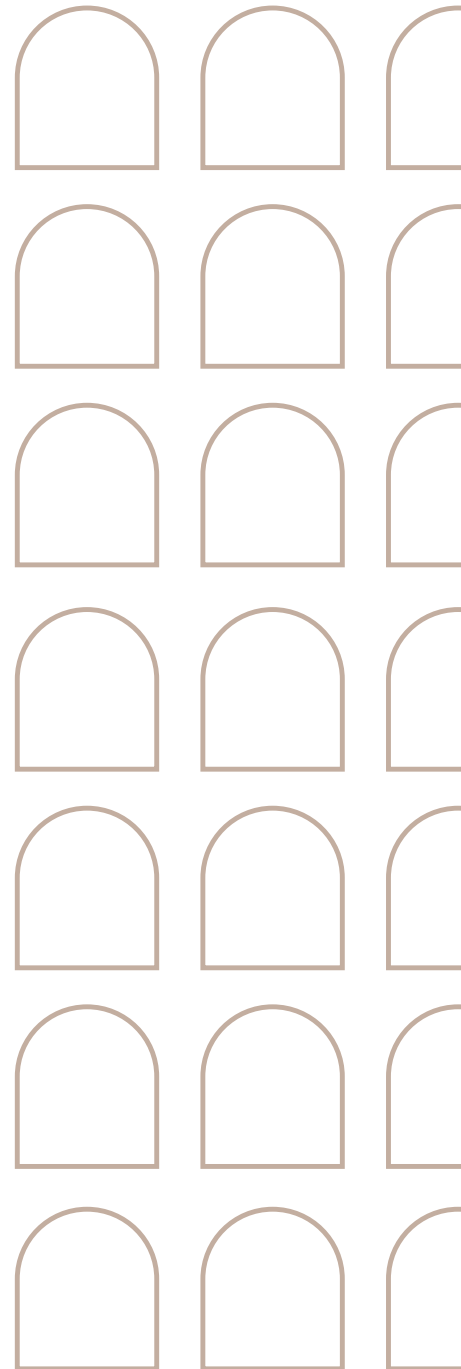EUI | SCHOOL OF
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POLICY BRIEF

# WALKING THE WALK, TALKING THE TALK WITH YOUTH, PEACE AND SECURITY IN AFRICA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Those under the age of 35 make up at least 65% of Africa's population, and they remain a largely untapped resource for peace and prosperity. Despite young people's rather gloomy state of exclusion, multilateral institutions like the United Nations (UN) and the African Union (AU) are instituting high-level advocacy campaigns for their increased inclusion and participation in peace processes. This policy brief explores how the global Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda can gain global momentum by taking a leaf from the approaches put forward by the erstwhile Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. Indeed, establishing a YPS agenda by the AU was a positive step toward sustaining peace on the continent. Nonetheless, just as with the WPS, the agenda needs to be domesticated and complemented by inclusive sub-regional regional and national legal frameworks for youth empowerment and emancipation. The brief also recommends that Africa champion this agenda for its youth population, despite its infancy stage.
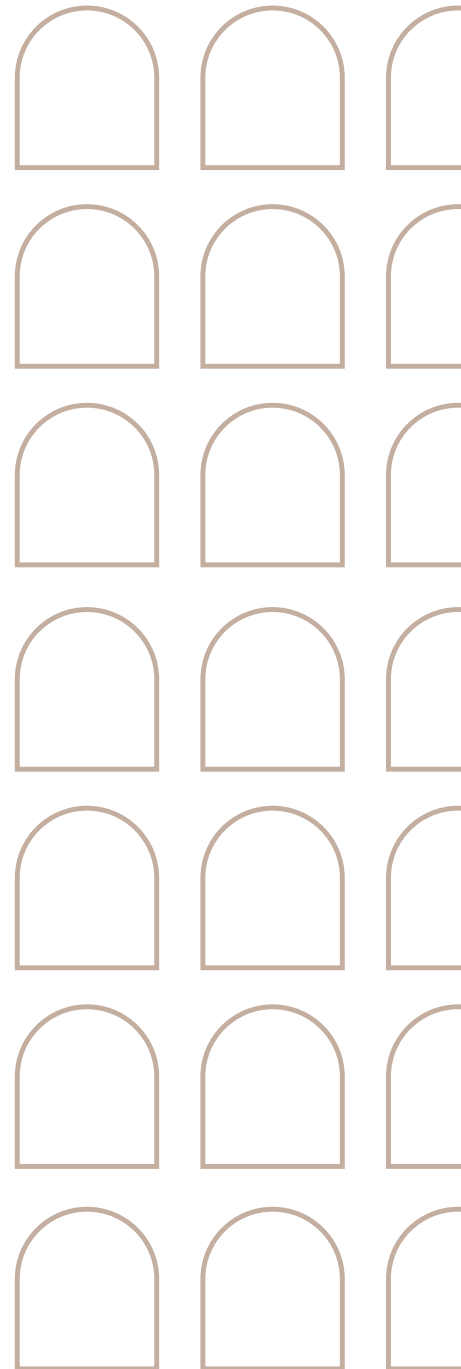
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1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has increasingly focused on inclusivity as a crucial vehicle for sustainable peace. For the youth demographic, this has mainly played out through the now 7-year-old Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda that recognises the positive role of young people in preventing and resolving conflict, countering violent extremism, and building peace.[1]

