



YOUNG POLITICAL LEADERSHIP SCHOOL AFRICA – COHORT 12

**THEME: UNLOCKING AFRICA'S POTENTIAL - YOUTH
LEADERSHIP FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND
POLITICAL STABILITY**

Report

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THE BIRTH AND RISE OF YPLS AFRICA

What began as a bold vision in 2016 has grown into one of Africa's most transformative youth leadership initiatives. The Young Political Leadership School Africa (YPLS Africa) was launched in Liberia with an inaugural cohort of just 30 participants, driven by a simple yet powerful mission: to prepare a new generation of character-driven, accountable, and visionary leaders for democratic governance.

The idea for the program was first sparked during the World Movement for Democracy's Seventh Assembly held in Lima, Peru from October 14–17, 2012.

There, a group of young leaders from the Georgian Institute of Politics presented a concept for a political leadership school designed to equip youth interested in politics, political parties, NGOs, and local government with essential training and mentorship.

This presentation ignited a passion in Eddie D. Jarwolo, who followed up, studied the model, and adapted it to serve the needs of African youth aged 18-35.

Recognizing the urgent need for ethical and competent political leadership across the continent, he returned home with a conviction to build a platform for young Africans to learn, lead, and take charge of their countries' futures.

Turning this vision into reality was not easy. Many thought it was impossible. But with determination, resilience, and a passionate team, Eddie kept pushing.

He shared the idea with Massa Crayton, then Country Representative of the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA). She believed in the vision, trusted Eddie and his team, and provided the first seed funding of USD 20,000.

That critical investment led to the successful launch of YPLS Africa in April 2016. OSIWA championed the initiative until they concluded operations in Liberia in the year 2021. Afterwards, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) stepped in to ensure sustained engagement and impact.

As word and impact spread, so did demand. Young people across Africa began applying in increasing numbers, inspired by the program's unique focus on ethical leadership, governance, and elections. To keep up with demand, the program expanded its scope, upgrading its curriculum, integrating high-level international facilitators, and enhancing the quality of training. Moreover, connecting emerging leaders with experienced mentors and building networks for support and collaboration.

By 2022, the Embassy of Sweden became a major partner, providing vital support and resources. Their contribution further solidified YPLS Africa's identity and operations as a leading youth political development program on the continent.

Since its inception, YPLS Africa has directly benefited over 1,200 young leaders from 13 African countries. These alumni are not just trained, they are transformed, effective communicators, civic leaders who are self-aware, and socially responsible engaged leaders. They are now mobilizers, policymakers, elected and appointed officials, and change-makers actively shaping political spaces and governance structures in their respective countries.

The overarching goal of YPLS Africa is to train, empower, and inspire a new generation of socially conscious African leaders to participate actively in democratic governance, politics, and public service. From a spark in Lima to a continent-wide movement, YPLS Africa is a testament to what is possible when vision meets action. The dream continues, building a stronger Africa through its youth.

From dream to reality, a better Africa is possible. [🔗 www.yplsa.org](https://www.yplsa.org)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to express my deepest appreciation and gratitude to all those who provided us with the opportunity and support to host the 12th cohort of the Young Political Leadership School Africa held under the theme: Unlocking Africa's Potential: Youth Leadership for Economic Development and Political Stability, the program provided a unique and inclusive platform to harness the untapped potential of Africa's youth and fostered critical dialogue, innovation, and collaborative solutions for Africa's development, aligned with Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want.

We extend special thanks to H.E. Josephine A. Nkrumah, Resident Representative of the President of ECOWAS Commission in Liberia who delivered amplifying messages through her keynote address, as well as our speakers, panelists, moderators, facilitators, participants, alumni and volunteers.

We are grateful to our partners and supporters because of your contributions, the YPLS Africa remains committed to empowering a new cadre of ethical and dynamic youth leaders who will transform Africa's political and economic landscape. We believe that with strategic partnerships, inclusive programming, and a results-driven approach, the YPLS Africa aims to deepen the movement for youth-led governance and economic growth across the continent.

