African Union

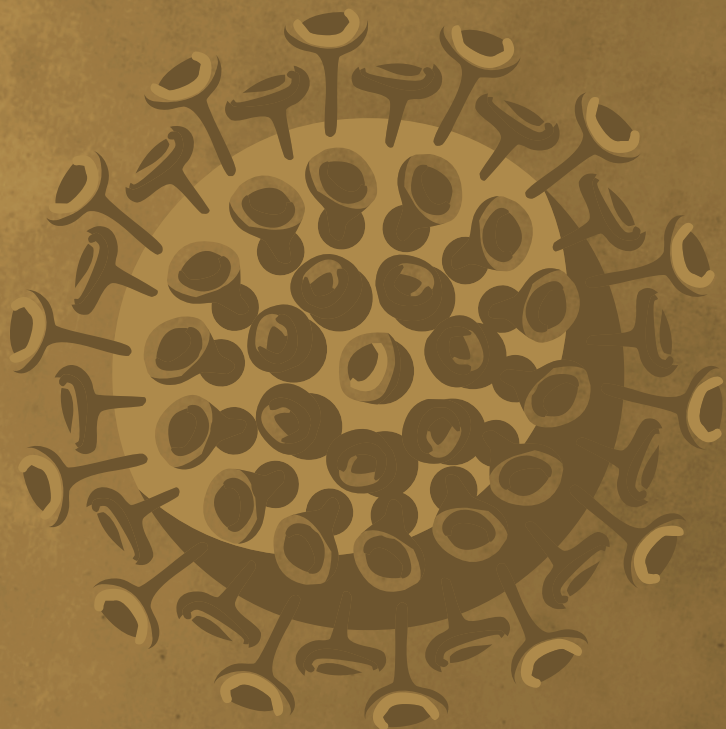AFRICA CDC
Centres for Disease Control and Prevention
Safeguarding Africa's Health

AFRICA YOUTH LEAD

POLICY PAPER

FACTS & FIGURES OF AFRICA YOUTH AGENCY, CHALLENGES AND RECOVERY ROADMAP ON COVID-19

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CONTENTS

ACRONYMS
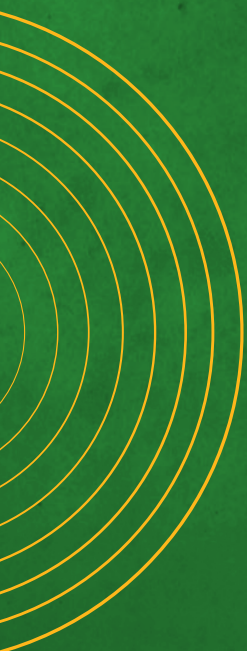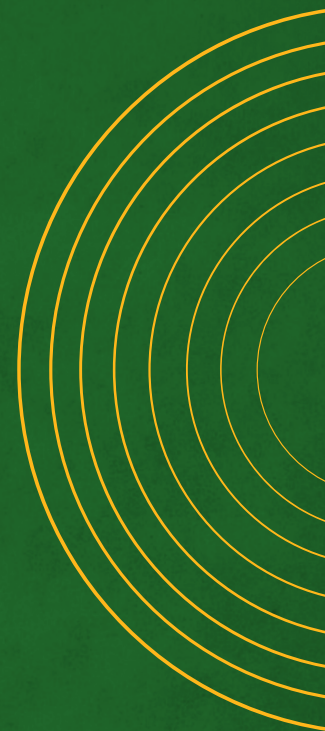
Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention	Africa CDC
African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes	ACCORD
African Peer Review Mechanism	APRM
Africa Taskforce for Novel Coronavirus	AFTCOR
African Union	AU
African Union Development Agency- New Partnership for Africa's Development	AUDA-NEPAD
African Union Office of the Youth Envoy	AU- OYE
Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa	COMESA
East African Community	EAC
Economic Commission for Africa	ECA
Forum for African Women Educationalists	FAWE
Gender Based Violence	GBV
Gross Domestic Product	GDP
Internally Displaced Persons	IDPs
International Labour Organization	ILO
International Organization for Migration	IOM
United Nations	UN
Universal Healthcare Coverage	UHC
World Health Organization	WHO

Africa is home to 16% of the world's population and 24% of the world's disease burden but accounts for just 1% of global health spending. Yet Africa's progress in improving health outcomes has been remarkable - life expectancy has increased from 50.9 to 61.2 years, or by 20% between 2000–2016.

Young people are the backbone of our continent. They make up the largest proportion demographically and have been revealed to be invaluable partners and stakeholders in the journey to Agenda 2063 of the Africa that we want. This fact calls for a paradigm shift towards the recognition and support of the youth to harness their potential by building capacity for quality education and skills improvement, health and well-being, good governance, human rights and accountability, employment opportunities, leadership skills, empowerment and entrepreneurship.

The African Union is committed to working towards a COVID-19 free Africa and continuing its economic, humanitarian and health response to the pandemic. This public health emergency has highlighted the continued solidarity and commitment needed towards the realization of Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want; and the central role that youth play in the realization of this future.

Domestic financing is critical to achieving and sustaining our efforts to achieve Africa's health and economic security, and the youth are central to this goal. A practical example is the achievements that Africa CDC has made, in partnership with young people through the establishment of the Africa Youth Front on Coronavirus.

In February 2020, the AU Policy Organs adopted the Social Agenda 2063 (EX.CL./Dec1074 (XXXVI) with its nine (9) social policy pillars, i.e. family policy, gender equality, access to social protection, universal access to societal services, quality and inclusive education, good health and wellness, sufficient and nutritious food, access to formal markets and entrepreneurship and access to the informal and rural economies. Leaders of the African continent built upon the need for social solidarity, equity of choice, and freedom from discrimination and poverty.

Among other existing instruments in the social development domain that will be facilitated by the implementation of Social Agenda 2063, will be the Continental Policy Framework on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights. It is noted that the calls foraction of the young people in this policy paper are all in line with the vision of the African Union Commission in creating a more sustainable and prosperous Africa, and in terms of age and chronology, the realization of this vision will rest upon the shoulders of today's youth and their children.

This policy paper is therefore a pivotal guide to future collaborations with young people towards building back better Africa. It seeks collaboration, cooperation and co-investment in the governmental and private sectors. I congratulate the African Union Special Envoy on Youth Envoy on the hosting of youth consultations and the work done by the African Youth Front on Coronavirus who continuously engaged with youth constituencies to collect information, advise and make recommendations on the work being done by the Africa CDC. These efforts have demonstrated that through harnessing the creativity and innovation of young Africans the dream of the Africa We Want described in Agenda 2063 will fast become a reality.

I celebrate African youth, both those residing on the continent and those in the diaspora for their resilience and tenacity to imagine and work towards a better future for all.

This year has presented the continent with an unprecedented global health emergency that has led to the awareness that now more than ever, there is a pressing need for better collaboration, cooperation and coordination across the nations, across sectors, across communities and across generations. The leadership on the continent has made commendable effort through their coordinated response to the pandemic.

Since its inception in January 2017, Africa CDC has remained committed to create partnerships across sectors to strengthen the continent's disease response strategies and capabilities. Disease outbreaks on the continent, such as the west Africa Ebola crisis and the current COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrated that diseases are a security, economic, and health threat to Africa. To overcome these threats, it is imperative that the sheer will and innovation of our young population on the continent are engaged in response to any crises at all levels.

Through the development of the Africa Joint Continental Strategy for COVID-19 Outbreak, Africa CDC has been leading the pandemic response. It is collaborating with several key stakeholders, including young African leaders, to ensure the response is effective and impactful including. The aim of the strategy is to ensure that best practices are shared and there is no duplication in partners efforts to minimize the spread of the virus. In line with this, and also noting the urgent need to include all sectors of society on the table, the African Youth Front on Coronavirus was launched.

The African Youth Front on Coronavirus is the continental youth space to advise on high level policy making in relation to the pandemic. These young people have played a pivotal role in providing context specific information for Africa CDC on specific socioeconomic thematic areas as observed and reported by young people as well as facilitated dissemination of accurate information on the COVID-19 virus. This engagement had significant impact especially in the areas of effective messaging and communication, as well as combating fake news.

Africa CDC would like to congratulate the African Union Office of the Youth Envoy and the African Youth Front on Coronavirus for their work to unite and strengthen youth voices and participation. This policy paper is a demonstration of the great work on the continent if only we continue to collaborate, cooperate and jointly coordinate activities and initiatives.

PREFACE - MS. AYA CHEBBI
African Union Special Envoy on Youth

We began this year with a renewed dedication to ensuring that all the Guns in Africa will be silenced. During my office's engagement around "Silencing the Guns" theme of the year, young people overwhelmingly expressed the diverse challenges that they are facing on a day to day basis. These challenges are not only a threat to their lives, but are also a barrier to their active involvement in building the Africa We Want. The engagement of young people is one that this continent can not go without.

2020 has proved to be a trying year for the world and especially Africa and African Youth. The current global pandemic which has been described as a generational pandemic has led to losses but also innovation and collaboration. For young people, it has exacerbated the challenges that they regularly face and emboldened their demand for better engagement in all levels of decision making and governance. The three months of intensive consultations hosted by my office, demonstrate the African Union's commitment to the active meaningful inclusion of youth at all levels of decision making.

The African Union Commission answered the call by young people to be heard and engaged them with the establishment of the African Youth Front on Coronavirus. The Youth Front has provided a meaningful space for grassroots youth engagement in decision-making at the continental level. As a multi-stakeholder youth advocacy group, it has supported the implementation of the African Continental Strategy for COVID-19 Pandemic. Through this initiative, African youth have played a pivotal role in the response efforts to the virus on the continent. Its success further demonstrates the need to replicate such intergenerational structures at the regional and national levels.

The recommendations in this policy paper are an expression of youth demands on the areas of job security, food security, gender justice, digital transformation, restructuring education systems, silencing the guns, healthcare reform and youth in public service. For these recommendations to be made possible it is imperative that they are addressed

through an intergenerational, feminist and multi-sectoral process. A process where both young and senior members of our society as well as the public, private and civil society work in collaboration to co-create policies and solutions of the Africa We Want.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper draws on several months of national, regional and continental youth consultations hosted by the African Union Office of the Youth Envoy (OYE) in collaboration with Africa CDC. These include the virtual youth consultations held from 23rd March 2020 to 11 June 2020; as well as focus group consultations carried out by member networks of the African Youth Front. The aim of these consultations were to collect opinions and recommendations from youth leaders, with a view to inform policy briefs that were shared with Africa CDC. The consultations collected original data from online discussions with participants using Zoom and Facebook Live, as well as polls and surveys.

13
Online Consultations

400+
Youth leaders from 42 countries

13 online consultations in the form of focus group discussions with over 400 youth leaders from 42 countries. This averages to 25 participants per consultation.

9
Self-organized consultations

211+
Participants

9 self-organized consultations by young people with over 211 participants

24
Consultations

887
Participants combined from 33 countries

24 consultations by the African Youth Front on Coronavirus between May and October with a total of 887 participants combined from 33 countries

8
Public Intergenerational Dialogues

3,724
Participants on Zoom

23,000+
Viewers on Facebook Live

83,000+
Reached with information

8 Public Intergenerational Dialogues with 3,724 participants on Zoom, over 23,000+ viewers on Facebook Live as well as over 83,000 reached with timely information

949
Participated on Zoom

3,849+
Reached on Facebook Live

Africa Youth Policy Consultation convened by the African Union Commission, the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), and Generation Unlimited and chaired by the AU Youth Envoy, 949 participated on Zoom from 13 countries and reached over 3849 on Facebook Live

3
A total of 3 surveys

24
A total of 24 Polls

1,130
Respondents from 50 countries
Survey on Risk Communication of 1130 respondents from 50 countries

1,190
Respondents from 81 countries
Survey on the Effect of COVID-19 on the lives of young people. This survey was done in collaboration with ECA with 1190 respondents from 81 countries

● Survey on what a post COVID-19 recovery plan should entail. Survey was conducted in 4 languages- English, Swahili, French, and Arabic and was supplemented by focus group discussions

24hrs
Over 24 hours of consultations

6,000
Participants combined on Zoom

25,500+
joined Facebook Lives

Total participants combined is about 6000 on Zoom and 25,500+ joined Facebook Lives

7,000+ tweets
#AfricaYouthLead hashtag

6,000+ retweets
#AfricaYouthLead hashtag

9 million+
People reached

48 million+
Impressions

#AfricaYouthLead hashtag generating over 7,000 tweets and 6,000 retweets with a reach of over 9 million+ people. The hashtag has also generated over 48 million+ impressions.