As the world attempts to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic, for Africa, the aim is to resume 'business as usual' for peace and development programming. For the continent, the pandemic slowed down the progress of the YPS agenda as outlined in the first 10-year Implementation Plan of the 2020 Continental Framework on Youth, Peace and Security. Nonetheless, it can still catch up if it can advocate for increased domestication and observe the challenges and opportunities surrounding the agenda for the Women, Peace and Security (WPS).

Despite the pandemic, the YPS agenda in Africa is still threatened by gerontocracy in its political spheres[2]. For example, with a median age of 18 years, Cameroonian citizens are ruled by an 89-year-old president, Paul Biya; in South Africa, and at a legislative level, the average age of national assembly members is 59. In essence, gerontocracy has created African governments led by personnel who cannot relate to the needs of their young populations. This feeds into a lack of political will to create room for youth leadership, even in initiatives geared at silencing the guns and inducing development.[3]

2. WHAT WAS PROMINENT BEFORE THE YOUTH, PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA?

The strengthening of the significance of the YPS agenda is partially due to the path set by the WPS agenda a little over 20 years ago via UNSCR 1325.[4] The latter was a trailblazer in ensuring that peace processes are more inclusive, acknowledging the broader participation of women with the hope of boosting effectiveness. The agenda has successfully coerced African governments to support women's empowerment in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. This has afforded women a seat at the decision/policy making table, thereby also improving their participation in political processes. Whilst gerontocracy predominantly has a male face; the WPS agenda continues to work towards making sure women are capacitated to co-lead.

Like the YPS agenda, that of WPS provides guiding principles toward strengthening the role of women before, during and after conflict. It has provided a global platform for debates and solutions for a lasting peace that further includes the voices of marginalised groups, including refugees and the disabled. Several African countries, such as South Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan and Nigeria, have gone a step further and introduced National Action Plans (NAPs). NAPs provide a roadmap on how states can govern, fund and monitor activities meant to boost the agenda. The potential of the agenda has gone further to include calls for equality in governance processes. In addition, countries such as Rwanda quote UNSCR 1325 when defending the need for gender-based quotas in parliament. Though the agenda has a long way to go, the progress recorded thus far is admirable for any population seeking equality and equity.

