics and governance. These include through demonstrations and strikes, initiating or signing a petition, joining pressure groups, volunteering time and donating to a cause or charity, boycotting a product, spreading and voting in social media surveys, etc³.

As such, young people continue to be excluded or at best, remain on the margins of policy development, leaving many disenfranchised. In addition, young people are not adequately represented in political institutions, including parliaments, political parties as well as engagement in electoral processes. This situation limits the effective participation of young people; the notion that young men and women have an adequate and equal opportunity to express their preferences, place questions on the agenda, and articulate reasons for endorsing one outcome over another⁴. Of equal importance is the need to interrogate the challenge of youth mobilisation and organizing skills, which continue to impact the onboarding of a critical mass of young people into political and governance processes.

In an effort to cast the light on the needs of its rapidly growing young population and to devise means of harnessing the demographic dividend, AU Heads of State and Government at the January 2016 Assembly Summit devoted the year 2017 to "Harnessing the Demographic Dividend through Investments

³ European Union. (2015). Empowering young people for political participation in the democratic life in Europe - Draft discussion paper in preparation for the May Council policy debate <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7854-2015-INIT/en/pdf>

⁴ International IDEA. (2001). Democracy at the Local Level. International IDEA Handbook Participation, Representation, Conflicts Management and Governance – Page 147

in Youth.” In order to give effect to the AU Assembly Decision on the 2017 theme of the year, a Roadmap was developed and adopted by the AU Policy Organs. The Roadmap focuses on four main pillars: Employment and Entrepreneurship; Education and Skills Development; Health and Wellbeing; and Rights, Governance, and Youth Empowerment⁵. Particularly, Pillar 4 – Rights, Governance, and Youth Empowerment – speaks to investments in ensuring participatory, representative and inclusive political processes, as well as responsive states institutions. In addition, the Pillar calls for provisions of spaces for inter-generational mutual learning and collaboration with emerging leaders, as critical investments towards harnessing the demographic dividend on the continent.

Coincidentally, 2017 marks the 10th anniversary of the adoption of ACDEG, a year that has been dedicated to taking stock of Africa’s democratic trajectory over the past 10 years, and to discuss the challenges and opportunities through the ACDEG lens. As a result, this year’s Youth Consultations will combine both milestones and the theme will focus on *enhancing young people’s meaningful participation in electoral processes in Africa* as detailed hereinafter.

B. Rationale

Over the past three decades, Africa has witnessed a commendable shift in the process of leadership change, with coup-d’états replaced with competitive elections. The continent continues to witness an increase in regular, credible and transparent elections, which have become the embodiment of Africa’s democratisation progress. Nonetheless, electoral processes are however becoming intricate, with increasing attention paid to the ‘democratic’ nature of these elections.

A concern has been the inclusivity of the electoral process particularly as it affects young people. Except for few countries, the participation of youth has been limited to voting, which in itself is relatively low when compared with other demographic groups. For instance, despite young people’s demographic strength, Africa’s youth participation in political processes, including electoral processes, is still lower than that of their elders, particularly in terms of voting. According to a survey conducted by Afrobarometer in 36 African countries between 2014 and 2015, 66% of 18-to-35-year-old respondents’ old enough to vote in the elections voted, compared to 79% of citizens above the age of 35.

Yet, young people have tremendous roles to play in the entire electoral cycle, not only as voters but also as contestants, electoral administrators and in fulfilling their civic role of engaging governance processes. Unfortunately, this limited participation in the electoral process has contributed to the perception of youth as political troublemakers. In a recent report, it was argued that 60% of elections in Africa were said to have experienced some form of electoral violence between 1990-2015 with young people playing varying

⁵ African Union. (2017). Roadmap on Harnessing the Demographic Dividend through Investment in Youth <https://www.africa-youth.org/new-release-au-roadmap-2017-theme-year/>

roles⁶. Indeed, as a dominant demographic group, young people have on several occasions been instruments for electoral violence; either as instigators and/or perpetrators. This is symptomatic of a rapidly growing youth apathy, and disenfranchisement from the political process, reinforcing the stereotypes that young people are disinterested in political processes and as such branded as objects of social policy or troublemakers⁷.

In interrogating the barriers to meaningful participation of young people in electoral processes, it is important to highlight the many instances of structural and administrative challenges placed in the way of young people. Particularly, restrictive national laws and exclusionary policies of political parties, which often set discriminative age limits and prohibitive fees, make it difficult for young people to stand as candidates for elective positions.