The data highlights the vulnerability of young people on the continent as it pertains to the lack of access to healthcare; unemployment; lack of access to education; digital divide and gender inequality among others. Young people are calling for better emergency response mechanisms especially for young women, refugee youth, disabled youth and youth in informal settlements. They additionally call for stronger commitment to end Gender Based Violence (GBV) and to put in place support structures for young women. They also call for the closure of the digital divide, increase of national budget to education that would ensure access to educational facilities, resources and materials in both urban and rural areas. They emphasize better engagement of the African Union at the grassroots through the continued use of online platforms, more engagement with rural, migrant, refugee and disabled youth in policy spaces as well as the adoption and implementation of policies that enable youth in establishing and sustaining businesses.

PART 1

AGENCY AND CHALLENGES OF AFRICAN YOUTH DURING COVID-19

There are many scholars and policy analysts that have asserted that; 'COVID-19 is the great equalizer'; but is this the reality for African Youth? It was this question that led the African Union Office of the Youth Envoy (OYE) to embark on a three-month long consultative process with young people across the African continent to ensure a bottom up approach to data collection and presented recommendations.

The African Youth Charter defines youth or young people as "every person between the ages of 15 and 35 years"[1]. Around 60% of Africa's population was under the age of 25 in 2019[2] which means that it is estimated that in 2020 out of the total population of Africa which is 1.340 billion, 254 million are between the ages of 15-24 years.[3]

The identity of this group is complex, although it is common to associate them as young people in school or higher education. It includes people that are in formal education, informal education, unemployed, employed in formal labour, employed in informal labour, vulnerable people, parents, caregivers and the list goes on. Therefore, data on the lived experiences of young people is additionally complex as it is dependent on the context in which they are in.

Agenda 2063 'The Africa We Want', is the continent's roadmap for 50 years with seven Aspirations. It prioritizes 20 goals for Africa's development which range from peace

gender equality, environmental sustainability, health, high standard of living and quality of life, education to sustainable and inclusive economies.[4] Under Aspiration 6 it acknowledges that in order to fulfil these goals, the potential offered by youth and women is central. Yet, despite the opportunity this large and complex demographic group provides for the continent, young people are bound by a shared reality of uncertainty for their future. Despite the uncertainty they experience, they are proactively engaging in grassroot mobilization and initiatives to stop the spread of the virus as well as efforts to alleviate the impact that the virus has had on local communities.[5]

Africa CDC states that, the coronavirus disease 2019, commonly known as COVID-19 "is a communicable respiratory disease". The first case in Africa was recorded in Egypt on 14th February 2020. Since then 52 countries in Africa have reported cases. As of 3rd November 2020, the total number of cases reached 1,803,464 with 43,389 related deaths.[6] As a result, member states have implemented measures such as the closure of borders, schools and gatherings as well as the imposition of curfews and the mandatory wearing of masks in public spaces.

On 22 February 2020, the African Union Ministers of Health and Heads of Delegation gathered in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, for an emergency meeting on the ongoing outbreak of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19). The African Continental Strategic Plan for COVID-19 PANDEMIC[7] was adopted with the establishment of the Africa Taskforce for Novel Coronavirus (AFTCOR), which is a continental platform to better coordinate the efforts across Africa in mitigating the pandemic. AFTCOR additionally promotes evidence-based public health practices. AFCOR is divided into Working Groups that regularly report to the Steering Committee chaired by the Director of the Africa Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC).

Due to the outbreak of COVID-19 in Africa, the OYE adapted the AU Youth Envoy 2019-2020 Action Plan[8] in order to contribute to the continental efforts to end the pandemic. The OYE therefore launched the 'African Union Office of the Youth Envoy COVID-19 Response Strategy' which focuses activities around convening spaces for young people to engage in the pandemic response efforts. These spaces additionally provide a route to advocate for the implementation of progressive and impactful policies and amplify the efforts led by young people around the continent to stop the spread of the virus.[9]

As part of the African Union's (AU) commitment to greater intergenerational inclusivity, on Wednesday 06 May 2020, in Addis Ababa, the African Union Office of the Youth Envoy (OYE) with the support of Africa Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) and the Department of Social Affairs launched the African Youth Front on Coronavirus. This new body is an African Union framework aimed at giving youth a seat at the decision-making table and an opportunity to co-lead Africa's response to the pandemic. The Youth front is tasked with supporting the implementation of the The African Continental Strategic Plan for COVID-19 PANDEMIC.

This initiative aligns with the African Union Commission's (AUC) 1 Million by 2021 Initiative, which seeks to provide opportunities for African youth in the areas of employment, education, entrepreneurship and engagement (4Es). Under the engagement pillar, the initiative seeks to create meaningful platforms for youth to contribute to the response to the pandemic and provides an opportunity for youth-led advocacy.

It is vital that young people co-lead and help drive agendas and policies that concern them, particularly in relation to a post COVID-19 recovery. The strategic approach to

1 "African Youth Charter" (African Union, 2006), https://au.int/en/treaties/african-youth-charter.

2 "Agenda 2063 & 2030: Is Africa On Track?," African Governance Report (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2019), 39, https://mo.ibrahim.foundation/sites/default/files/2019-10/African_Governance_Report_2019.pdf.

3 Bakary Dosso, "Impact of COVID19 on African Youth: An Overview" (Virtual Africa Youth Policy Consultation. Building Back Better with Young Africans, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, June 9, 2020).

4 "Goals & Priority Areas of Agenda 2063," African Union, accessed July 6, 2020, https://au.int/agenda2063/goals

5 "COVID-19 and Youth," The Youth Cafe, April 15, 2020, https://www.theyouthcafe.com/updates/covid-19-and-youth-the-youth-cafe.

6 ''Outbreak Brief 42: COVID-19 Pandemic – 3 November 2020" (Africa CDC), accessed November 6, 2020, https://africacdc.org/download/outbreak-brief-42-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-pandemic/

7 "Africa Joint Continental Strategy for COVID-19 Outbreak" (African Union, Africa CDC, March 5, 2020), https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/38264-doc-africa_joint_continental_strategy_for_covid-19_outbreak.pdf.

8 African Union Youth Envoy, "2019/2020 Action Plan For The Office of the Youth Envoy (OYE)," 2020, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1H1K7TCwzWy-P-CyaqjOTsP1ZYelOgw2U/view?usp=drive_open&usp=embed_facebook.

9 "The African Union Office of the Youth Envoy COVID-19 Response Strategy", African Union Youth Envoy, accessed June 22, 2020, https://auyouthenvoy.org/covid19rs/.

these challenges goes beyond access and requires that we examine the leadership structures, ideologies, values, traditional biases and norms as well as cultural shifts needed to ensure that Africa's post COVID-19 recovery is both equitable and fair.

Over the course of 6 months the Africa Youth Group on Coronavirus (AYFC), composed of representatives from youth networks, civil society organizations, social entrepreneurs, student unions, national youth councils and AU Youth boards have canvassed the views of African youth on a range of COVID-19 related issues. These engagements form the basis of the COVID-19 Recovery Roadmap which highlights the key policy and structural barriers that must be addressed in order to ensure that life post COVID-19 does not return to "business as usual" but rather that a new normal is established. One characterised by equitable justice for all, inclusive thriving economies, the protection of vulnerable communities and inter-generational co-leadership.

THE VIRTUAL AU YOUTH CONSULTATIONS SERIES ON COVID-19 (VAUYCS)

The consultations were guided by a humanistic perspective which viewed young people as active participants in their societies and experts in their experiences. The VAUYCS therefore adopted a bottom-up approach for the dialogues and data collection. They involved:

1. Pre-consultations mapping of youth led-initiatives;

2. Pre-consultations forums interviewing of youth

3. Pre and post consultations surveys for further analysis on particular aspects of the discussed themes;

4. Collection of questions and expectations;

5. Active participation of youth during the consultations including the public webinars to act as a platform for discussion, exchange and information sharing;

6. Conducting polls throughout to gather further input on the theme of the consultation.

The VAUYCS started with 13 focus group discussions convened between 23 March and 3rd April 2020. These initial consultations reached over 400 youth leaders from 42 countries, with an average of 25 participants per consultation. The OYE additionally called for young people and youth networks to organize consultations within their communities. There were a total of 11 self-organized consultations which were conducted in English, French and Portuguese. These consultations had a total of 211 participants from Africa. Additionally, 12 consultations were organized by members of the African Youth Front on Coronavirus with 668 participants participating.

The aim of these consultations was to;[10]

INFORM

through Africa CDC briefings to raise awareness and accelerate prevention measures

MOBILIZE

youth through youth-led conversations and youth-led actions through sharing experiences and best practices among African countries

UNITE

African Youth Collective Response to the pandemic

INNOVATE

through digital engagement mechanisms bringing African Youth closer to the African Union

The youth consultations were created through a call for young people and youth networks to sign up to take part in an OYE hosted consultation or self-organize a consultation

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10'Virtual AU Youth Consultation Series on African Youth Collective Response to COVID-19," African Union Youth Envoy, accessed June 22, 2020, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1BnUcoo37DHcJxU0dVe4zHdSoah5LM12l/view

9 SELF-ORGANIZED CONSULTATIONS

● Organizer (name)   ● Language used

20th April 2020
● Antonio Braga Fazenda
● Portuguese

click link

25th April 2020
● Alexis Amachree
● Portuguese

click link

25th April 2020
● Collins Nnabugwu
● English

click link

27th April 2020
● Damilare Oyedele
● English

click link

28th April 2020
● Chevlin Ramsamy
● English

click link

30th April 2020
● Irabor M. Imoisili
● English

click link

3rd May 2020
● Maimouna Yade
● French

click link

4th May 2020
● Dosso Mouhamadou
● English

click link

4th May 2020
● Lynnet Nerima
● English

click link

BOTH THE OYE HOSTED CONSULTATIONS AND THE SELF-ORGANIZED CONSULTATIONS WERE GUIDED BY THREE QUESTIONS:

? How can we strengthen innovative communication tools between institutions and the local community both online and offline?

? How can we mobilize and organize the youth and the non-governmental actors to play a key role in prevention, response and transformation of the crisis?

? What are the best practices and learnings we can share from countries and other viruses (Ebola, HIV etc.)?

During OYE hosted consultations, Africa CDC presented continental briefings on COVID-19 followed by a discussion on challenges and best practices and agreed on actions.

13 OYE HOSTED CONSULTATIONS

● **Organization**   ● **Number of participants**

23 March 2020
● National Youth Council of Cameroon & Namibia
● 2

click link to report

23 March 2020
● Pan-African Youth Taskforce
● 19

click link to report

26 March 2020
● African Youth Advisory Board for Disaster Risk Reduction
● 12

click link to report

26 March 2020
● Gender Is My Agenda (GIMAC) Young Women Network
● 37

click link to report

26 March 2020
● East African Community Youth Ambassadors
● 38

click link to report

31 March 2020
● MILEAD Fellows
● 28

click link to report

31 March 2020
● African Youth Ambassadors for Peace
● 11

click link to report

2nd April 2020
● Afrika Youth Movement
● 27

click link to report

1st April 2020
● AWLN Young Women Leaders Caucus
● 29

click link to report

3rd April 2020
● One Young World Ambassadors
● 39

click link to report

17th April 2020
● African Young Women
● 34

click link to report

23rd April 2020
● Federation of African Medical Students' Association
● 20

click link to report

13th May 2020
● National Youth Councils (South Africa, Egypt, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Refugee-Led Network)
● 5

click link to report

Based on the outcomes of the focus group consultations, youth expressed the need for the creation of youth policy spaces and a framework within the African Union to co-lead the response to the pandemic. In response to this demand, the African Union launched the African Youth Front on Coronavirus with 18 member networks, as an African Union framework to engage youth in decision-making and contribute youth-led solutions in support of the implementation of the African Continental Strategic Plan for COVID-19 Pandemic.

Youth additionally called for direct engagement, communication and dialogue with decision-makers. Therefore, the OYE organized a series of 8 Intergenerational Webinars with African leaders under different themes.