3. THE SHORTCOMINGS OF THE YPS AGENDA

Despite the wins amassed by the WPS agenda, the YPS agenda can learn from its shortcomings. At least two are relevant to this policy brief. Firstly, though with plenty of champions amongst civil society organisations (CSOs), the WPS agenda is discussed chiefly at a nation-

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1 UNSC Resolution 2250 (2015) identifies five key pillars for action: participation, protection, prevention, partnerships and disengagement and reintegration. This landmark resolution urges the UN Member States to give youth a greater voice in decision-making at the local, national, regional, and international levels and consider setting up mechanisms to enable young people to participate meaningfully in peace processes.
2 Gerontocracy generally refers to a society riled by those who are more than double the age of those they rule i.e., a rule by old people.
3 The African Union's Silencing the Guns aspiration is based on its member states' determination to achieve the goal of a conflict-free Africa, to make peace a reality for all our people and to rid the continent of wars, civil conflicts, human rights violations, humanitarian disasters and violent conflicts, and to prevent genocide.
4 The WPS agenda rests on four pillars: prevention, participation, protection and relief and recovery. In that regard, UNSC Resolution 1325 of October 2000 affirmed the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building initiatives.

al level by government-related stakeholders. The agenda gained relevance when it reached the hallways of inter-governmental policy organisations and national government ministries. The efforts and potential of non-state actors was not adequately acknowledged. CSOs remain vital in ensuring widespread engagement with the agenda for ordinary citizens. If a partnership with them is enhanced, then domestication of the WPS agenda would increase significantly. Secondly, at its onset, the WPS agenda was perceived as an initiative to be championed only by women from all walks of life. However, this was not the case. Men were later recognised as co-champions with the rise of the *He for She* movement. In that regard, the YPS agenda needs to recognise that people of all age groups should be allowed to advocate and champion its own growth. It boosts the agenda's relevance for communities around the continent.

4. MAKING THE AGENDA WORK FOR AFRICA

In Africa, the YPS agenda matters and is key in identifying effective and sustainable responses to violent hostilities. Most often, the African states affected by warfare have large youth populations. Young people are not only among the perpetrators but also direct victims of armed conflict. Every estimate of direct conflict deaths suggests that more than 90% of all casualties occur among young adult males.

The role of young people concerning peace and security is complex and often poorly understood. The YPS agenda in the last seven years has intended to overcome this lack of understanding by increasing its focus on strengthening the positive role of youth in peace and security. UNSC Resolution 2250 is the first international policy framework recognising young people's positive role in peace and security matters. The resolution was followed by the two other resolutions by the UN and ground-breaking deliberations and a pioneering policy framework by the African Union (AU). These resolutions are meant to guide a large youth population disillusioned by under/unemployment and poverty in Africa.

5. HOW CAN THE YPS LEARN FROM THE WPS AGENDA?

The WPS agenda started as part of the feminist movement and is, to a more considerable extent, now tabled and embedded in the politics of peace and security worldwide. The potency of the WPS agenda is deeply rooted in its use of NAPs across the world. Such plans can increase inclusivity, foster implementation and increase awareness of the agenda's goals. On the continent, the NAPs for the WPS agenda were accompanied by a tool to report and monitor progress: the AU's WPS Continental Results Framework. This framework recognises that while several commitments towards the WPS Agenda have been adopted at the continental, regional and national levels in Africa, the continent has not established measures to ensure practical assessment of and reporting on the delivery of those commitments. Therefore, to ensure practical implementation and policy direction, the YPS agenda needs to realise and prioritise NAPs as a critical component towards achieving its goals at AU member state levels.

NAPs for YPS remain urgent to shift policy from paper to action. However, they do feature in the early stages of the AU's Ten-Year Implementation Plan (2020-2029) for the aforementioned Continental framework on Youth, Peace and Security. The plan by the AU to establish NAPs for YPS in member states is highly dependent on a sustainable partnership between the AU, its Regional Economic Communities (RECs), Civil Society, and youth groups/networks.