We acknowledge the invaluable contributions of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP-Liberia) in collaboration with us in documenting this story and working with us on the report, and the National Endowment for

the Democracy for the continue support and alumni for the YPLS Africa for always available to assist.

Many thanks to all Naymote staff, especially the Manager of the Young Political Leadership School Africa, Ms. Alpha Faith Kemokia for her immense contributions towards the successful conduct and management of the Program. A big thank you to our board of directors and chairperson Omolara T. Balogun, Head, Policy Influencing and Advocacy Unit, West Africa Civil Society Institute, Accra, Ghana and Mr. Emmy Otim, Regional Manager, Program for Young Politicians in Africa/Uganda among others for the excellent facilitations.

We extend our sincere appreciation to the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and the Embassy of Sweden in Monrovia for their support of the Democracy Advancement Program (DAP)

Throughout the years, Naymote's interventions has strengthened governance accountability, empowered citizens, and fostered collaboration among key stakeholders, demonstrating a measurable impact on Liberia's democratic processes. We are very grateful and appreciative for all your support.

Thank you all for your invaluable

Eddie D. Jarwolo
Executive Director,
Naymote Partners for Democratic Development
Phone: +231779201046/0886510479
Email: eddie@naymote.com



We express our heartfelt gratitude to **H.E. Rt. Hon. Sheriff F. O. Oborevwori**, the current Governor of Delta State, Nigeria, for being the first and only public official to consistently support and encourage the upcoming generation of Delta State leaders to enroll in the Young Political Leadership School Africa annually. Thank you, sir.





INTRODUCTION

The Young Political Leadership School Africa (YPLS Africa) Cohort 12, a flagship initiative of Naymote Partners for Democratic Development, convened an inspiring five-day intensive training from Monday, June 9 to Friday, June 13, 2025 designed to empower emerging African leaders with political knowledge, ethical leadership values, and practical governance skills. Held in Liberia and attended by a diverse cohort of 100 participants from across the continent: including Liberia, Guinea, Cameroon, Sierra Leone, and Nigeria, etc.

The program showcased a vibrant tapestry of voices, perspectives, and aspirations committed to democratic transformation. With a strong emphasis on gender balance and inclusiveness, the atmosphere throughout the week was marked by openness, mutual respect, and enthusiastic engagement. Young political aspirants, activists, and advocates delved into sessions led by seasoned professionals including politicians, educators, and legal practitioners, who shared firsthand insights into public service, civic responsibility, and

transformational leadership. The week's sessions were characterized by lively debates, interactive lectures, and spirited networking, fostering not only intellectual growth but also interpersonal bonds rooted in shared values. Culminating in a democratic process to elect the Cohort 12 President, where 99 out of 100 participants cast their votes in a transparent and monitored process.

The final day highlighted practical democratic engagement, with Bridge Builders securing 40.4% of the votes and the Pan African Integration Movement claiming victory with 59.6%, Ms. Abbie Yatta Kamara won as President of the Cohort 12. The program concluded with a moving certification ceremony, during which invited dignitaries shared advice, reflections, and words of encouragement, cementing the experience as a transformative chapter in the political journeys of Africa's next generation of leaders.

Objectives of the program

- Strengthen youth political literacy and ethical leadership capacities
- Foster cross-cultural dialogues and regional collaboration among participants
- Provide mentorship through engagement with seasoned leaders and professionals
- Promote gender balance and inclusive participation throughout the program
- Reinforce democratic principles through experiential learning activities
- Celebrate leadership development and participants' achievements through certification

Opening program

The session began with a warm welcome and context setting. **Omolara Balogun**, *Head of Policy Influencing and Advocacy Unit, West Africa Civil Society Institute in Ghana and Board Chair of Naymote Partners for Democratic Development* set the tone by emphasizing the critical challenges facing Africa, including youth exclusion, shrinking civic space, and economic instability.