Adoption of a youth policy contribution framework	Co-design models of Action including Advocacy model	8 Intergenerational dialogues
Raise awareness AU departments →	Technical consultation →	Intergenerational dialogues
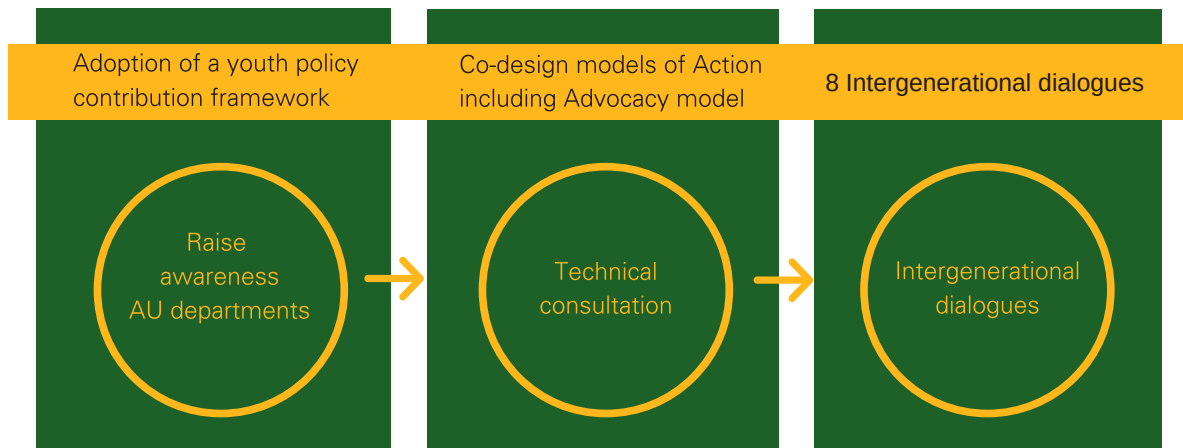
These webinars were co-designed with young people on the continent through a bottom-up approach. Each week the registration link on Zoom was published and promoted among youth on the different OYE platforms revealing the guest and the theme to be discussed. Through the registration, the OYE collected questions and expectations regarding the theme from youth through the comments section on the social media platforms. The registration additionally allowed for a mapping of youth-led initiatives on the continent. From the registration and social media 3 to 8 contributions from young people were invited to a "Pre-webinar forum" to frame the conversation with the African leader (Guest) as well as showcase their work relevant to each theme. Further, among those who participated in the Pre-Webinar Forum, one youth representative was invited to provide a live intervention and engage with the African leader (Guest).

Open Weekly Thematic Forum

● Publish and promote the registretion link on zoom among young on the weekly theme

● Collection of youth questions and expectations concerning the theme of the week via emails and social media

● Mapping of the youth-led initatves

CO-Design Content

● Comilation of the questions & expectations received

● Cluster the youth questions persub-themes

● Record with 3 to 5 relevant youth contributions in covid-19 response

● Shape the consultation informed the by the forum

Host Webinar

● The Guests (AU decision makers) Present their official covid-19 action plan

● Presentation of youth expectation + Q&A

● Run polls to identify trends

● Intervention from youth running the relevant initiatives identified

● Call to Action for young people

● Commitment from the guest on how they can support concretely youth covid-19 Response

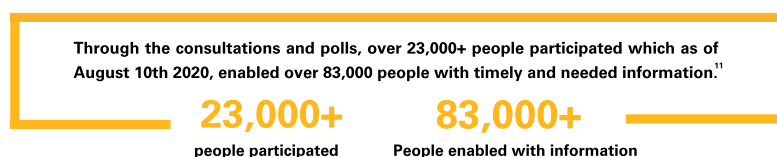The objective of these 8 webinar series was to create the opportunity for African youth to participate in the decision making process by establishing a model of dialogue and space for exchange and co-creation between youth and decision-makers as well as secure commitment from the leaders in favor of the youth agenda.

The The format of these dialogues was designed for the African Union Youth Envoy to host a guest speaker who is a decision maker and African leader with live interventions from African youth, short interventions from global leaders and partners as well as Q&A from the participants and use of polls to highlight trends.

Through the consultations and polls, over 23,000+ people participated which as of August 10th 2020, enabled over 83,000 people with timely and needed information.[11]

23,000+
people participated

83,000+
People enabled with information

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[11] "Statement of the AU Chairperson's Special Envoy on Youth, Ms. Aya Chebbi to African Youth Ministers," African Union, June 17, 2020, https://au.int/en/speeches/20200617/statement-au-chairpersons-special-envoy-youth-ms-aya-chebbi-african-youth?fbclid=IwAR1ybps7HNq30P-QHibiXBrSPpbRwftixyTrTnwTWi127kGWssVG01HIukU.

8 INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUES

● Theme ● Guest ● Youth interventions (names and countries)
● Number of participants

● **COMMUNITY & YOUTH ENGAGEMENT**

● Dr. John Nkengasong, Director of Africa CDC

● 1,947 +

[click link]

● **ROLE OF WOMEN & YOUTH CIVIL SOCIETY**

● HE Mme Bineta Diop, the African Union special envoy on Women, Peace and Security.

● Riya William Yuyada - South Sudan

● 2,377 +

[click link]

● **YOUTH IN AREAS AND OFFLINE ENGAGEMENT**

● Her Excellency Amira Al-Fadel, Commissioner of Social Affairs, the African Union

● Fatima AlSalami - Chad

● 2,886 +

[click link]

● **DIGITAL DIVIDE & TRANSFORMATION**

● HE Dr Abou Zeid, Commissioner for Infrastructure and Energy

● Kevin njoroge - Kenya

● 1,819 +

[click link]

● **YOUTH & HUMAN RIGHTS**

● Dr. Solomon Ayele Dersso, Chairperson of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights

● Okelo Sejo - South Sudan

● 3,571 +

[click link]

● **EDUCATION & E-LEARNING**

● Prof Sarah Anyang Agbor, Commissioner for Human Resources Science and Technology at the African Union

● Helder Eduardo - Cameroon

● 3,472 +

[click link]

● **YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT & ECONOMIC RECOVERY**

● Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, AU Special Envoys to mobilise international support for the fight against COVID-19

● 2,418+

[click link]

● **AFRICAN & GLOBAL SOLIDARITY**

● H.E Joyce Banda, Former President of Malawi;

H.E Graca Machel, Founder of the Graca Machel Trust;

H.E Chileshe M. Kapwepwe, Secretary General COMESA;

Prof. Eddy Maloka, African Peer Review Mechanism;

H.E George Papandreou, Former Prime Minister of Greece;

H.E Mary Robinson, Former President of Ireland

● Jacob Eyeru - Uganda

Baganda Ba Zagabe Crispin- Democratic Republic of Congo ,DRC.

Rekgotsofetse Chikane- South Africa

● 3,560+

[click link]

On 9 June 2020, the African Union Commission, the UN Economic Commission for Africa and Generation Unlimited co-organized a Virtual Africa Youth Policy Consultation in response to COVID-19 under the theme: "Building Back Better with Young Africans". This consultation focused on developing recommendations for the AU Specialized Technical Committee of Ministers of Youth, Culture and Sport. It was designed taking into consideration all the questions and feedback from the 13 Virtual Youth Consultations and the 8 Intergenerational Webinars.

A survey was also run and questions were collected from participants. The consultation used breakout groups where youth led discussions under different thematic areas such as health, education, and entrepreneurship in order to share regional examples.

The consultation had **3849** participants; with **949** participants on Zoom out of **1731** registered and **2.900** participants on Facebook Live with more than **80%** of participants under the age of **35** years old. **69** questions were received at the webinar and the survey attracted over **1500** respondents.[12]

[12] Ibid.

METHODOLOGY OF THE DATA ANALYSIS

This paper was co-designed and guided by the youth networks that participated in the consultations, aiming to be a process that was safe, inclusive, participatory and collaborative. The data analysis process adopted an intersectional lens, recognizing power imbalances and marginalized youth.

This paper is a compilation of these findings and aims to;

1 Analyze the impact of COVID-19 on youth in Africa

2 Access pathways for youth agency

The data analysis process relied upon a sequence of research questions: what is the reality of young people's lived experiences on the continent? What are the similarities and differences between young people across the continent? How do we make sense of the multiple stories and identities that young people hold during the pandemic? How can organizations and governments better work with young people?

The data analysis involved the transcription of the zoom calls to get a sense of the whole context and flow. Units of significance were identified and values assigned to the units. Themes were then identified to tie together the units into a layered meaning[13] which was

The data was analyzed through a series of sense-making exercises guided by three questions:

? What challenges have young people in Africa faced during the pandemic

? How did young people in Africa manifest agency during the pandemic?

? What policy recommendations have young people concluded for turning this challenge into an opportunity for transformation?

analyzed in relation to published reports from institutes such as the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD), International Labour Organization (ILO), Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and others.

There were ample limitations to this work: the consultations were only able to engage youth that have access to internet and only a fraction of the diversity of youth movements and feminist leadership across the continent. The consultations were limited in size. The ideas in this paper additionally only capture the perspectives of progressive youth activists who are a subset of the population.

CHALLENGES: WE ARE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER BUT EXPERIENCE IT DIFFERENTLY

● ECONOMIC CRISIS

Aspiration 1 of Agenda 2063 calls for the eradication of poverty in order to "build shared prosperity through social and economic transformation of the continent". This transformation includes improving the standard of living and quality of life, educating citizens, transforming African economies, as well as transforming African agriculture "to enable the continent to feed itself"[14]

> Economic empowerment is of central concern for young people on the continent. In a poll on 29th April 2020, the OYE asked youth what has increased their vulnerability during COVID-19 crisis. Out of a total of **236** respondents **58%** stated it was unemployment. When asked what kind of violence they are facing **56%** stated they face socio-economic violence.

Further, on 13th May 2020, the OYE held a VAUYCS webinar under the theme 'Youth Unemployment and Economic recovery' with Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, (AU Special Envoys to mobilize international support for the fight against COVID-19); webinar in the series with an engagement reaching 8,100+ people and 718 participated on the Zoom .

During the consultations unemployment, hunger, the informal sector vulnerability and education disruption due to the lack of access to the internet, emerged as the top challenges for youth in relation to economic empowerment.

13 Anol Bhattacherjee, "Social Science Research: Principles, Methods, and Practices," Textbooks Collection 3 (2012): 103–10, https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1002&context=oa_textbooks.

14 "Our Aspirations for the Africa We Want," African Union, accessed July 13, 2020, https://au.int/agenda2063/aspirations.

UNEMPLOYMENT AND HUNGER

Unemployment is regarded as the overall concern for youth as well as the ability of the job to provide a living wage. Factors that influence employment are financial crises that lead to businesses downsizing, the lack of experience, training and education, technological changes, as well as racism and gender discrimination.

According to AUDA-NEPAD; one in five people living in Africa are hungry which includes "undernourishment, and the inability to acquire enough food to satisfy dietary energy requirements".[15]

Youth expressed the following in relation to unemployment:

1 Limited government support and cooperation for innovation and entrepreneurship

2 Reduced financial resources for young entrepreneurs which has resulted in many small businesses closing down

3 Lack of government stimulus packages inclusive of refugee youth, youth in rural areas, living with disability and HIV/AIDS

4 Expensive internet bundles which makes it difficult for young people to remain employed due to 'work at home' policies

5 Underpaid youth in the agricultural and informal sectors with no access to social security including health insurance

A poll run by the OYE on 5th May 2020 showed that unemployment was the top challenge youth are facing as a result of the virus. In this regard, they cited that their job security has been affected by a fall in salaries; lost jobs and the lack of opportunities due to movement restrictions and other COVID-19 related policies.

"Young people are saying they would rather die from huger than die from Corona".
Consultation with the Pan-African Youth Taskforce

RISK IN THE INFORMAL SECTOR

The Informal sector has greatly been affected by COVID-19. The global narrative on COVID-19 as it pertains to the economy, recognizes the trend for those in the informal economy to have lost jobs and be the most at risk to the virus. With 55% of the urban population of Africa living in informal settlements,[16] the International Labour Organization (ILO) has estimated that informal workers in Africa and Latin America will have an 81% reduction in their income.[17] "In Africa, informal employment is the highest form of employment. ILO estimates from the total number of women that are in employment, 89.7% are in informal employment. Similarly, 82.7% of men in employment are in informal employment.[18] From these percentages, youth are the highest in the informal sector. That is, youth between the ages of 15-24 years make up a total of 94.9% of the informal sector with West Africa being the highest at 97.9%.[19]

Youth expressed the following in relation to the informal sector:

1 Lack of access of workers in the informal economy to basic protections in the form of social protection covers with limited to no access to healthcare services and no form of income replacement

2 Loss of jobs due to lockdown measures such as 'stay at home' policies with inability to afford access to basic amenities such as food and water

3 Rising inequality and struggle of youth in the informal sector to gain access and affordability to healthcare, testing, and preventative measures such as sanitizers and water.