Although participation is a fundamental human right, young people are often unfairly disqualified for lacking the requisite skills to engage or contribute in formal political and electoral processes meaningfully. Additionally, the heterogeneous nature of the youth demography calls for an adaptive and dynamic approach to enhancing youth participation in electoral processes. The disparity in terms of interest, access, and level of participation of rural and urban youth in an electoral process is an example of this. Furthermore, the specific needs of disabled youths also require an amenable approach to guarantee their participation in the electoral process. It is therefore important to evolve a participation agenda that recognizes youth diversity in terms of age, economic opportunity, location, access to new technologies, gender, religion, social status, cultural and political ideology, and education levels.

Equally important is the need to recognize and enhance youth agency for meaningful participation. Young people are often unfairly criticized for their inability to sufficiently leverage their numbers for increased participation in the political process. The disparity between vocal expressions by young people on social media and their actual participation on election days is often referenced in this instance. Thus, lending credence to a perception that young people lack organisation and mobilisation skills to meaningfully participate.

In defining an inclusive and credible electoral process leveraging youth agency, the African Union has established considerable norms to guide such process. Article 3 (7) of the ACDEG obliges State Parties to ensure effective participation of citizens in democratic and development processes and in the governance of public affairs. Article 17 of the ACDEG further commits State Parties to regularly hold free, fair and transparent elections in accordance with the Union's Declaration on the Principles Governing

⁶ Ojok, D. and Acol, T. (2017). Connecting the Dots: Youth Political Participation and Electoral Violence in Africa http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_21270-1442-2-30.pdf?161229095436

⁷ United Nations Development Programme. (2013). Enhancing Youth Political Participation throughout the Electoral Cycle: A Good Practice Guide http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Democratic%20Governance/Electoral%20Systems%20and%20Processes/ENG_UN-Youth_Guide-LR.pdf

Democratic Elections, which reaffirms every citizen's right to fully participate in the electoral processes of the country, including the right to vote or to be voted for, according to the laws of the country and as guaranteed by the Constitution, without any kind of discrimination.

There is, therefore, a need to provide a platform for engagement, interactions, and experience sharing amongst key stakeholders within the electoral process. This includes young people, political parties, electoral management bodies (EMBs), media, amongst others. Such a platform should provide a safe space for mutual learning to share comparable lessons and develop an agenda to enhance youth participation in the electoral process.

To further deepen the implementation of ACDEG and the need for meaningful youth participation in electoral processes, the African Governance Platform⁸ will convene regional and continental youth consultations under the theme "*Enhancing Young People's Meaningful Participation in Electoral Processes in Africa*". The consultations, which will be convened under the auspices of the African Governance Architecture (AGA) Youth Engagement Strategy⁹ (AGA-YES), will assess young people's participation in electoral processes in Africa. The aim is to curate youth perspectives on overcoming challenges of meaningful engagement in electoral processes. It will also provide a platform for capacity building for youth-oriented and -focused organisations/networks towards enhanced involvement of young people in electoral processes through responsive actions. The consultations would also unequivocally provide a space for young people to contribute to the discourse of building a culture of democracy and peace on the continent.

C. About the 2017 Regional Youth Consultations

To facilitate intra-regional exchanges and lessons learning, five (5) regional youth consultations will be convened for Central, East, North, West and Southern Africa. Each of the five regional consultations will focus on three broad areas, namely:

i. Assessment of Youth Participation Landscape in Africa:

Under this sub-theme, discussions will focus on youth participation in Africa with emphasis on trends, challenges and prospects for improving youth participation in electoral process. Specifically, discussions will focus on building broad-based collaborations and partnerships with EMBs and Political Parties towards removing barriers to youth participation in electoral process;

⁸ The African Governance Platform is the institutional mechanism for the African Governance Architecture, which was established as a platform for dialogue between the various stakeholders who are mandated to promote and strengthen democratic governance in Africa, in addition to translating the objectives of the legal and policy pronouncements in the AU Shared Values.