She highlighted the urgency for youth to be seen not merely as future leaders, but as active contributors to political and economic transformation today. Her address underscored that Africa stands at a critical juncture, where youth leadership must be central to addressing challenges, such as shrinking civic space, economic inequality, and democratic backsliding.

"African youth are not just demanding change, they are creating it. From the streets to the boardrooms, they are building their own tables."

She stressed the urgency of equipping young leaders with the right mindset, given that over 60% of Sub-Saharan Africa's population is under 25, representing "Africa's future" and the "world's largest youth population by 2050." She also announced the upcoming Democracy Innovation Hub and plans for a dedicated leadership training center, calling for donor and partner support. She emphasized the need for youth-led democratic reform and civic engagement, noting that over 1,200 young

leaders from 13 African countries have been trained through YPLS Africa, with many now serving in political and civic leadership roles.

She mentioned that approximately 90% of Africans experience limited civic engagement, prompting the launch of a democratic innovation tool designed to empower young people to transform their ideas into tangible solutions. The initiative has received sustained support from Sweden over the past three years, a commitment that continues today. Additionally, Naymote has developed a fundraising and sustainability plan to ensure the longevity and impact of this program.



Overview of the YPLS Africa

Alpha Faith Kemokai, *Program Manager, YPLS Africa*, provided an overview of the school's goals, reiterating its core objective: to contribute to the formation of a "new generation of character-driven, socially active, and politically responsible youth leaders." She emphasized the importance of program that promote youth engagement in democratic governance and inclusive development across Africa. Noting that since 2016, the program has trained over 1,200 youth, many of whom have risen to become ministers, parliamentarians, activists, and youth advisors across the continent.

With youth comprising over 60% of Africa's population, yet underrepresented in leadership and governance, their voting behavior and dividends of participation remains a pressing concern, largely due to the inadequate civic education, limited political accountability, and access to economic opportunities. This underrepresentation and political marginalization of young people has contributed to rising political apathy, distrust in governance, and increasing social unrest.

In response to these challenges, Naymote Partners for Democratic Development established the Young Political Leadership School Africa (YPLS Africa www.yplsa.org) in 2016. The program equips young African leaders with the necessary skills, knowledge, and tools to engage in democratic governance and political processes effectively. Over the years, YPLS Africa has been and still one of Africa's leading political leadership schools grooming young people for democratic development. The institution have enhanced the capacity of young people to learn, share, collaborate, network, and dialogue to improve their skills in political and civic leadership, electoral administration, and democratic governance.



Alumni Testimonial

Titilope Tawakkaltu Anifowoshe, *Alumna and Director of Programs at the Presidency, Federal Republic of Nigeria*, underscored the importance of young people leading with values and integrity. She described YPLS Africa as a launchpad for youth to overcome self-doubt and reclaim their space in public leadership. *"Here at YPLS Africa, we don't wait to lead; we lead with values and integrity from the moment we walk in,"* She encouraged participants to *"not just network, but connect"* and to *"speak, listen, and be heard."* She emphasized that participants are *"selected for impact and chosen for change."*

Goodwill messages from partners

H.E. Gerard Considine, *Ambassador of the Embassy of Ireland in Liberia*, conveyed Ireland's strong belief in the transformative power of youth leadership, emphasizing their shared commitment to democracy, peace, and inclusive governance. He congratulated Liberia on its recent election to the UN Security Council, noting that this achievement aligns with the aspirations of the next generation and noted that Liberia's leadership is recognized for promoting regional stability and global peace. He referred to the participants as *"architects of Africa's future,"* underscoring that true democracy is only sustainable when it includes the voices of youth and described youth as tremendous assets for global transformation. He emphasized that youth, peace, and security are central themes of the UN Security Council, and the empowerment of youth will lead to positive changes in communities and have profound impacts. ***"We stand with Liberia and Africa in building inclusive, accountable governance."***



Ms. Nikolina Stålhand, *Program Officer, Democracy and Human Rights/Second Secretary, Embassy of Sweden*, expressed Sweden's long-term support for Liberia's democracy, human rights, and good governance. She highlighted the importance of forums like YPLS Africa in times of democracy being challenged in many parts of the world. She commended Liberia as an example of democratic progress in a region where more people are living under authoritarian regimes.