4 Limited access to clean water, and social distancing is not possible due to crowding in these areas such as informal settlements where the majority of the youth in the informal economy reside

5 Increased burden on young women to find work in the marketplace to sell goods

"Women are struggling in marketplaces to put food on the table as businesses are closed"
Riya William Yuyada - South Sudan

15 "Ending Hunger in Africa: The Elimination of Hunger and Food Insecurity on the African by 2025: Conditions for Success | AUDA-NEPAD," AUDA-NEPAD, accessed August 4, 2020, https://www.nepad.org/caadp/publication/ending-hunger-africa-elimination-of-hunger-and-food-insecurity-african-2025.

16 Nina Wilen, "The Political and Socio-Economic Consequences of COVID-19," COVID-19 In-Depth Analysis, accessed June 26, 2020, https://www.accord.org.za/analysis/political-socio-economic-consequences-covid-19/.

17 "COVID-19 and the World of Work. Third Edition. Updated Estimates and Analysis," ILO Monitor (International Labour Organization), 1–2, accessed June 23, 2020, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/—dgreports/—dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_743146.pdf.

18 "Women and Men in the Informal Economy: A Statistical Picture. Third Edition" (Geneva: International Labour Organization, 2018), 20–21, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/—dgreports/—dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_626831.pdf.

19 Ibid., 30

EDUCATION DISRUPTION

Education on the continent has been affected by the virus. Policies on the restriction of movement and concerns about the spread of the virus have led to a disruption in education systems across Africa. Education underpinned by Science, Technology and Innovation is a key priority area of Agenda 2063 under Aspiration 1. The First Ten Year Implementation Plan [20] of Agenda 2063 includes the creation of an African Virtual and E-University as a flagship program for Agenda 2063. The Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016-2025 [21] further recognizes the importance for education for young people. The strategy covers education from early childhood education, higher education and life-long learning

As part of the webinar on Education and E-learning, Commissioner for Human Resource Science and Technology, Professor Sarah Anyang Agbor, asserted the centrality of education for the progress of young people but also the continent. She further challenged young people to find innovative ways to overcome some of the barriers to education, amongst which include access to the internet.

The Human Development Index on the continent, which includes welfare, education and health has in recent years reported a slowing improvement on the continent.[22] This, according to the African Governance Report 2019 is due to a downwards pattern in education since 2014. There has been increasing deterioration in efforts by governments in creating accessible programs for youth in education, housing and employment; with only 11 countries on the continent showing an improvement in these areas between 2014 and 2017.[23] Further, it is estimated that 14-32.8% of youth across the regions are unemployed and not in training or education.[24]

In a poll conducted on 27th May 2020, out of a total of **196** respondents **70.4%** of respondents indicated that COVID-19 has disrupted their studies. It further indicated that the top challenges to education in Africa are, no access to technology, expensive mobile data and the lack of infrastructure at schools.

Youth expressed the following in relation to education:

1 Dependency on access to available and affordable internet during 'Stay at home' policies that are only applicable to youth in private education or those who live in urban areas

2 Reliance on internet cafes for youth in low income areas who do not have their own computers and therefore do not have access to technology and cannot attend online classes

3 Limited infrastructure and training for teachers to conduct online learning in schools and universities

4 Marginalized youth with disabilities in e-learning spaces as there is limited capacity for sign language, braille etc.

"I believe the problem is not youth unemployment but our education system which is more of knowledge based than development of skills."
Ivy from East Africa

DIGITAL DIVIDE

Internet penetration rate on the continent is still low with Africa at 39.3%. In this respect the country with the highest internet penetration is Mauritius at 56.5%.[25] This means that even at the highest, half of the population still has no access to the internet. H.E. Dr Amani Abou-Zeid, African Union Commissioner for Infrastructure and Energy in the webinar on Digital Divide and Transformation noted that the digital divide in Africa goes beyond coverage and includes usage and related skills, geographical location such as rural or urban, generational divide and gender divide as well as affordability, reliability and speed. She further asserted that in moving towards closing the digital divide, policymakers need to be mindful of data protection and privacy which would make already vulnerable populations such as poor, marginalized women and girls, migrants, refugees and stateless people are at higher risk

20 "Agenda 2063. The Africa We Want. First Ten Year Implementation Plan" (African Union Commission, 2015), https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/33126-doc-11_an_overview_of_agenda.pdf.

21 "Continental Education Strategy For Africa 2016-2025" (African Union, 2016), https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/29958-doc-cesa_-_english-v9.pdf.

22 ""Agenda 2063 & 2030: Is Africa On Track?," 25.

23 Ibid., 39

24 Dosso, "Impact of COVID19 on African Youth: An Overview."

25 "Agenda 2063. The Africa We Want. First Ten Year Implementation Plan" (African Union Commission, 2015), https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/33126-doc-11_an_overview_of_agenda.pdf.

Youth expressed the following in relation to the internet:

1 High cost of internet bundles, unaffordable for young people

2 Limited accessibility to technology by the cost of devices

3 Concentrated penetration of technology in urban areas while youth in rural and refugee camps are marginalized

4 Expensive technology for youth with disabilities

5 Lack of data protection and privacy

In a poll conducted on 27th May 2020 by the OYE, out of a total of **196** respondents **61.2%** of youth stated that no access to technology and expensive mobile data is a challenge for youth. Additionally, in a poll on 3rd June 2020, out of **129** respondents **48.85%** stated that employment, business or the economy was the top sector to be affected by the digital divide followed by **37.2%** which stated it was education.

"As an engineer, I believe now more than ever that technology has a big role to play in the sustainable growth of Africa"
Baganda Ba Zagabe Crispin- Democratic Republic of Congo , DRC

"40% of us youth have access to digital inclusion but my concern is about the quality of internet connectivity, affordability and knowledgeability about digital inclusion." **Michael from West Africa.**

"How do we use E-Learning approaches considering that very few of us in Africa have access to the internet?"
Helder Eduardo-   Angola

⬤ HEALTH CRISIS

Dr. John Nkengasong, Director of Africa CDC in the webinar on Community & Youth Engagement noted that the health systems on the continent are weak with few doctors and nurses. He further noted that the current pandemic is a generational health crisis that requires an Africa-led response with the active role of youth in community-based responses.

"Only 10 African countries provide free and universal healthcare to their citizens, while healthcare in 22 countries is neither free nor universal."[26] According to WHO, Universal health coverage means,

"all people and communities can use the promotive, preventive, curative, rehabilitative and palliative health services they need, of sufficient quality to be effective, while also ensuring that the use of these services does not expose the user to financial hardship."[27]

It embodies three objectives:

1 "Equity in access to health services - everyone who needs services should get them, not only those who can pay for them;

2 The quality of health services should be good enough to improve the health of those receiving services; and

3 People should be protected against financial-risk, ensuring that the cost of using services does not put people at risk of financial harm."[28]

According to the African Governance Report 2019, the overall health score for the continent is seeing slow improvement. Despite the improvements such as Public Health Campaigns, Maternal Mortality and Absence of Communicable Disease; there is a marked increase in dissatisfaction amongst citizens with the healthcare systems in their countries. Access to sanitation has additionally shown a slow improvement and the situation of undernourishment is showing warning signs. Further, on the continent there is an average of only 17 skilled health workers per 10,000 people. [29]

[26] "COVID-19 in Africa: A Call for Coordinated Governance, Improved Health Structures and Better Data" (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, March 2020), 13, https://mo.ibrahim.foundation/sites/default/files/2020-04/2020-COVID-19-in-Africa.pdf.

[27] "What Is Universal Coverage?," World Health Organization (World Health Organization), accessed June 23, 2020, http://www.who.int/health_financing/universal_coverage_definition/en/.

In light of these challenges, the continent remains committed to improving access to healthcare. Under the African Health Strategy 2016-2030, member states of the African Union acknowledged that health is a human right and therefore healthcare systems need to be equitable, accountable, gender equal, cost effective and involve regional cooperation. In line with this strategy, and ahead of the 32nd Summit of the African Union in 2019; African Heads of State and Government, Ministers of Health and Finance, business leaders and global partners, launched an initiative to increase country commitments for health. This included improving spending on healthcare to ensure the achievement of universal health coverage in all African countries. There has been a trend for low spending on healthcare with only 3 AU member states dedicating 5% of their GDP to health, a requirement under the Abuja Declaration. Further between 2016-2019 only 30 countries increased their investment while 21 decreased their investment.[30]

H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat, AU Commission Chair particularly drew attention to the necessity of governments to substantially "increases in domestic investment". He further noted the link between health and human development, stating that; "Member States and Africa's partners must reorient health spending and health systems to target the diseases across the life cycle that have the greatest measurable impact on mortality and human capital development."[31]

During the VAUYCS, lack of equipment, mental health support and inequality in pandemic policies emerged as the top challenges that African youth are facing in relation to health

"Using our past with Ebola experience we used the emergency response unit, we went to the rural areas through radio stations to tell people about COVID-19"
Mohamed from West Africa

In a poll conducted on 5th May 2020 by the OYE, out of a total of **205** respondents health infrastructure emerged as the third top challenge facing African youth on the continent at **18.39%.**

FRAGILE INFRASTRUCTURE

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the healthcare system on the continent has been strained. According to the Partnership for Global Health 40% of medical equipment on the continent is out of service with 80% of medical equipment being donated by foreign sources.[32] Further, in consultation with youth during the webinar on "Youth in Rural Areas and Offline Engagement"; Her Excellency Amira Al-Fadel, Commissioner of Social Affairs noted that health infrastructure differs from rural to urban areas where remote health services are not adequately equipped nor technologically advanced compared to those in urban areas. This creates an inequality between the access to health care for those in rural areas versus urban areas.

Young medical professionals and medical students have expressed the following in relation to fragile infrastructure:

1. Lack of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for health workers and volunteers on the frontline particularly felt in government hospitals and clinics in rural areas

2. Lack of basic amenities in communities such as limited to no access to clean water and sanitizers leading to the rise of infected cases

3. Loss of jobs leading to the loss in health insurance covers

4. Limited national health insurance schemes in terms of funding and services

5. Lack of testing especially in rural areas

6. Misinformation of the severity of the pandemic because of perceived low mortality rates

28 Ibid

29 "Agenda 2063 & 2030: Is Africa On Track?"

30 "Press Release: Africa's Leaders Gather to Launch New Health Financing Initiative Aimed at Closing Funding Gap and Achieving Universal Health Coverage," African Union, February 9, 2019,

31 Ibid

32 "Agenda 2063 & 2030: Is Africa On Track?"

> "Africa is expected to be the next epicenter for the virus due to the lack of capabilities. Our healthcare systems are expected to be extremely strained as the pandemic arrives, posing many challenges to frontline workers because of lack of PPE and other equipment, lack of specialists and lack of ICUs."
>
> **Kapil from FAMSA**

MENTAL WELL-BEING EFFECT

Safety precautions during COVID-19 implemented by African governments include the enforcement of policies such as physical distancing, directives to stay home, restriction of movement within countries and between countries, closure of schools and religious gatherings as well as other spaces for social gatherings such as marketplaces, restaurants and public parks. The result of this new reality of a physically distant world which has led to an increase in mental health issues [33] amongst young people who have reported in the Youth Consultations; the development of symptoms of depression and anxiety.

They additionally noted the importance of the internet to provide psychosocial support for young people during the lockdown to connect with friends and online support systems.

Youth expressed the following in relation to mental health:

1 Depression and anxiety as a result of losing incomes, the disruption of their social life and distance from family especially those migrating to the city for work

2 Burnout among young activists and community organizers due to the increased need for community work during the pandemic but under an environment where the funding has reduced and movement is restricted making community engagement particularly challenging. Lack of awareness for available helplines for young people or are not willing to use them because of stigma

3 High cost of calling helplines which is a deterrent for young people to use them

In a poll conducted on 20th May 2020, the lack of resources was expressed as the top challenge faced by women and youth-led organizations, followed by lack of trust and cooperation with governments and gaps between policies and actions.