⁹ AGA Youth Engagement Strategy is a guiding framework for the African Governance Platform aimed at facilitating youth engagement in democratic governance processes in Africa.

ii. Responsible Civic Participation in Electoral Process in Africa:

This sub-theme will focus on leveraging Africa's youth bulge for responsible civic engagement in political and electoral processes. In this regard, discussions will focus on strengthening the capacity of youth organisations and networks to meaningfully engage the electoral cycle. In addition, issues such as responsible use of social media, youth responsive voter education, youth organising to engage elections stakeholders will be interrogated. Overall, emphasis will be on youth organising imperatives for ensuring inclusive electoral process; and,

iii. Enhancing Youth Participation through efficient electoral management processes:

This sub-theme will address the role of Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) as enablers for enhancing inclusive electoral processes. Emphasis will be on sharing comparable experiences on leveraging the youth bulge for improving management of elections as poll workers, voter education agents amongst other.

D. Goal and Objectives

i. Goal

The overall goal of the regional youth consultations is to provide a collaborative, open and inclusive space for young people to critically and objectively reflect on the progress made so far; challenges encountered; and prospects for enhancing meaningful youth participation in Africa's democratisation processes, particularly in its electoral processes.

ii. Objectives

Specifically, the regional youth consultations intend to:

- a. Provide a platform for thorough reflection on barriers and opportunities for meaningful youth participation in electoral processes at the individual, organizational and societal levels;
- b. Improve capacity of youth-led and focused organisations/networks towards enhanced youth organizing and participation in electoral processes at local and national levels with the aim of moving from tokenistic to impact-oriented approaches;
- c. Create functional linkages between national and regional networks as well as their initiatives aimed at empowering young people to meaningfully participate in political processes in general and electoral processes in particular;
- d. Provide a platform for intergenerational dialogue and cross-fertilization of lessons and experiences among electoral institutions and youth political structures, including national youth councils and youth wings/leagues as well as relevant networks towards positive collaboration at both lateral and vertical levels; and
- e. Identify concrete strategies and innovative initiatives at national, regional and continental levels for meaningful participation from young people in electoral processes aimed at building a culture of democracy and peace in Africa.

E. Expected Outcomes

From the discussions at regional consultations, the following outcomes are envisaged:

- i. Actionable recommendations grounded in a rights-based approach to youth political participation to improve:
 - a. individual programming of AU Organs, and Regional Economic Communities (RECs);
 - b. enhance efforts towards meaningful youth participation in political parties, government ministries, and agencies, including EMBs, media;
- ii. Enhanced capacity of youth-led or -focused organisations and networks to foster young people's participation in democratic elections and ensure accountability and transparency;
- iii. Country and regional specific challenges and experiences related to meaningful youth participation in electoral processes documented. This is to provide baseline information and also disseminated to facilitate sharing of best practices and lessons learned among the AU Member States;
- iv. Inauguration of "Youth Electoral Participation Programme" (YEPP) as a training programme under the Democracy Cluster of the African Governance Platform. The YEPP will focus on equipping youth networks and organisation with necessary skills and capacities to program and meaningfully engage electoral processes in AU Member States.
- v. Intergenerational policy dialogue on youth in electoral processes institutionalized as part of the Annual Forum for EMBs convened by the Department of Political Affairs, Democracy, and Electoral Assistance Unit in collaboration with Association of African Election Authorities.

F. Methodology and Timelines

The regional youth consultations will be undertaken using a mix of methodologies including plenary presentations, intergenerational panel discussions, capacity building and skills training amongst others. The consultations will be designed to empower individual participants to share their insights, reflect and engage in deliberations and constructively come up with ideas and strategies for enhancing youth participation in political processes. Specifically, the consultation will be structured as follows:

- i. Opening Speeches including Keynote Address on the theme with emphasis on regional dynamics;
- ii. Moderated Intergenerational Panel focusing on regional trends, challenges and prospects;
- iii. Capacity Development Sessions focusing on the following specific training areas:
 - a. Introducing/refreshing participants' understanding of continental and regional normative and policy frameworks on elections specifically ACDEG;
 - b. Basic understanding of electoral cycle and process with emphasis on highlighting opportunities for youth engagement across the entire cycle;
 - c. Strategic organising and communication skills to assist participants to engage with elections stakeholders towards credible and inclusive electoral processes;

- d. Experience sharing on youth engagement in electoral processes that work
- iv. Africa Talks DGTrends – An open platform for showcasing good practices and initiatives as well as knowledge sharing with regards to enhancing young people’s meaningful participation in electoral processes.