"It's often said that young people are the future- and while I believe that, this is true, I also believe that young people are also the present. You are important here and now"



Ms. Christine Umutoni, *Resident Coordinator United Nations Liberia*, Ms. Umutoni started her remarks by thanking Liberia for securing a non-permanent membership role at the United Nations Security Council, which she described as a significant achievement on the world stage and commended Liberia for its contribution to peacekeeping in other countries and the peaceful transfer of power as a building block for development.

She encouraged young people to engage in politics with a focus on making significant societal changes. She urged participants to be active voices of their community and leaders who bring change. Emphasizing core values, she advised upholding transparency and honesty in actions and trust as the cornerstone of effective leadership. She shared her personal leadership journey and encouraged participants to lead with empathy, courage, collaboration, integrity, and adaptability.

"You are not in leadership for the title; you are here to make change. Politics is not about position, it's about purpose."

She encouraged young people to embrace challenges and learn from them, as problems are temporary and can be overcome. She emphasized the role of young people in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 and described them as an embodiment of hope in Africa and stated that it cannot have the SDGs achieved without youth. The speaker highlighted the importance of unity in diversity and fostering dialogue for collective action. She finally encouraged young people to seize the opportunities and challenge themselves for a better Africa.



H.E. Nona Deprez, *Ambassador and Head of Delegation of the European Union to Liberia*, highlighted the EU's priority in engaging young people in decision-making and democratic processes. Comparing European youth to African youth, she noted that there is a global issue of low political participation among young people, particularly in Europe, but African youth show a strong commitment to democracy and express dissatisfaction with current political systems.

She noted that young people are underrepresented in political decision-making positions, which affects policy priorities, and described youth representation in politics as crucial for policies to reflect the priorities of younger generations.

She encouraged young leaders to advocate for policy changes that directly affect them and see their participation in leadership programs as both an opportunity and a responsibility.

She asks young people to build networks and platforms that can empower youth to challenge political decision-makers, and that Intergenerational collaboration is necessary to address challenges like political participation, representation, and leadership.

She informed participants that European Union is working on youth engagement through strategic partnerships and programs like the Youth Academy and Youth Entrepreneurs Leaders Program and that the EU supports civil society initiatives led by youth, focusing on democratic engagement and civic projects.

She added that the Global Youth Participation Index will provide insights into youth involvement in shaping political models. She cautioned the youth saying *"If you do not participate, others will decide for you."*



Keynote Address

H.E. Josephine A. Nkrumah, *Resident Representative of the President of the ECOWAS*, delivered the keynote address and opened her address by highlighting a paradox: despite Africa's abundance of resources, rich cultural heritage, and vast natural wealth, the continent continues to struggle with poverty and inequality.

She extended warm greetings on behalf of the President of the ECOWAS Commission, recognizing the Young Political Leadership School Africa (YPLS Africa) as a transformative initiative. She commended Naymote Partners for Democratic Development for their steadfast commitment to youth empowerment, aligning with ECOWAS's vision that young people are at the center of reconstruction and development.

With a sense of urgency, she stressed the importance of equipping youth with the knowledge, vision, and ethical leadership needed to build Africa's future.

H.E. Josephine A. Nkrumah reflections framed as three key questions:

1. Who Are You, really?

- Leadership is not just about degrees or résumés but about identity and purpose.
- Understanding one's roots, culture, history, and heritage is key to building authentic leadership.
- African history is rich and revolutionary, shaped by powerful queens, ancient empires, and resilient leaders.
- The keynote speaker emphasized that Africa has always had strong leaders and challenged youth to embrace their historical strength to uplift the continent.

2. What Is Your Purpose?

- Politics should serve the public good, not personal ambition.
- True leadership is measured by its impact on communities, policies, and governance.
- Leaders must ask themselves:
 - Are you leading for the people or yourself?
 - Are you building a legacy or chasing a title?
- Africa requires leaders who break the cycle of performative leadership, embracing ethical governance.