6. INCREASING YOUTH PARTICIPATION

There is an urgent need to reinforce existing structures and introduce new ones for youth participation in peace and governance processes. No one knows the YPS terrain better than the youth themselves. At a continental level, the appointment of a Youth Envoy within the AU and Youth Ambassadors for Peace has been a crucial stepping stone towards including civilian youth. On a regional level, RECs like the East African Community have had youth programmes with rotational Youth Ambassa-

dors for almost a decade. This follows the pattern set by the WPS agenda to give influential women a seat at the table. Africa's WPS agenda has a WPS envoy in office at the AU Commission. The need and impact of envoys and ambassadors for agendas such as WPS and YPS are underrated. They have the potential to ensure that the plight of their communities does not become redundant. They carry forth historical and contemporary messages meant to advocate for urgent action.

Additionally, most AU member states have National Youth Councils working alongside youth ministries/departments within the mandate of existing National Youth Policies. These structures must embed the YPS agenda into their mandates and promote it. They need to task themselves with building the capacity to speed up the implementation of the agenda and monitor progress for future evaluation and refinement.

Policy and decision-makers and even young YPS agenda advocates on the continent need to ensure that critical issues are added regularly. This is where youth ambassadors and envoys exhibit their skills and relevance to the continent. They are meant to use the resources at their disposal to engage the AU and UN on behalf of the continent's youth and advocate for much-needed reform. A top-down and bottom-up approach needs to be used simultaneously to ensure that new issues are addressed. Youth need to input just as much as those in influential policy spaces at the grassroots level. They also need to be the face of the agenda, especially at a national level. This increases local ownership of the process and would cement the notion of inclusivity in the peace and security discourse. Achieving such an approach's vision depends on the decentralisation of efforts to infuse YPS into local systems. Youth and various other stakeholders such as civil society in the local towns, cities and provinces need to be conversant with the current discourse of YPS before deliberations and decisions are made in the capital.

A critical consequence of the absence of the above has been youth-led uprisings in the last 5 years that turned violent in the face of marginalisation and grave human rights abuses. Two contemporary examples are Nigeria's #EndSARs movement and the Bobi Wine-led campaign ahead of Uganda's 2021 elections. These two exhibit the disconnect between policy/decision-makers and the youth who live with the often-harsh reality of their decisions.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Intergenerational co-leadership:** Moreover, policymakers need to flip the narrative and promote intergenerational co-leadership. This is necessary to enhance the success and sustainability of the agenda. This idea could be boosted by mentoring programmes by mid-level governance practitioners such as mayors, town/city officials and provincial leaders. There could be a scenario where the aforementioned mentor young men and women in preparation for their careers in governance. This, in turn, could open up the spaces for young people to engage in politics and prepare for their roles in conflict prevention and mitigation. Here, the WPS and YPS agenda can further exhibit complementarity by having young African women mentored in existing structures such as gender ministries or departments and even within the Office of the Envoy on WPS sitting in Addis Ababa.

2. **Involvement of young women:** Young women remain a vulnerable community with a vulnerable community. Hence, as both agendas continue to fight against stereotypes and marginalisation, the challenge of gerontocracy should be a priority that they can both hope to tackle. The WPS agenda needs to advocate for the empowerment of young women in peace processes. This is a bold step in avoiding gerontocracy within the agenda itself. So far, the agenda pushes for the visibility of women with experience in the field without lifting those yet to establish a voice and a wealth of experience in the field. Thus far, the agenda is lacking in that regard, and this is a void that the YPS agenda should look forward to filling.

3. **Increase funding:** More than enough re-

search reports alleging that funding is critical for a global agenda to exist. When rolling out an agenda, the first impulse is for analysts to announce the challenge of funding new initiatives. What is needed is to collect more evidence and initiate discussions on prioritising YPS from within the AU's envisioned Peace Fund to member states' national budgets. National Youth Councils and Ministries should also plan to allocate finances to YPS-related activities. Once that is done, YPS and its need for sustainable funding become embedded into any nation's mainstream politics. An alternative solution for member states is to engage the private sector to fund YPS-related projects. This will close a financial gap that is slowing down the implementation of the agenda. Private sector targets for funding could include multinational companies and local businesses keen to engage in social entrepreneurial activities.