G. Policy Linkages

i. Annual Forum of the Association of African Electoral Authorities (AAEA)

To foster intergenerational policy dialogue on young people’s meaningful participation in electoral processes, a continental dialogue is planned on the margins of the Annual Forum of AAEA. Selected participants from the regional youth consultations and Heads of all EMBs on the continent will attend the dialogue. The policy dialogue will take the format of an inclusive and participatory interaction between young people and leaders of African EMBs towards building a wide continental agenda for improving youth participation in the electoral cycle. The dialogue intends to create a space for candid discussions on barriers to youth participation in electoral processes, as well as provide an opportunity for conversations about possible practical solutions and strategies to address these barriers. Presentations from the five regional youth consultations, coupled with moderated panel discussions, will frame the conversations at the dialogue. It is further envisaged that the dialogue will facilitate the development of a five-year roadmap to enhance young people’s participation in electoral processes, consisting of commitments by EMBs and other key actors towards this cause.

ii. Annual High-Level Dialogue on Democracy, Human Rights and Governance in Africa

To further facilitate the intergenerational policy dialogue within the context of the 10th anniversary of the adoption of ACDEG and the AU theme of the year, a special session at the 2017 *High Level Dialogue on Democracy, Human Rights and Governance: Trends, Challenges, and Prospects* will be dedicated to issues pertaining to young people’s meaningful participation in electoral processes. The session will take the shape of a moderated panel discussion, consisting of regional youth representatives, who will speak to the key outcomes of their respective youth regional consultations. It is anticipated that the High-Level Dialogue will adopt the five-year roadmap for enhancing young people’s participation in electoral processes towards building a culture of democracy and peace in Africa.

H. Dates and Venues

In line with the principle and spirit of the AGA Platform, the 2017 Regional Youth Consultations will be convened in close collaboration with RECs as members of the AGA Platform. In this vein, the consultations will be held as follows:

REGIONAL YOUTH CONSULTATIONS	TIMELINES	VENUE
East and Southern Africa	Arusha, Tanzania	28 – 30 August 2017
West and Central Africa	Abuja, Nigeria	12 -14 September 2017
North Africa	Tunis, Tunisia	27 – 29 September, 2017
2017 High-Level Dialogue on Democracy, Elections, and Governance	Windhoek-Namibia	October 2017

I. Documentation

The documentation for the youth regional consultations will be shared electronically, while more information and updates will be available on the African Union website www.au.int under the Department of Political Affairs portal and the AGA website www.aga-platform.org. Conversations can also be followed on Twitter @AU_DPA and through the #DGTrends.

A short video and/or picture campaign will be run to evoke ideas on how to enhance young people's meaningful participation in electoral processes. The contributions will be uploaded on AGA social media platforms in order to facilitate wider circulation as well as sharing of experiences and comparable lessons in this regard.

Participants

Participants for the regional youth consultations will be identified through an open call that will be administered through an online application system. This process will be complimented with a purposive selection of participants through the AGA Secretariat database and recommendations from key stakeholders, including Members of the African Governance Platform.

The consultations will target young people with track records of work and experience in the area of elections and political participation. The selection will specifically be based on the following criteria:

- i. Youth-led and oriented organisations implementing activities that are related to youth in electoral processes, programmes and activities in the Member States at all levels taking into consideration the diversity of young people;
- ii. Prominent youth-led and -focused organizations and networks that work on issues of democratic elections and young people's participation in electoral processes;
- iii. Youth representatives from political parties, EMBs or elections commissions, CSOs/NGOs/FBOs, government, MPs;
- iv. Selected think tanks and academic research institutions with experience in promoting youth participation in electoral processes;
- v. Selected media practitioners; and
- vi. Youth focal points for and representatives of the African Governance Platform Members.

J. Partnership and Management

The regional youth consultation is an initiative under the AGA Youth Engagement Strategy. As a result, the consultations will be convened by the AGA Secretariat based at the Department of Political Affairs of the African Union Commission in collaboration with the Democracy Cluster of the AGA Platform and the respective RECs (EAC, IGAD, COMESA, SADC, ECOWAS, ECCAS, CEN-SAD and UMA) among other Members of the African Governance Platform with support from Development Partners.

K. Working Languages

Meetings will be conducted in either English, Arabic, French or Portuguese, depending on location. Online and physical publications will be available in English and French.

L. Contact Details of the Coordinating Team

For further inquiries, please contact:

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