3. What Values Define You?

- Values shape leaders, institutions, and policies.
- Trustworthiness is a cornerstone of ethical leadership, embodying integrity, dependability, and resilience.
- True leaders craft inclusive policies, foster justice, and engage transparently with citizens.
- Leadership grounded in strong values shapes nations and Africa's future.

The Africa We Want

H.E. Nkrumah outlined Africa's shared vision for development:

- a. A prosperous Africa built on inclusive growth
- b. A politically united continent rooted in Pan-Africanism

- c. A continent of good governance, democracy, and rule of law
- d. A peaceful and secure Africa
- e. A culturally strong Africa with shared values and ethics
- f. A people-driven Africa, powered by youth and women
- g. An Africa that is globally respected, resilient, and influential

Despite Africa's wealth, including \$6.5 trillion in untapped resources, 65% of the world's uncultivated arable land, and the youngest population on Earth, the continent still struggles with poverty and inequality.

The speaker challenged youth to recognize that aid alone will not save Africa true transformation requires bold leadership, innovative solutions, and governance tailored to Africa's needs.

Call to Action

- Africa's average leader is over 60, while its average citizen is just 19.

- Youth must rise to close the gap and drive change.
- Africa's demographic strength, natural wealth, and technological potential make it a key player in global multipolarity.
- Leadership must be rooted in values, purpose, and courage to reshape Africa's destiny.

H.E. Nkrumah closed her address with the words of Kwame Nkrumah: "Africa needs a new type of citizen, a dedicated, modest, honest, and informed individual, submerged in service to the nation and mankind. Someone who abhors greed and detests vanity."

Vote of thanks

The session closed with a heartfelt Vote of Thanks from Mr. Alphonso P. Johnson, a YPLS Africa alumnus. He expressed appreciation to all partners, speakers, and participants. He reminded his fellow youth that leadership is not about titles but about service, consistency, and integrity.



EXTENSIVE SUMMARY OF EACH DAY

**Day 1: Monday, June 9,
2025**

Governance and Leadership in the Public Sector: the case of Liberia

Dr. Josiah F Joekia Jr, *Director-General, Civil Service Agency (CSA)-Liberia*, provided a comprehensive overview of governance and leadership, defining governance as mechanisms and processes through which power is distributed, decisions are made, and services are delivered.

He differentiated the public sector (political appointments) from the civil service (professional workforce). He outlined the tenets of good governance, including equitable growth, human rights protection, rule of law, and public accountability, citing examples like Rwanda and Botswana. Conversely, he highlighted the consequences of bad governance, such as corruption, mismanagement, economic decline, and civil unrest.

Dr. Joekai emphasized that youth are “not spectators” but must be “at the table.” He detailed Liberia’s governance evolution, noting President Sirleaf’s focus on foundational governance and anti-



graft institutions, President Weah’s emphasis on infrastructure, and President Boakai’s “system-wide governance reforms” under the ARREST Agenda for Inclusive Development (AAID).

He provided concrete examples of Civil Service Agency reforms, such as removing “ghost names” from the payroll (saving \$8.2 million), reforming the consultancy regime (saving \$4.6 million), and integrating healthcare workers into the national payroll system, which he noted is being modeled by other African nations.

He urged youth to be “agents of governance innovation, not recipients of goodwill,” demanding that governments “put money in budgets that directly cater to the needs of young people.”



The importance of emotional intelligence in political leadership and inclusive development

Dr. Tanya Garnett, *Associate Dean Amos C. Sawyer College of Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Liberia*, introduced emotional intelligence (EQ) as a critical skill for effective leadership, arguing it can matter more than IQ. She defined EQ as “the ability to perceive and express emotions, to understand and use them, and to manage emotions in oneself and other people.” She outlined the five key components of emotional intelligence:

- **Self-awareness:** Recognizing one’s own emotions, strengths, and limits.
- **Self-regulation:** Keeping disruptive emotions and impulses under control (e.g., adaptability, resilience).
- **Motivation:** Personal drive to improve, achieve goals, and maintain optimism.
- **Empathy:** Understanding others’ emotions, perspectives, and actively taking interest in their concerns.
- **Social Skills:** Influencing others, clear communication, visionary leadership, conflict management, and teamwork.

