Youth Pre-Forum to the Fourth Annual High Level Dialogue on Democracy, Human Rights and Governance in Africa: Trends, Challenges and Prospects

Youth Participation and Leadership in Political Parties: Special Focus on Young Women

Outcome Statement

4-6 December 2015 | Kigali

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THEME:
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Introduction

1. The Third Youth Pre-Forum to the Annual High Level Dialogue on Democracy, Human Rights and Governance in Africa: Trends, Challenges and Prospects, took place in Kigali, Rwanda from 4 to 6 December 2015. The 2015 Pre-Forum was held under the theme: “Youth Participation and Leadership of Political Parties in Africa: Special Focus on Young Women” and was attended by over 200 youth delegates drawn from the Member States of the African Union and representing various political parties, youth led advocacy groups, women’s rights and civil society organizations as well as media organizations across the continent.

2. The core objective of the Youth Pre-Forum was to provide a space for young people, particularly young women involved in various political spheres to creatively engage on current issues around youth participation in politics within an open and inclusive space. Accordingly, the Forum aimed to reach a collective vision on how to strengthen youth leadership and participation in political parties and the respective roles that can be played by AU organs and institutions in strengthening youth political participation in Member States.

3. The pre-forum provided an opportunity for the participants to review the existing space for youth participation, highlighting the opportunities and
challenges faced by young people in political parties in Africa. Furthermore, participants debated the quality of participation vis-à-vis the capacity of youth wings/leagues to influence policy directions of their respective parties as well as the value addition that youth participation brings to improved democratic governance on the continent.

4. The 2015 Youth Pre-Forum was organized by the African Governance Architecture and Platform in collaboration with the Government of Rwanda through the Rwanda Governance Board. It was supported by various partners including the National Democratic Institute, GIZ, International IDEA Institute of Security Studies, the United Nations Development Program and State of the Union (SOTU).

Emerging Issues

5. The pre-forum acknowledged the role of young people in the evolution of political parties in Africa and their contributions to the liberation movement. These contributions led to the formation of most pre and post-independence political parties which continue to be the most dominant parties in several countries on the continent to date. However, the incursion into the governance space by the military through coup d’etat shortly after most African countries gained independence in many instances truncated political party systems on the continent. Invariably, this negatively affected youth participation in political parties as political harassment, incarceration and outright ban of political parties in most countries made political participation a risky affair.

6. The return to democratic governance in most countries particularly since the early 90s has led to a resurgence of political party systems in Africa. This resurgence has led to varying degrees of experiences on youth participation in various countries:

7. It was noted that while several parties have put in place structures and created an enabling environment for young people to organize and influence party policies,
most young members of political parties in Africa particularly young women still grapple with nepotism, marginalization through entrenched patriarchal systems and influences which have deprived them from effective political participation.

8. Furthermore, it was observed that participation of young men and women in politics and governance is hampered by limited platforms to voice their views, express their concerns and advance their agenda within political parties. The limits of youth wings/leagues which can also serve to further marginalize the concerns and contributions of young people from the mainstream, dominant discourse within political parties was highlighted. Closely related to this, is limited capacity to effectively influence party policies and manifestoes.

9. Nonetheless, it was acknowledged that Africa’s young people have a critical role to play in the attainment of the African Union Agenda 2063. In achieving this lofty goal, the forum underscored the need to emplace effective structures and modalities that enable active and effective participation of young people in political parties.
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Recommendations

Based on the conversations, exchanges and country experiences shared at the three-day youth pre-forum, the following key recommendations were proposed:

**Creating an enabling environment for meaningful youth participation in political parties in Africa**

10. As a crucial step towards ensuring youth participation in political spheres, state parties should work towards the institutionalization of quotas within constitutional frameworks. Such efforts should be immediately reflected in party policy documents and in the selection of party candidates in primaries.

11. To ensure their meaningful participation, youth should not be restricted to youth leagues and consequently isolated from other important platforms. Political parties should work towards mainstreaming youth within party and governance structures and ensuring easy transition from youth wings to the main party structures.

12. Political parties should work towards improving internal party democracy in all its organs. Selection of candidates' party candidates and party decision should be in line with the principles of inclusion, transparency, professionalism, equality and justice.

13. National governments should establish and support independent youth institutions committed to youth development, democracy and rule of law.

14. Platforms that promote dialogue and exchange between political parties, youth social movements and civil society should be established and supported by state parties as well as civil society organizations.
15. The African Union should develop a coherent continental advocacy strategy for the implementation of continental instruments and mechanisms that promote the participation of youth in politics. In this vein, the AGA Youth Engagement Strategy must be fully operationalized to guide such an advocacy plan.

16. States should create and foster a friendly legal environment that safeguards the participation of youth generally and young women specifically in politics.

17. There should be sustained advocacy for reforms of legal frameworks that promote increased representation of youth in political institutions.

18. African states should undertake political reforms that reduce the cost of running for political offices. State parties should also be encouraged to pursue strict enforcement of campaign spending limits.

**Enhancing Effectiveness of existing participatory structures for youth in political parties**

19. Youth wings/leagues must be guided by set rules and regulations developed by consensus by its members. Such rules and regulations should provide the basis for any member to aspire to elective positions within the youth wing and the party's main body.

20. Youth wings/leagues should develop clear gender mainstreaming strategies to ensure the active and effective participation of young women within their structures. Such strategies could include the establishment of quota systems to encourage young women in line with the Maputo Protocol and other AU Shared Values instruments on women’s participation.

21. Youth wings/leagues should seize the initiative and take the lead in engaging party structures in governance processes by influencing party policies and manifestoes.
22. African youth wings/leagues should ensure regular intra and inter-generational exchange with the party structures to ensure that youth issues are given adequate consideration and mainstreamed into party programs and activities.

23. Political parties should set clear transition mechanisms both at party and national structural levels to meaningfully integrate youth and young women into political life.

24. Member states constitutions should provide the legal basis for youth mainstreaming in all decision-making organs of government.

25. The AU should ensure that youths are represented in all decision making organs of the Union. To ensure participation, young men and women should be given a fair chance in politics and leadership roles through deliberate quota systems.

26. The AU should invest in democratic leadership training programs for young people to provide necessary skills and capacity required for the transformation of the continent in line with Agenda 2063. In this vein, the forum called for the scale up of the skills building program during the pre-forum into a full blown “African Union Democratic Leadership Training” program. In the same vein, member states should consider establishing capacity building programs that seek to train and mentor young leaders to ensure seamless transitions.
Need for a paradigm shift in existing mode of youth participation in governance processes

27. Youth wings/leagues are called upon to step up their policy engagement as the key to ensuring that youth concerns are addressed in party programs and by extension government programs.

28. Young people should take the initiative for their own leadership and organize accordingly. Through membership of political parties and other civic organizations, young people must assert their demographic strength and lead change in their respective communities.

29. Young people must take advantage of the information and communication technology tools available to them for innovating and creating solutions to peculiar challenges of their communities.

30. Young people should take advantage of various youth conferences and dialogues such as the Annual Youth Pre-Forum to the High Level Dialogue to organize, network, share comparable lessons and innovate continental ideas for peace, unity and prosperity in line with AU Agenda 2063.

31. Member states who have developed their national youth policies are encouraged to ensure effective implementation and regular reviews where appropriate. Such policies should provide guidance on the role of young people in the attainment of their respective national development plans.

32. African Union should continue to provide leadership on youth participation and leadership on the continent through its policy development and harmonization programs. In this vein, the AU should ensure effective implementation of the African Youth Charter, the AU Youth Decade Plan of Action and the AGA Youth Engagement Strategy.
In Partnership with