A Citizen’s Engagement Strategy will mainstream engagement of the African citizens in democratic governance processes on the Continent.

The African Union through the African Governance Architecture - African Peace and Security Architecture (AGA- APSA) Secretariat have embarked on the development of a comprehensive Citizen’s Engagement Strategy to advance the full mainstreaming of engagement of the African citizen in democratic governance processes on the continent. The development of the strategy which will include a component on the Civil Society Engagement Strategy, is inspired by the modest gains made in mainstreaming youth and women in the democracy, governance, peace and security processes through the implementation of AGA’s two key strategies that is the Youth Engagement Strategy (YES – 2016-2020), the Women Engagement Strategy (AGA-WES – 2018-2021).

Increasingly, it has been evident that without the participation of African Citizens, efforts to create and sustain positive changes in governance, peace and security processes are futile. African citizens, specifically youth and women have demonstrated their capabilities, potential and creativity in contributing to democratic governance processes to build lasting peace in Africa. The involvement of the citizenry in democratic governance systems, is also strategic as citizens are not only the beneficiaries of several policies and programs, they are also the implementers, practitioners, as well as partners. Buy in from citizens on issues of democracy, governance, peace and security is critical in effective, efficient and smooth implementation of government policies with potential impact to enable socio-economic and developmental changes.

In a five-day workshop convened in Nairobi, Kenya, the AGA-APSA is facilitating a conversation among diverse range of stakeholders drawn from the African Union, its Organs, the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), civil society groups, and experts on youth, women and knowledge management, in the evaluation and review of the impact of the Youth Engagement Strategy and the Women Engagement Strategy, whose outcomes will feed in the updated versions of the strategies aligned
to new developments and realities on the continent. The activities are aligned to the objectives and goals of the African Union Agenda 2063 Aspiration 2: An integrated continent, politically united and based on the ideals of Pan-Africanism and the vision of Africa’s Renaissance and Aspiration 6: An Africa, whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children.

The youth and women strategies have been instrumental in mainstreaming youth and women within their own activities and processes particularly in the institutionalization of the Youth, Gender and Civil Societies Organization’s Pre forum ahead of the annual High Level Dialogue on Democracy, Governance and Human Rights: Trends, Challenges and Prospects. The implementation of the strategies has also led to the launch of youth focused programmes focused on innovation, leadership, political participation and engagement in democratic governance processes.

Relatedly, the AGA Secretariat under the auspices of the AGA Youth Engagement Strategy rolled out a joint project with the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), to establish a youth engagement programme that opened the door for the development and adoption of the COMESA Youth Engagement Strategy in 2021 and the establishment of the COMESA Youth Advisory Board. The AGA-YES is also a guidance document that inspired the launch of a Youth Engagement Programme within African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). Further, through the Women Engagement Strategy, key knowledge products have been produced.

Participants evaluated the strategy by taking stock of the challenges encountered during the implementation that vary from the lack of financial and technical support, institutional capacity gaps and entrenched inhibitive social cultural attitudes towards youth and women. These challenges have been a hindrance to effective and meaningful engagement of citizens, particularly youth and women. Beyond capacity gaps and socio-economic inequalities that are limiting the capacity citizens, the lack of investment and disfranchisement of citizens at the national, regional and continental levels continue to challenge their meaningful engagement.
Human and Peoples' Rights underlined the critical roles youth and women play in shaping the democracy, governance, human rights and peace and security issues on the continent. “There is need to recognize important demographic, majority of whom are women and youth in our population and groom them to become valuable advocates for the promotion of principles of peace, equality, dignity, good governance and so on. We also need to have a robust and inclusive engagement mechanism for the civil societies and that is why the conversations about having a comprehensive citizen’s engagement strategy is quite timely and relevant.”

Head of AGA-APSA Secretariat Amb. Salah Hammad noted that the evaluation and review of these strategies was timely and relevant. “Strategies should not be static but should change and adopt to the current realities of the AU, the AGA Platform and also our continent. This workshop is aimed at the review, evaluation and development of strategies that are not only current but are also relevant as well as agile. This workshop will also re-sensitize participants on the AGA - APSA and its mandate and functions; discuss ways to coherently work together to avoid silos; provide room for adaptability and inclusivity; and to bring all stakeholders on board to create a document that is practical, functional and cutting edge.”

The workshop which concludes on the 27th August 2022, will also develop a roadmap and timeline for the consolidation and finalization of the Draft Comprehensive Citizen’s Engagement Strategy.

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