Dr. Garnett used the metaphor of an “emotional soup” to explain that every environment is a combination of everyone’s emotions, and “as a leader, you create the sweetness of your soup.” She distinguished between resonant leadership (understanding group feelings and redirecting them positively) and dissonant leadership (producing negative emotions and stress). She emphasized that effective leaders are not just managers (who “do things right”), but leaders (who “do the right thing”), highlighting that EQ is crucial for professional growth, positive relationships, and overall success. She concluded by encouraging participants to apply EQ in their personal and professional lives, recognizing that emotions are powerful tools to be harnessed effectively.

Key Take Aways from Day 1 Governance and Institutional Reform

- Advocate for a unified, legislated national development agenda that transcends political cycles and ensures policy continuity.
- Strengthen democratic institutions to uphold the rule of law and promote government accountability.
- Advance reforms through political will and courage, ensuring that reforms are data-driven and implemented with transparency.
- Public institutions should be empowering and service-oriented, enabling citizens rather than controlling them.

Youth Leadership and Participation

- Promote intentional youth leadership that is ethical, purpose-driven, and guided by data and context.
- Encourage youth to challenge the status quo by creating alternative

civic and political spaces and engaging in solution-focused dialogue.

- Promote youth entrepreneurship and job creation through supportive and enabling environments.
- Invest in youth as a strategic imperative for realizing Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Civic Responsibility and Personal Leadership

- Begin with individual responsibility: model integrity, honesty, and civic discipline in everyday actions.
- Promote continuous self-leadership and ethical development among youth as a foundation for public service.

Emotional Intelligence in Leadership

- Recognize emotional intelligence (EQ) as a core leadership competency for building trust, managing relationships, and sustaining influence.
- Integrate EQ training into political leadership development programs and civic education.
- Promote reflection, empathy, and interpersonal skills among young leaders through coaching and mentorship.
- Acknowledge that without emotional intelligence, leadership becomes unsustainable, divisive, and disconnected from people.





Day 2: Tuesday, June 10, 2025

Transformational leadership and the significance of ethical decision-making for national and inclusive development

Dr. Rudolph M. Bropleh, *Vice President, Cuttington University School of Professional Studies, Monrovia, Liberia*

During the session, participants voiced concerns about the behavior of many Liberian leaders, citing a disregard for time, traffic rules, and public services, actions that reflect a perception of being above the law and a demand for special treatment at the expense of the citizenry. Corruption was identified as a widespread problem across Africa, underscoring the need for leaders to embrace self-regulation and uphold ethical standards. Several key issues were highlighted, including:

- a. Dependency syndrome addressed by cultivating self-reliance and belief in one's capacity.
- b. Exclusion of marginalized groups remedied through inclusive leadership
- c. Poor mindsets requiring educational opportunities to shift perspectives
- d. Lack of honesty necessitating openness from parents; and
- e. The election of self-serving politicians over true leaders countered by the formation of youth councils to foster informed political engagement.



Dr. Bropleh emphasized that ethical and transformative leadership demands humility and empathy, urging leaders to serve rather than rule. A transformative leader, he noted, must be firmly rooted in ethical decision-making, recognizing the profound responsibility they hold to influence lives constructively.

The fundamental principles of the ECOWAS Commission and how they impact the region's youth.

H.E. Josephine A. Nkrumah, *Resident Representative of the President of the ECOWAS Commission in Liberia.*

H.E. Josephine A. Nkrumah mentioned that during the fundamental principles of the ECOWAS Commission and how they impact the region's youth discussion, ECOWAS has played a significant role in fostering regional integration and stability. The speaker emphasized that unity strengthens nations, while isolation leads to vulnerability. Historically, ECOWAS faced challenges with coup d'états throughout the 1900s, with efforts to curb them gaining momentum in 1993, though the issue was not entirely eradicated.