● GENDER INEQUALITY

Women form part of the vulnerable population in African countries and the promotion of gender equality is on the decline.[34] Overall, in Africa, women account for around 40% of cases, this ranges from 35% in some countries to over 55% in others.[35] Further, during the lockdowns and 'stay home' measures, young women who form the majority of the informal labour force[36] and the majority in vulnerable employment[37] have been struggling to survive with little to no access to social protection designed for their specific needs.

> "In particular movements such as in South Africa, we are not just questioning the nature of society, but our society logic, of why you are less when you're a black woman etc. but we are no longer asking for permission, we must bring change"
>
> **Rekgotsofetse Chikane- South Africa**

33 Aya Chebbi, "COVID-19 in Africa: Youth Perspectives," Mo Ibrahim Foundation, June 9, 2020, http://mo.ibrahim.foundation/news/2020/covid-19-africa-youth-perspectives-aya-chebbi.

34 "Agenda 2063 & 2030: Is Africa On Track?," 40

35 "WHO Concerned over COVID-19 Impact on Women, Girls in Africa," WHO Regional Office for Africa, June 18, 2020, https://www.afro.who.int/news/who-concerned-over-covid-19-impact-women-girls-africa.

36 "Women and Men in the Informal Economy: A Statistical Picture. Third Edition."

37 "Africa Gender Data Book," Text (African Development Bank Group, April 22, 2019), https://www.afdb.org/en/documents/africa-gender-data-book-2019

GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

In the VAUYCS webinar on the 'Role of Women and Youth in Civil Society', H.E. Mme Bineta Diop (the African Union special envoy on Women, Peace and Security) stated that; "COVID-19 and its effects has exacerbated the inequality and gaps in our social infrastructure. In particular, it has emphasized that issues of Gender Based Violence are everywhere not just Africa." She further noted that young women are especially vulnerable during the pandemic but that they are also at the forefront of response efforts, citing that 70% of health workers and social workers are women.

Young women expressed the following in relation to Gender Based Violence:

1 Vulnerability of young women to 'Stay at home' measures if they are living in a household where they face abuse

2 Loss of jobs has exacerbated young women's vulnerability to power dynamics for food and shelter

3 Closing of internal borders between cities have made it difficult for young women to escape and find support and safety

4 Lack of shelters or safe spaces especially in rural areas and refugee camps as well as young women that migrate from rural to urban areas for work which makes them at a higher risk for abuse

5 Lack of awareness amongst young women on where to get help when experiencing o any form of gender-based violence

"Many young women are actually right now victims of sexual and gender-based violence at home, so we all need to look at our messaging that gives them ways not just to prevent themselves from getting Coronavirus but also to protect themselves from violence."

Mercy from GIMAC

When youth were asked in a poll conducted on 29th April 2020, what kind of violence they are affected by **14%** out of a total of **311** respondents said they were affected by Gender Based Violence. When asked in a poll on 5th May 2020 what are the main challenges facing young women, **40%** out of a total of **205** respondents stated that it was Gender Based Violence and Lack of Shelter, another **40%** stated it was Unemployment and Lack of Access to Opportunities; and **13%** stated it was the Lack of Health Services.

DISRUPTION ON SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH SERVICES

Governments have been focused on stopping the spread of the virus and this has led to the disruption of essential services for young women such as sexual and reproductive health services. WHO has reported that for example in Zimbabwe the number of live births have fallen by 21%. In addition, they state that it is estimated that reduction in maternal health services continues, it could lead to increased maternal deaths especially in middle-income countries.[38]

Youth expressed the following in relation to the disruption in sexual and reproductive health services:

1 Loss of jobs or reduction in income which makes young women unable to afford sanitary pads and contraceptives including young women in refugee camps that would receive these services as aid, do not have access anymore as aid work has slowed down

2 Difficulties to access reproductive health services because of stigma but due to restriction in movements

3 Interruption in access to antiretroviral treatment either due to affordability; or closure of centers which provided them for free or at subsidized costs

4 Increased stigma against youth living with HIV/AIDS

YOUTH NOT AT THE TABLE

During the webinar on African & Global Solidarity, Prof. Eddy Maloka, Chief Executive Officer of African Peer Review Mechanism noted the importance of youth engagement and participation in decision making

Youth agency is the active engagement of young people with systems, institutions and technologies towards finding space to influence decision making. Youth engagement is therefore considered important under Aspiration 6 of Agenda 2063 and as an indicator in Africa's development in the African Governance Report. The desire to be actively engaged in social, economic and political life is overwhelmingly expressed across the continent by young Africans.

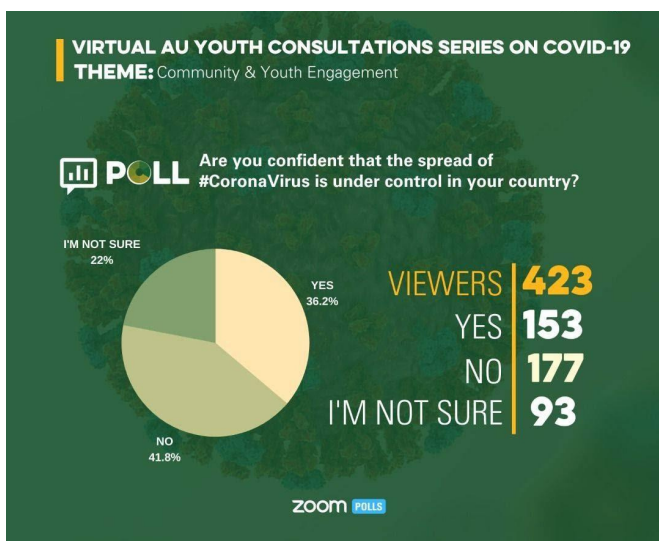[38] "WHO Concerned over COVID-19 Impact on Women, Girls in Africa."

In all the consultations held by the OYE, young people have asserted their desire to be part of institutional decision making.

Further, during the Virtual African Youth Policy Consultation, a third of participants preferred to be placed in civic and community engagement breakout sessions, indicating the interest of young people to be involved in their communities, nations and continent.

In a poll conducted on 5th May 2020, the OYE asked "if given the right opportunities and access, would you like to run or serve in public office?" **95.8%** of respondents out of a total of **33** respondents said yes.

When asked what they consider to be a positive impact of COVID-19 on their personal well-being, **28%** stated that it is giving back to the community.

However, when asked if they were confident that the virus was under control in their country, out of **423** viewers **177** stated they were not.

"There is a challenge in creating a sense of legitimacy amongst young people as they are disenfranchised with government and need to see initiatives as a legitimate cause"
Andrew from EAC Youth Ambassadors

"For young people, this is not just a health crisis but also a governance crisis, where they demand intergenerational co-leadership in decision-making, negotiation tables and community responses." **Aya Chebbi** [39]

Youth expressed the following in relation to exclusion from decision making:

1 Lack of greater inclusion of young people in decision making at national levels

2 Lack of access to engagement spaces with governments and policy makers in refugee camps, rural communities and for disabled youth

3 Lack of engagement in consultations on how to address specific issues that youth face

4 Lack of funding and resourcing to active youth led and community-based organizations in these communities

"The main challenges facing African youth in general and in rural areas in particular are the absence of support, guidance and adequate spaces of expression"
Fatima AlSalami - Chad

"أبرز التحديات التي تواجه الشباب الإفريقي بشكل عام والشباب الريفي بشكل خاص هو غياب الدعم والتوجيه ومساحة حرية التعبير"

فاطمة السلامي - التشاد

39 Aya Chebbi, "The fears and hopes of African youth during the COVID-19 pandemic", COVID-19 In-Depth Analysis, accessed July, 7 2020, https://www.accord.org.za/analysis/the-fears-and-hopes-of-african-youth-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/?fbclid=IwAR1YwwIYDHL_9adrUwGOrdm3OTinsUdS1nuGRP6cxG3x1VG-opj6XSTraKA

HUMANITARIAN AND HUMAN RIGHTS CRISES

The Chairperson of the African Commission of Human and Peoples' Rights stated in the webinar on "Youth and Human Rights" that, COVID-19 as a public health emergency put those already considered as vulnerable such as refugees, Internally Displaced People (IDPs), disabled people among others, in a situation where their vulnerability has become enhanced. He further asserted that this increased vulnerability means that the demand and need for human rights protection has equally become enhanced.

As a flagship project of Agenda 2063, The African Union declared 2020 the year of "Silencing the Guns in Africa". Peace, under this project, is seen as integral to Africa's development. Therefore, the primary objective of the project is to achieve sustainable peace to allow for development across the continent.[40] The Silencing the Guns agenda is in line with Article 17 of the African Youth Charter which outlines steps that State Parties should take towards peace and security. These include the promotion of socio-economic rights as well as political rights for young people

1. In view of the important role of youth in promoting peace and non-violence and the lasting physical and psychological scars that result from involvement in violence, armed conflict and war, States Parties shall:

A Strengthen the capacity of young people and youth organizations in peace building, conflict prevention and conflict resolution through the promotion of intercultural learning, civic education, tolerance, human rights education and democracy, mutual respect for cultural, ethnic and religious diversity, the importance of dialogue and cooperation, responsibility, solidarity and international cooperation;

B Institute mechanisms to promote a culture of peace and tolerance amongst young people that discourages their participation in acts of violence, terrorism, xenophobia, racial discrimination, gender-based discrimination, foreign occupation and trafficking in arms and drugs;

C Institute education to promote a culture of peace and dialogue in all schools and training centres at all levels;

D Condemn armed conflict and prevent the participation, involvement, recruitment and sexual slavery of young people in armed conflict;

E Take all feasible measures to protect the civilian population, including youth, who are affected and displaced by armed conflict;

F Mobilise youth for the reconstruction of areas devastated by war, bringing help to refugees and war victims and promoting peace, reconciliation and rehabilitation activities;

G Take appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of young victims of armed conflict and war by providing access to education and skills development such as vocational training to resume social and economic life.

In February 2020, the African Union Office of the Youth Envoy released a poll during the 33rd Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the African Union. This poll asked youth what would be your top priority for Silencing the Guns?

40 Ms. Aïssatou Hayatou, the AU "Silencing the Guns" operations manager, Citied In; Zipporah Musau, "Silencing the Guns in Africa by 2020," Africa Renewal, December 23, 2019, https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/december-2019-march-2020/silencing-guns-africa-2020.

What would be your top priority for Silencing the Guns for Anglophone?

Category	Value
Silencing Poverty	23.73%
Silencing Conflict	20.62%
Silencing Gender Based Violence	18.36%
Silencing Corruption	18.08%
Silencing Climate crisis	8.47%
Silencing Lack of access to healthcare	5.65%
Silencing Arms Trade	5.08%
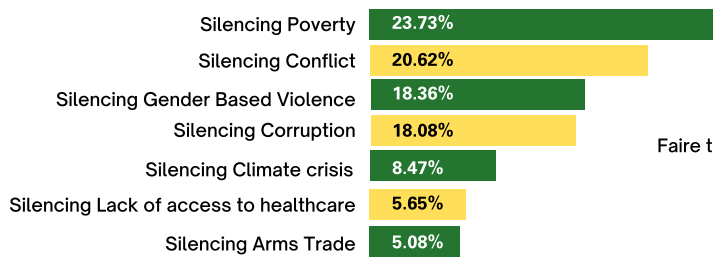
What would be your top priority for Silencing the Guns for Francophone

Category	Value
Faire taire la pauvreté (Silencing Poverty)	25.00%
Faire taire le conflit (Silencing Conflicts)	25.00%
Faire taire La violence basée sur le genre (Silencing Gender Based Violence)	18.42%
Faire taire le commerce d'armes (Silencing Arms Trade)	17.11%
Faire taire le changement climatique (Silencing Climate Crisis)	6.58%
Faire taire la corruption (Silencing Corruption)	6.58%
Faire taire le manque d'accès aux soins de santé (Silencing the Lack of access to healthcare)	1.32%

This data demonstrates that, although the African Youth Charter frames issues of peace and security as direct violence, young people view the peace and security agenda as one that extends to issues beyond conflict and interpret Silencing the Guns to silencing poverty, violence against women, climate change, corruption and the lack of access to healthcare.