8. CONCLUSION

As the YPS agenda transcends its teething phase, it could transform youth inclusion in peace processes in less time than the WPS agenda. Among others, what is needed is to ensure that implementable structures are in place with strict accountability and sound mentoring and evaluation mechanisms. The agenda needs to leave the hallways of elite policy institutions and start working on the ground for the vulnerable majority of young people worldwide.

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The School offers Executive Training Seminars for experienced professionals and a Policy Leaders Fellowship for early- and mid-career innovators. The School also hosts expert Policy Dialogues and distinguished lectures from transnational leaders (to include the STG's Leaders Beyond the State series which recorded the experiences of former European Institution presidents, and the Giorgio La Pira Lecture series which focuses on building bridges between Africa and Europe). In September 2020, the School launched its Master-of-Arts in Transnational Governance (MTnG), which will educate and train a new breed of policy leader able to navigate the unprecedented issues our world will face during the next decade and beyond.

The STG Policy Papers Collection aims to further the EUI School of Transnational Governance's goal in creating a bridge between academia and policy and provide actionable knowledge for policy-making. The collection includes Policy Points (providing information at-a-glance), Policy Briefs (concise summaries of issues and recommended policy options), and Policy Analyses (in-depth analysis of particular issues). The contributions provide topical and policy-oriented perspectives on a diverse range of issues relevant to transnational governance. They are authored by STG staff and guest authors invited 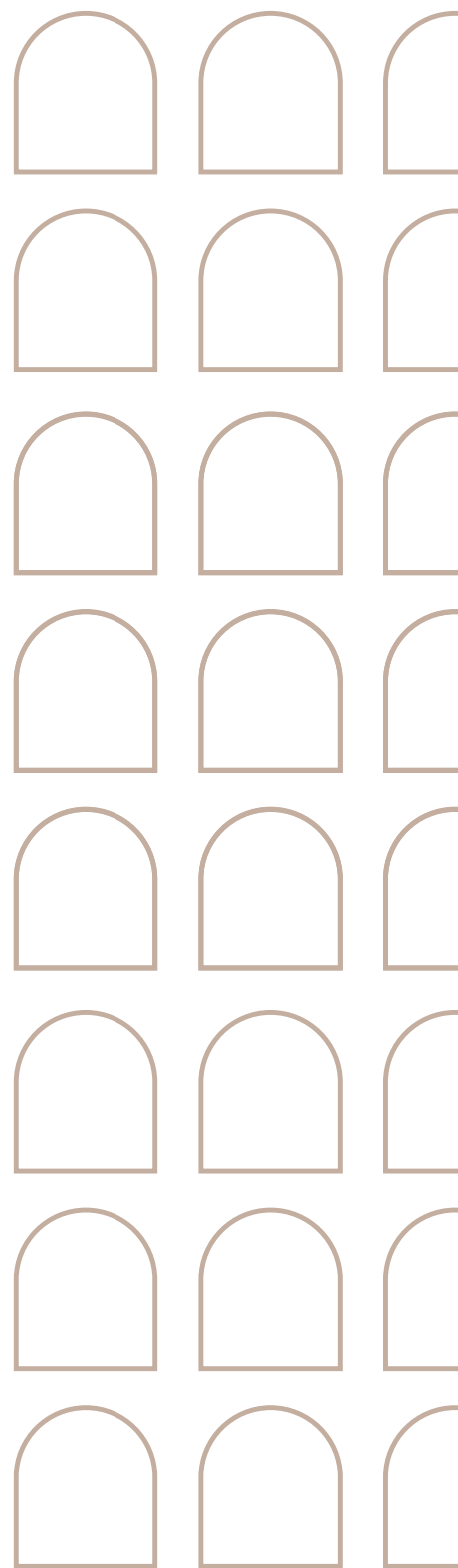to contribute on particular topics.