Resident representatives within ECOWAS are tasked with promoting political stability, peace, and cooperation among member states. One notable benefit of ECOWAS membership is the visa-free travel policy, aimed at enhancing economic integration across West African nations. However, Liberia currently faces a high hunger rate, especially among women with young children aged 1 to 5 years. Addressing such socio-economic concerns remains critical, especially as ECOWAS recognizes youth as central to the region's development and strives to empower them for a sustainable future.

Regional integration as a pathway towards political stability, peace, and security

Kelvin Kamei, *Research & Policy Analyst Department of International Cooperation & Economic Integration (ICEI), Ministry of Foreign Affairs.*

Mr. Kamei mentioned that regional integration is a critical pathway to political stability, peace, security, and good governance in Africa, fostering economic cooperation and institutional strength. By removing trade barriers and promoting shared policies, it enhances economic resilience, reduces conflict, and strengthens democratic institutions. ECOWAS exemplifies this approach through visa-free travel, peacekeeping missions, and governance initiatives that uphold human rights and transparency. As integration deepens, Africa can leverage its youth as a driving force for innovation and development, ensuring long-term sustainability and prosperity.



Day 3: Wednesday, June 11, 2025
Program for Young Politicians in Africa: Building the capacity of young political leaders and increasing youth participation and influence within politics

Emmy Otim, *Regional Manager, Program for Young Politicians in Africa/Uganda*

Emmy Otim opened his session with a powerful call to action for young leaders across the continent. Describing himself as an Afro-optimist, he emphasized the importance of political education, truth-telling, and intentional leadership. Rejecting notions of inherited power, he asserted that “a king is not born, but made,” encouraging youth to challenge misinformation and claim leadership through discipline, learning, and mentorship. Emmy advocated for a new generation of leaders to rise, not through entitlement but through integrity and preparation, stressing that leaders must be readers, connectors, and role models, not mere figureheads.

Throughout his presentation, Emmy explored the deeper systemic challenges facing Africa’s development. He criticized extractive economic practices that inflate GDP without human-centered growth, highlighting that true development must translate into jobs, dignity, and access to basic services. He noted that although African states own 60% of the African Development Bank, the remaining 40% lies in the hands of external powers, reinforcing patterns of dependency. Emmy called for bold self-examination among leaders and citizens alike, declaring that fighting corruption demands personal discipline and civic responsibility.

Emmy drew critical distinctions between mobilization and organization, asserting that while social media can ignite movements, it takes strategy, structure, and continuity to build real power. Referencing the collapse of the Arab Spring due to poor succession planning, he underscored the need for systems that outlast individuals. Drawing on philosophical mentorship chains from Socrates to Alexander the Great, he argued that lasting institutions

depend on deliberate generational investment, not slogans or shallow activism. His insights reminded participants that leadership is a craft, honed over time, requiring patience, wisdom, and strategic planning.

The session also addressed Africa's enduring structural problems rooted in colonial legacy, including tribal divisions, unjust borders, and inherited elite privileges. Emmy challenged the notion of imported democracy, suggesting that Africa must define its own political systems that reflect its history, cultures, and aspirations. He exposed the dangers of unchecked resource exploitation, referencing mining concessions in places like Bomi, Liberia, which offer little benefit to future generations. Emmy advocated for Pan-African integration, including regional airspace and borderless mobility, as pathways to unity, strength, and shared prosperity.

In the interactive portion, participants raised poignant questions about navigating leadership without privilege, building influence outside formal political roles, and confronting the exclusion of youth from decision-making processes. Emmy emphasized that leadership begins with everyday choices—living responsibly, leading by example, and remaining authentic. He cautioned against reckless activism that reinforces harmful stereotypes and urged youth to prioritize organization over chaos. Ultimately, Emmy's session offered a comprehensive, thought-provoking framework for ethical, visionary leadership rooted in African identity, communal values, and strategic readiness.