The spread of COVID-19 has not stopped conflicts on the continent. Conflict leads to devastating effects on the human rights of individuals and their access to safety, shelter, food, healthcare and education. COVID-19 is now adding to the humanitarian crisis in Africa. Humanitarian organizations, governments, and victims of conflict are facing an even greater health and human rights crisis.

The AU Commissioner for Peace and Security, Amb. Smail Chergui, notes that the pandemic has affected conflict and mediation efforts. He particularly notes that critical operations have been delayed or cancelled due to the quarantining of some forces. [41] At national levels security forces are overwhelmed as they work to enforce pandemic measures.

According to the African Union, over a third of the world's forcibly displaced persons are in Africa, including 6.3 million refugees and asylum-seekers and 14.5 million internally displaced persons (IDPs). Of this population the majority are young people that have fled their homes seeking for a safer environment. These young people face a disruption to their education and basic needs as they take on the status of being an 'other' in a foreign land.

Their survival is left to humanitarian organizations and foreign governments to provide basic needs. UNHCR has stated IDPs[42] followed by refugees form the majority of the people of concern during the current pandemic as they face a higher risk of infection from COVID-19 due to overcrowding and the lack of basic necessities.[43] Furthermore, young refugee women face particular challenges. For instance, the Refugee Led Organizations Network (RELON), member of the African Youth Front on Coronavirus, stated young pregnant women have been at risk due to lack of access to health facilities.

"I worry that even though this is a public health crisis, we are increasingly seeing a militarized response from our governments"
Catherine East Africa from GIMAC

"I want to talk particularly about internally displaced young women. We have been working with a couple of them and the numbers are rising as the conflict intensifies in these areas. Young girls are moving out of the rural areas to the urban cities because the conflict is really heated in the rural areas. In the urban cities they are struggling to find their feet. A lot of problems from living conditions, accommodation issues and feeding problems have arisen."

Cynthia from Central Africa

41 Smail Chergui, "Peace and Security in Africa amidst COVID-19," ACCORD (blog), May 27, 2020, https://www.accord.org.za/analysis/peace-and-security-in-africa-amidst-covid-19/

42 African Union, "CONCEPT NOTE ON THE THEME OF THE YEAR: 'REFUGEES, RETURNEES AND INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS: TOWARDS DURABLE SOLUTIONS TO FORCED DISPLACEMENT IN AFRICA,'" February 7, 2019, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/67990.pdf.

43 Africa," accessed July 17, 2020, https://reporting.unhcr.org/africa.

In a poll on 29th April 2020, the OYE asked youth what has increased their vulnerability during COVID-19 crisis,

Youth expressed the following in relation to conflict and humanitarian settings:
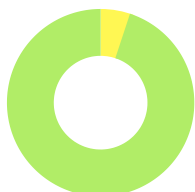
Percentage
5.1%

I'm a Person with Disability
Number of respondents (12)
Percentage (5.084745763%)

94.9%

1 Lack of financial support putting vulnerable youth such as refugees at risk

2 Challenges for refugee community living in poverty and isolated in the camp from the outside world

3 Panic in the refugee communities because of the curfew and closure of the marketplace leading to small businesses closure leaving refugees struggling to survive on the rations provided

41.5%

I'm Unemployed
Number of respondents (138)
Percentage (58.47457627%)

Percentage
58.5%

4 Increasingly at risk young refugees and IDPs during the lockdown including Gender Based Violence with no safe spaces in camps.

5 Escalation in violence, with armed groups refusing to adopt ceasefire agreements. Instead they use the restriction of movements to intensify conflict.
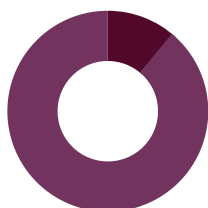
Percentage
11%

I'm Refugee, Migrant, IDP
Number of respondents (26)
Percentage (11.01694915%)

89%

6 Militarized response by governments due to the pandemic leading to increased cases of police violence

Percentage
25.4%

I live in Rural Area
Number of respondents (60)
Percentage (25.42372881%)

74.6%

"Nothing is being done with persons of disability. There is no specific things that target them and their specific needs."
Peter from Afrika Youth Movement.

"How do we ensure that refugees are treated with the same basic human rights as citizens? If we treat refugees as people there wouldn't be a problem, the problem is treating refugees as a problem"
Okelo Sejog- South Sudan/Kenya

SPOTLIGHT AFRICA YOUTH LEAD

Young people on the continent have organized and mobilized around efforts to stop the spread of the virus as well as to plan for the post-COVID-19 world. During the Youth Consultations, participants described the different initiatives that they are leading. Some of these initiatives are found below.

Vision in Action Cameroon — Cameroon

Provides sanitary products to young women during the pandemic, organizing sensitization programs on 'Eliminating Sexual Violence' and sexual reproductive health and rights.

Vijana Think Tank — Tanzania

Fundraising campaign to support vulnerable communities and build 5 permanent hand washing stations in markets with lots of food traffic, in public schools, in hospitals and medical facilities supplying liquid soap and hand sanitizers to hospitals, doctors, nurses, and people who visit hospitals regularly.

NexusAfrik — Pan-African

Started as a result of the OYE Youth Consultations on COVID-19, gathering data on youth and COVID-19 and mobilizing collective action

Local Youth Corner — Cameroon

Turned their offices into laboratories for producing hand sanitizers

Hands of Hope — South Sudan

Provides basic assistance and necessities for families in vulnerable communities in the form of medicines and foodstuffs targeting expatriate families, students and refugees living in Egypt who have lost their jobs, causing the worldwide amid COVID19 pandemic.

Africa Education Initiative — Chad

Providing adequate rehabilitation of youth in rural areas and raising awareness in the countryside and urging them to sensitize rural communities to health information

Restructure Africa — Nigeria

Addressing poverty issues through increased access to education, public health, and humanitarian interventions in disadvantaged communities and providing palliatives to underserved communities

Crown The Woman — South Sudan

Raising awareness , especially against GBV amid COVID 19, and educating communities about COVID-19

Saharawi Advocacy Campaign — Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic

Raising awareness about Sahrawi refugees through social media campaigns as well as taking part in several webinars to talk about the difficulties that the Sahrawi refugees face during the current Crisis.

Tiwale — Malawi

Empowering women around creative fashion through; education, skills training, and job creation. During the pandemic the women in their programs have been producing protective face masks which they learnt how to make and through their sale provides financial support.

Youth Voices — Rwanda

Providing safe space for young people to share stories and raising awareness about the pandemic in their communities.

Food And Genes Initiative — Nigeria

Performed food drives and awareness on healthy diet for households in underserved communities

SAREPTA Initiative — Mauritius

Raising funds and food distribution and using social media extensively to encourage citizens of Mauritius to make monetary contributions towards helping a noble cause during this difficult COVID-19 times. The initiative served 1,500+ families so far.

Association YOUTH CLUBs — Tunisia

Composed of students (more than 50 clubs in around 14 governerats) training students on soft skills and advocacy on the importance and possibility of online education including through television and radio. In addition to the production on sensitization awareness videos, holding mental health events to talk about the danger of addiction and inactivity

African Youth Fellowship — Liberia

Conducting awareness campaigns in communities and provided food for slum communities and disabled people.

"Saviez-Vous" — Morocco

Raising awareness about COVID-19 and fighting fake news, through producing infographics, videos, etc

Ad El-mas'olya initiative — Egypt

Raising awareness for public or specific categories like children, deaf and garbagemen through training, online courses and distributing sanitizers and some protective equipment for specific segments - distributing aids for damaged and infected people

Youth for Egypt — Egypt

Developing and executing strategies and initiatives to advance awareness for fighting COVID-19 crisis.

East African Community Youth Ambassadors Platform — Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi and South Sudan

Conducting consultations to inform safe participation of Youth in elections amidst COVID19 and support resilience of vulnerable youth communities particularly EAC border communities
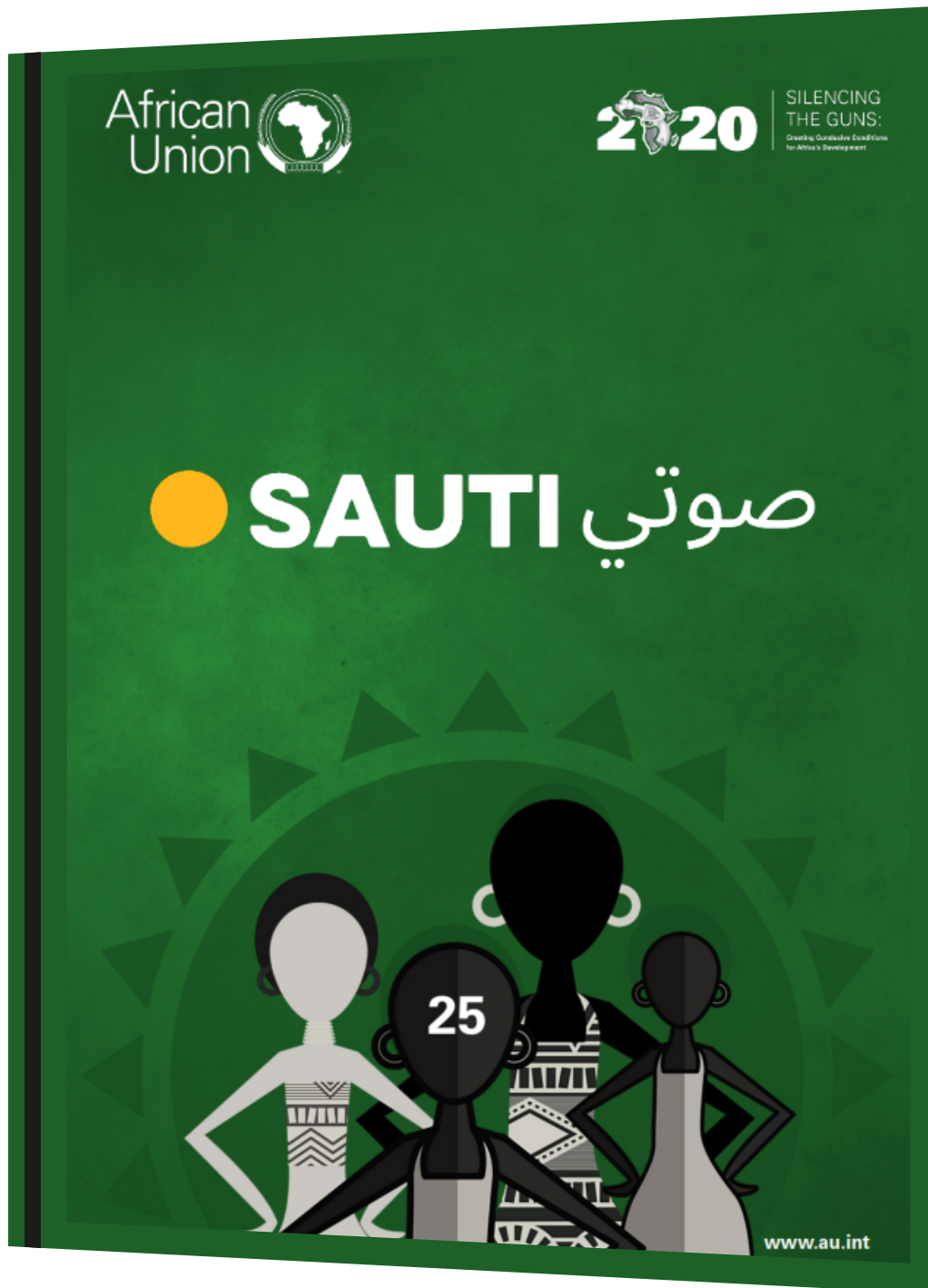
"SAUTI صوتي" AFRICA YOUNG FEMINIST BLOG AND PUBLICATION;
Amplifying young women voices and actionsin light of the current COVID-19 Outbreak.

DOWNLOAD FULL PUBLICATION
https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/39285-doc-sauti_oye_2020.pdf

MORE ABOUT THE WINNERS
https://au.int/en/sauti-blog

PART 2

AFRICA YOUTH FRONT ON CORONAVIRUS - RECOVERY ROADMAP

OVERVIEW - AFRICA'S COVID-19 RECOVERY PLAN

This paper constitutes a second section outlining the COVID-19 recovery context and the inclusive recovery processes needed to galvanize all groups, particularly African youth in the actions prescribed and the outcomes needed to drive Africa's turnaround. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare many of the systemic failures that continue to stifle growth and development across Africa. It has shone a spotlight on entrenched inequalities and structural barriers that work to keep millions of people in a perpetual cycle of poverty and underdevelopment. Across Africa, citizens are rising up and demanding more and better from their elected officials. This is especially true for Africa's youth whose social and economic prospects have been severely hampered by the ongoing pandemic. As many countries begin the hard work of rebuilding economies and returning to some semblance of pre-covid 'normality,' it is imperative that the systemic flaws and deficiencies which led to the pandemic gaining a foothold on the continent in the first place are dealt with decisively. On a continent where the median age is 20 years old, this can only be achieved if leaders across the generational spectrum come together to devise strategies that speak to the needs and challenges facing Africa's youth.

OBJECTIVES

Given this, the following COVID-19 Recovery Roadmap seeks to:

1 Highlight the structural challenges that worsened/propagated the effect of the pandemic as identified in part one of this paper

2 Mobilize youth through youth-led conversations, youth-led actions, and shared experiences among African youth.

3 Put forward concrete recommendations on how to incorporate the youth when addressing future pandemics

4 Provide systematic analysis on opportunities available to African youth in the recovery from the Coronavirus pandemic

5 Table best practice approaches to facilitate the recovery of African economies and local communities negatively affected by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic

6 Facilitate youth participation within African decision-making structures, fostering intergenerational dialogue and co-leadership

THE AFRICAN YOUTH FRONT ON CORONAVIRUS
- A CASE STUDY ON YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

CHALLENGE

Africa currently ranks as one of the world's youngest nations with over 65% of its population under the age of 35. It is the only region in the world where the youth population is actually growing. By contrast, however, the average age of an African leader is 64 years old. This age gap is telling and gives insight into the institutional and systemic barriers that work to silence the views, opinions and lived experiences of African youth. It challenges the core precepts of governance, sustainable development and the potential for harnessing Africa's demographic dividend through intergenerational co-leadership.

ACTION

It is within this context that a pioneering project by the AU office of the Youth Envoy in collaboration with the Africa CDC, hosted a Virtual AU Youth Consultations on the COVID-19 (VAUYCS) for a Youth collective response. The initiative comprised a series of online consultations in which youth leaders shared their views and opinions on what was needed to combat the virus. Between March 23rd and April 15, a total of 13 focus group consultations with over 300 youth leaders from 42 countries were held. Attendees were briefed by the Africa CDC on continental response efforts, following which they went on to share best practice, brainstorm and develop Actions plans.

RESULT

Based on the outcomes of the focus group consultations, there were two main expectations from youth.

- Firstly, the creation of a youth policy space and framework within the African Union to co-lead the response to pandemics. The result of which was the launch of the African Youth Front on Coronavirus.

- Secondly the need for direct engagement, communication and dialogue with decision makers. The outcome of which was eight webinars with African Leaders.

On Wednesday 06 May 2020, in Addis Ababa, the African Union Office of the Youth Envoy (OYE) with the support of Africa Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) and the Department of Social Affairs launched the African Youth Front on Coronavirus. This new body is an African Union framework aimed at giving youth a seat at the decision-making table and an opportunity to co-lead Africa's response to the pandemic. The Youth front is tasked with supporting the implementation of the African Continental Strategic Plan for COVID-19 PANDEMIC.

Over the course of 6 months the Africa Youth Group on Coronavirus (AYFC), composed of representatives from youth networks, civil society organizations, social entrepreneurs, student unions, national youth councils and AU Youth boards canvassed the views of African youth on a range of COVID-19 related issues. These engagements form the basis of this COVID-19 Recovery Paper.

The COVID-19 Recovery Roadmap highlights the work done by the AYFC, analysing key policy and structural barriers that must be addressed in order to ensure that life post COVID-19 does not return to the old "normal" but rather that a new normal is established. One characterised by equitable justice for all, inclusive thriving economies, the protection of vulnerable communities and inter-generational co leadership.

METHODOLOGY

The African Youth Front COVID-19 Recovery Roadmap is a signature project for the Youth Front and is the outcome of consultations conducted by member networks. This policy paper serves as official documentation of the views and experiences of different youth bodies across Africa and details recommendations for governments and significant stakeholders to take when designing inclusive and comprehensive recovery measures that leave no one behind.

Member networks of the Youth Front carried out focus group consultations to collect opinions and recommendations from youth leaders, with the idea of informing policy briefs that are to be submitted to Africa CDC. The consultations asked focus groups how they envisioned recovery from the pandemic and asked them to identify system strengthening policies needed at a national and continental level to spur a just and inclusive COVID-19 recovery. These engagements were done in four languages; English, Swahili, French, and Arabic. This section of the paper is a summary of the most salient points from the consultations with a consolidated set of recommendations.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

COVID-19 has made visible the inequalities in our societies and the hardships that youth face daily. The pandemic has clearly had a profound impact on the lives and livelihoods of young people. In developing a set of youth driven policy recommendations on how to approach the COVID-19 recovery, member networks of the African Youth Front were asked to conduct consultations with other youth organisations and interested parties.

The consultations were conducted and documented according to the following themes;

- Job & Food Security, Economic Recovery
- Strengthening Healthcare Systems
- Digital Transformation & Restructuring Educational Systems

- Job & Food Security, Economic Recovery
- Strengthening Healthcare Systems
- Digital Transformation & Restructuring Educational Systems
- Gender JusticeI
- Inclusion of Vulnerable Youth
- Youth Silencing the Guns
- Youth in Public Service and Intergenerational Co-Leadership

The consultations were conducted and documented according to the following themes; Digital Transformation & Restructuring Educational Systems, Inclusion of Marginalised Youth in Vulnerable Communities, Gender Justice, Strengthening Healthcare Systems and Job & Food Security, Economic Recovery. Under each theme is a set of recommendations on how governments and other stakeholders can respond to the current pandemic in a manner that also magnifies the focus on youth.

It is widely agreed among research participants that for recovery efforts from the ongoing pandemic to be truly effective it will have to be to be inclusive. It must include marginalised and overlooked groupings, especially the youth. The recovery plan also needs to strategically position Africa to take advantage of emerging opportunities in the digital economy. Skills development in this area is one of the most critical investments that need to be made to ensure a sustained economic growth after the pandemic. Below is an interpretative summary of the consultations, followed by the resultant eight (8) policy recommendations and associated actions that were made by the young people that participated in the consultations:

JOBS, FOOD SECURITY, AND ECONOMIC RECOVERY

COVID-19 has brought a high level of youth unemployment, driven by imbalances, such as limited access to education, poor education outcomes, considerable levels of food insecurity and hunger. Lockdowns have further increased pressure and limited economic opportunities, affecting the most vulnerable severely. The increase in unemployment and food insecurity is a trend that has to be reversed with a robust recovery strategy. This denotes the availability of opportunities for young people to engage in economically productive activities that take into cognizance the human rights and dignity of these young people.

To ensure that the goals and aspirations of Agenda 2063 are obtained, dignified jobs and job security for youth are central. The call for job security was therefore the top priority area expressed by young people during the consultations. A critical theme identified through the youth-led consultations was the strong conviction that the digital economy presents new avenues for employment and scalable, entrepreneurial opportunities for young people across the continent. Also identified was the risk of not taking the digital opportunity seriously enough. Africa currently lags significantly behind other emerging markets with regard to IT infrastructure investment.

The participants of the consultation process identified the following critical components for the COVID-19 recovery, namely:

Recommendation 1: Invest in youth-run innovation and Small and Mid-size Enterprises (SMEs) ensuring their sustainability

1 Increase investments in youth entrepreneurship and innovation by financially supporting SMEs, including: grants, loans, tax relief, payroll protection and loans

2 Certify and create legal status for youth innovation during the response to COVID-19

3 Provide immediate stimulus packages to young people who have lost their jobs during the pandemic

4 Develop sustainable public-private partnerships that focus on the creation of digital jobs and enhancement of digital skills for the youth

Promoting youth businesses that lead to innovations should be significantly increased to allow access to new markets and increase the number of employment opportunities youth-run businesses can create. Africa needs to increase the pace of investment into these growth areas to support young entrepreneurs in establishing businesses in the digital economy. Businesses that take advantage of digital technology can find new markets, and potentially employ more people. Investment is also required for the skills needed to accompany this new economy, thus investment needs to have a strong skills development focus.

Ensuring the sustainability of youth-run businesses was a major concern for the research respondents. African leaders need to ensure that youth-run businesses operating in the informal economy during pandemics have the financial and non-financial support they require. Reducing the cost of doing business (administrative burden, strategic subsidies) for youth-run SMEs will also enable sustainability. Further, financial institutions operating in Africa should provide capital– in the form of loans or other innovative low-cost financial instruments, at lower than usual interest rates, which can be used to rebuild businesses after the loss of income caused by the pandemic. Providing this whole suite of support should be made a priority for governments and other relevant stakeholders.

In addition, better forward planning is required from all relevant stakeholders to ensure alignment between educational curriculums and the needs of the evolving economy. The development of digital infrastructure and improved internet connectivity across the continent is key to any possible recovery, especially in developing policy frameworks to respond to future global pandemics on the scale of COVID-19.

Recommendation 2: Ensure food security through greater investment in young farmers and traders

1 Establish private-public partnerships facilitating grants, access to land and low-interest loans for young farmers to develop 'smart' farming methods to improve the food value chain through agriculture and entrepreneurship

2 Create an enabling legal, regulatory and administrative environment for youth to actively participate in trade and opportunities of African Continental Free Trade Are

3 Strengthen higher education in agriculture by reforming curriculums to prepare youth to lead agricultural innovation

4 Provide immediate financial and administrative support to organisations that fill societal needs during the pandemic, especially for vulnerable and marginalised youth

Hunger and the lack of nutritious foods is a major challenge for young people. Governments should develop the food value chain through the creation of programs and policies that encourage youth to play an active role as either farmers, processors, and distributors. In doing so, governments are able to address food insecurity as well as create jobs for young people.

Participants listed many examples of organisations that stepped in and provided food and other support for the many young people who were unable to support themselves during government mandated lockdowns. Ensuring that these organisations exist will enable this support for future pandemics.

STRENGTHENING HEALTHCARE SYSTEMS

The pandemic has tested Africa's governance structures and policy choices in the critical areas of healthcare. Africa's health infrastructure, for one, has been shown to be extremely inadequate. Thus, there is a need to treat health and social-economic rights as fundamental rights and publicly invest in their realization. Based on the experiences of the youth that were reflected in the consultations, participants have recommended the following specific policy interventions:

Recommendation 3: Implement Universal Healthcare Coverage (UHC) and basic services and reforms accessible to youth

1 IPrioritise youth capacity development and empowerment to contribute to healthcare reform and hold leaders accountable in technical sectors

2 Adopt and enforce tax exemptions on local youth manufacturers related to Personal Protective Equipment and sanitation products

3 Incentivise youth healthcare workers by improving growth opportunities and the standard of working conditions to reduce the number of youth migrating out of the continent

4 Adopt e-healthcare by engaging youth digital innovations to provide quality, affordable and timely health services

An optimal healthcare system is largely a function of coordinated systems at National Government level. Consultation participants pointed out that including the youth in formal decision-making would be more representative of African society and allow for the diversity required to innovate in these important systems. Furthermore, African youth should be trusted and encouraged to work within and alongside the health sector. Doing so would make objectives like creating community awareness and mobilising a pandemic response significantly easier for future outbreaks.

Some sectors of the economy are very technical, and participants noted that capacity should be developed in the youth, to hold current leaders accountable, and develop a strong pipeline for future leaders in these sectors

As with all other sectors, governments should acknowledge the importance of ICT developments in food production systems (digital agriculture, SMS, payments, enhanced payment transparency, optimised routes to market for produce, etc.) and healthcare, leveraging on innovation driven by the youth. Thus, the appropriate allocation of funds and resources to drive growth in these sectors must be prioritised.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION & RESTRUCTURING OF EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS

70% of Africa's youth are offline even though technology is a growth area for the future. The policy measures put in place to respond to COVID-19 have drawn attention to the importance of digitalization to the future of the continent. Countries with developed internet and mobile banking, as well as sufficient infrastructure for education and workplace functioning have been able to minimize the effect on its citizens and the economy.

Young people who have access to these provisions have additionally been able to innovate new ways of making an income and providing platforms for continued learning and social support for their communities. Young people therefore assert the need to go beyond "digitization" into digital transformation that is inclusive, clean, green and smart . They also see the need for regional innovation platforms, an ecosystem for youth leaders to work together to promote innovative and creative societal solutions for communities.

The consultations produce the following specific recommendations to ensure a sustained COVID-19 recovery:

Recommendation 4: Increase, urgently and significantly, investments in digital infrastructure and democratize digital access and internet freedom

1 Increase national budgeting for education and accelerate the development of e-learning systems in delivering quality education especially for offline youth in fulfilling the commitment of Continental Education strategy for Africa

2 Establish multi-stakeholder partnerships to invest in technologies that facilitate the digital economy and accelerate digital opportunities for youth

3 Establish African Centres for Innovation and Excellence that can match education with the market needs through training opportunities, digital skills and infrastructure, in both urban and rural areas

4 Accelerate digitization to fulfill the commitment of African Strategy for Digital Transformation particularly for rural and vulnerable youth including accessible, affordable and reliable broadband

5 Criminalize undue restrictions on internet freedom and internet shutdowns

African countries are lagging behind in making digital resources available for their citizens. Where this has been done, there is an imbalance in access to emerging technologies. Communities across the spectrum should have the right to access the internet and make use of the emerging opportunities to improve their lives. Technology needs to be better leveraged to facilitate livelihoods, communicate information and raise awareness for anything that may require their attention. COVID-19 has shown that we need to change the way we work. Educational provision and the gender digital divide are further areas of concern. We need to implement systems for e-learning to address gender imbalances in access to education.

Despite all the challenges and issues around accessibility, African youth are finding innovative ways to leverage digital platforms by using digital tools and training workshops to engage youth socially. These efforts need to be supported, and gender discrimination must be addressed through a multi-sectoral approach and cross-sectorial collaboration.

COVID-19 has exacerbated the digital divide, and this does not only refer to coverage but also broadband coverage and skills development. According to data from the World Bank, only 51% of Africans don't have access to electricity or reliable sources of energy. With no energy, there is no digitalization, and this is across all sectors.

Energy, affordable data prices, and many other aspects of ancillary infrastructure are required for the African youth to take full advantage of the digital opportunity. For digital developments to play a transformative role, additional investments will need to be made into sectors that are required to facilitate the digital economy. The youth have called for these investments to be prioritised.

GENDER JUSTICE

Gender disparities characterise many African societies. Gender justice emerged in all the consultations as a cross-cutting issue area that requires governments to commit to the creation of policies and the implementation of mechanisms to address the systems that perpetuate gender inequality. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted key gaps in our societies that need to be urgently addressed. To fill these gaps policies need to be designed for young women and vulnerable youth that takes into consideration their lived reality. We also need to address structural patriarchal problematic systems that do not pay women equally. Addressing the current crisis into transformative solutions must also be feminist.

The participants of the consultations identified significant gender-based barriers to decent jobs and employment opportunities all over Africa. Critical to the recovery from the pandemic will be the following policy recommendations:

Recommendation 5: Protect and enable young women's voice, agency and gender equality

1 Protect and support young women's economic resilience and recognise their additional burden of unpaid and domestic work

2 Criminalize Gender Based Violence in all its forms including femicide, rape, sexual harassment, child marriage and female genital mutilation

3 Provide equal access to essential sexual and reproductive health services, mental health support and digital technologies

4 Remove taxation on menstrual products

The gender-based barriers, which were defined by participants as the social perceptions of what kinds of work people of a particular sex should do, can create major injustices or imbalances in the quality of opportunities available.

The participants highlighted that gender-based barriers are often used to discourage people of a particular sex from joining and accessing certain jobs that are 'deemed' to be reserved for a specific sex. These perceptions ultimately limit competence and systematically discriminate against females, who are disproportionately disadvantaged the majority of the time. Eliminating these barriers will not only result in a more equitable society but will also deliver objectively better outcomes.

Consultation participants also noted that women are still unable to properly access ICT infrastructure, which drastically limits their access to a wider range of work and training opportunities. Furthermore, based on the centrality of digital and innovative solutions to economic recovery, removing barriers to access will be a critical component to shaping an inclusive future and the better this is done, the stronger the COVID-19 recovery will in fact be .In addition, effective implementation of supportive labour laws, increased youth inclusion, and appropriate education policies geared towards equipping students with the skills needed in the job market and the modern economy - are some of the other actionable recommendations suggested by participants, largely focused on driving the societal change required to deliver an inclusive and sustainable African society, free of gender-based barriers.

INCLUSION OF VULNERABLE YOUTH

The consultations around the theme of broadening inclusivity featured a strong conviction that ensuring inclusivity would be central to the COVID-19 recovery. It was noted that many social challenges pre-dating COVID-19 were caused by the exclusion of some sections of society and addressing this was key to achieving a sustained recovery. During the consultations, vulnerable communities were defined as groups of people who, due to factors usually considered outside their control, do not have the same opportunities as other, more fortunate groups in society. This group can include youth living with disabilities, youth in rural communities, young women, offline youth, displaced, refugee, migrant youth etc and differs in each country.

Accordingly, the following recommendations were put forward on how this could be done to include members of vulnerable communities:

Recommendation 6: Institutionalize basic standard of living and access for vulnerable youth including refugees, displaced and youth with disability

1 Ensure the representation and active engagement of vulnerable youth in policy formulation and decision making structures and implementation

2 Expand and adapt disaster financing provisions, such as cash and in-kind transfers to address livelihoods-related social protection requirements for vulnerable youth

3 Ensure the mainstreaming of disability in all COVID-19 responses and recovery together with targeted actions

4 Ensure accessibility of information, facilities, programs, and services in the COVID-19 recovery by funding and supporting vulnerable youth to lead initiatives in their communities

Recent reports have shown that marginalised groups, in general, have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19; this is largely due to their lack of access to medical facilities, often due to poverty. Marginalised youth, in particular, have been excluded from the decision-making process that impact them.Successful measures to tackle COVID-19 can not only rely on politicians. Rather active participation from citizens through community engagement is critical to ensuring broad buy-in for decisions taken. It is critical to ensure that all groups, regardless of race, gender, social class, or religion, are front and centre in the short- and long-term responses to combating this novel virus. A rights-based approach to inclusion would mean that all voices are considered when policies are developed. All sectors of society, especially the most vulnerable, must be included in all decision-making structures to ensure that the policy decisions taken are equitable and fair.

Furthermore, there is an urgent need to scale up and innovate the social protection measures available to members of vulnerable communities. This means that governments should provide social safety nets and cash transfers, protecting jobs, and consider how to work with employers to support working parents. Generally, stakeholders need to prioritize policies that connect families to the resources required to sustain livelihoods.

YOUTH SILENCING THE GUNS

The Africa Union marked 2020 the year for "Silencing the Guns in Africa". The COVID-19 pandemic and its effects have highlighted that this goal is vital to achieving the ambitions under Agenda 2063. The OYE began this year by emphasizing the broad understanding that youth have in regards to Silencing the Guns. For young people "Guns" include social and economic inequality as well as war and conflict. The challenges and recommendations during the consultations further highlight this broad understanding of what Guns as silencing corruption, silencing gender based violence, silencing poverty and hunger, silencing climate crisis and silencing youth unemployment. Against this backdrop, the African Union launched, on 24th of July 2020, the 'Youth Silencing the Guns Campaign".

This campaign aims to "provide a platform to mobilize the development and support of key actions that can be undertaken by youth to fast track the implementation of the 'Silencing the Guns' Agenda in Africa." [45] As part of the campaign the OYE held six virtual "Youth Silencing the Guns Intergenerational Dialogues".

Recommendation 7: Uphold and protect youth rights under the African Youth Charter and the Continental Framework on Youth, Peace and Security

1 Protect the right to peaceful protest, assembly and freedom of speech during the pandemic and beyond

2 Establish policies and mechanisms and investigate police violence against young people and other human rights abuses during the pandemic

3 Fund and support technically and financially young peacebuilders

4 Produce research and document youth contribution to peacebuilding efforts and processes, mediation and negotiations

COVID-19 has particularly had devastating effects in areas where war and conflict perpetuate despite the spread of the virus. In an already vulnerable population, the spread of the virus has led to increased suffering and death as citizens cannot access amenities due to both the virus and the violence. Many young people expressed that they are profiled as 'troublemakers' by government officials; targeted for recruitment by militia groups; and are the first to be affected by the closure of schools and the lack of jobs. Further, the manner in which restrictions such as lockdowns are enforced has made more visible the extent to which police violence against youth is rampant in African countries. As a result, young people continue to demand an end to police violence, a revolution in law enforcement and stronger commitment by governments to end conflict and other human rights abuses.

YOUTH IN PUBLIC SERVICE & INTERGENERATIONAL CO-LEADERSHIP

The Coronavirus pandemic is a generational pandemic that has proven to require collaboration, coordination and cooperation between generations. The institutionalization of youth engagement through the adoption of the Africa Youth Front on Coronavirus has highlighted the central and pivotal role that youth and youth networks play in moving Africa towards the fulfillment of Agenda 2063. Furthermore, the effect of the closure of borders and 'stay home' measures has resulted in youth engagement migrating to the virtual space. This has allowed more young people to be more engaged in policy spaces as some institutions have become more creative in reaching and including young people in important spaces for decision and policy-making. However, much is left to be desired as regards the youth inclusion in leadership and decision making.

45 Youth Silencing the Guns Intergenerational Dialogues. Policy Report, 2020.https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/39577-doc-oye_stg_policy_report_2020_1.pdf

In the Report on Greater Inclusion of African Youth in Public Service published by the AU Office of the Youth envoy in Collaboration with the African Leadership Institute, highlighting the importance of a youth mainstreaming and inter-generational co-leadership approach especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic as young people must be seen not as mere beneficiaries, but as co-creators of the reformed systems.

The challenges and consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic has proven that this is the time for Africa to re-think and have a look at its governance systems. Young people are needed in the governance space to provide new models and innovative ideas to help contribute to the development of the continent. Greater inclusion of young people to the public service is vital to Africa's growth and development.

Recommendation 8: Ensure greater inclusion of African youth in public service and governance

1 Lower age requirements for entry into government or contesting for electoral positions including removal of economic barriers namely high candidacy fees or allow waivers for young electoral candidates

2 Introduce and enforce youth quotas at every level of government and public service

3 FAppoint young technocrats and Special Advisors/Envoys for support at every level of government in order to drive innovation

4 Strengthen and democratize National Youth Councils and youth parliaments among other structures to ensure youth contributions across all sectors of government and policies

OUTCOMES

At its core, the recovery expands on the important role that Africa's youth must play in the post COVID-19 rebuilding phase. Youth are demanding that Africa's new normal be one that puts its citizens at the centre of all economic, political, and social policies and systems. The most prominent insight from the various consultations was the centrality of the digital and technological advancements to the future of African youth. Many recommendations that were tabled were about creating a better response to the digital opportunity for the benefit of all African citizens.

Other key recommendations have been made in all areas of life and it is up to the current African leadership to incorporate these recommendations into the recovery phase, from nsuring gender justice in the provision of resources to making the requisite investments in the infrastructure, that will allow for Africa to seriously use the digital opportunity to recover from the devastation caused by COVID-19.

It is the view of African Youth that the COVID-19 recovery must be based on a more inclusive view of society, where the youth and marginalised communities are considered in the decisions that affect them. If the eight recommendations are implemented, that would be the first step in establishing the new normal, which promises to be more inclusive than the one before.

CONCLUSION

Young people across Africa have unanimously expressed the need for urgent action towards eradicating the various forms of inequality in our societies. Before the pandemic youth were on the frontline advocating for jobs, universal healthcare and universal basic income, gender equality, digital transformation and intergenerational co-leadership. Youth highlighted the inequalities in our societies and fearlessly advocated for change taking to the streets in protest. The current pandemic has emphasized the extent of inequality and injustice in our societies and in some cases has deepened them. The series of consultations hosted by the OYE and summarized in this paper is therefore a reminder of the urgency for the call to end all forms of injustice and inequality. It is clear that life can not and should not go back to normal if normal means continued inequality and the marginalization of youth and different groups.

AS WE MOVE FORWARD, WE ARE REMINDED BY THE WORDS OF FRANTZ FANON;

"We must shake off the heavy darkness in which we were plunged, and leave it behind. The new day which is already at hand must find us firm, prudent and resolute [. . .] for ourselves and for humanity, [. . .] we must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new man."

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