Remarks before lunch by Mr. Prince Deji Adeyanju

Mr. Deji, a Nigerian seasoned political activist and Human Rights lawyer, delivered a candid and stirring reflection on the realities of youth leadership in Africa. Speaking with urgency and conviction, he defined politics not as a pursuit of status or glamour but as a sacrificial calling. Drawing from his personal experiences, including imprisonment and near-death encounters during protests, he emphasized that leadership must be rooted in humility, integrity, and service.

He outlined six forms of “currency” crucial for political credibility: financial independence, social capital, loyalty, integrity, reliability, and community connection. According to Deji, youth must not shy away from political spaces, as doing so enables unjust systems to persist. Instead, they must enter leadership roles prepared, disciplined, and committed to challenging corruption and transforming society from within.



Following Deji’s remarks, Lillian Best a Princeton University trained, a senior economic corporate strategist and governance expert, nuanced and heartfelt perspective on youth leadership, dignity, and wisdom. She highlighted that many participants were chosen for their teachability and depth of character, urging young leaders to seek growth through lived experience rather than rush toward power for its own sake.

She encouraged participants to see learning in all facets of life, from art and literature to everyday encounters, and to reclaim governance by recognizing that elected officials are servants of the people. Her reflections centered on dignity: for oneself, for fellow citizens, and for systems that must evolve to meet the needs of ordinary people. She challenged gender norms and urged young women to know their worth and never feel compelled to compromise their values for access or recognition.

Together, the speakers delivered a powerful and transformative pre-lunch dialogue on leadership as a moral duty. They stressed that real leadership in Africa cannot be inherited or bought; it must be built through discipline, sacrifice, and service. Participants were challenged to redefine political engagement by rejecting complacency, embracing their responsibility, and committing themselves

to a future where character and competence are valued above connections and charisma. Their messages underscored a shared belief: Africa doesn't need saviors, it needs prepared minded, principled leaders who see governance as a platform for justice, transformation, and collective elevation.



The importance of youth in politics and civic engagement for national development and advocacy for social change

Omolara Balogun, *Head, Policy Influencing and Advocacy Unit, West Africa Civil Society Institute, Accra, Ghana*

Omolara Balogun, the Head of Policy Influencing and Advocacy at the West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI), delivered an engaging session centered on civic engagement, youth leadership, and the power of advocacy in driving social change across West Africa. Drawing from her experience in Ghana and Nigeria, she spoke to the energy and frustration that characterize

younger generations today, while reminding participants that many of the institutions they now critique such as ECOWAS, were once shaped by young people themselves, who also made errors, but still dared to lead.

She challenged the group to think critically about what it means to be a citizen not just someone born in a country, but someone who accepts the rights and also fulfills the obligations that citizenship entails. Civic engagement, she emphasized, is the practice of actively participating in shaping one's community and country. It is through this active role that young people begin to build influence and leadership.

She discussed the importance of youth in politics and civic engagement for national development and advocacy for social change. She continued her lecture on advocacy by prompting the audience with a question: What do you expect to gain from this session? She then explored the fundamental elements that define citizenship, rights, which are granted; obligations, which are guided by law; and responsibilities, which are expected of every citizen. When participants were asked which of these elements should take priority, many chose rights, but she emphasized that since all three are interconnected, they hold equal importance. She continued by discussing civic engagement, describing it as the active participation of citizens in national and community affairs, particularly on issues that directly impact them.

Democracy, she argued, is vital because it serves as the bridge between the people and their government. She explained that discussions are at the core of civic engagement and that

enabling civic space is necessary for change to occur; without such a space, even basic demands for rights become impossible. Unfortunately, civic space and youth involvement are often restricted through various means, including restrictive laws, surveillance, intimidation, stigmatization, arrests, torture, killings of activists, internet shutdowns, freezing of accounts, protest bans, and police harassment. To counteract these restrictions, advocacy is essential, offering a strategic path to addressing injustice and affecting meaningful change.

She stressed that advocacy requires careful planning and is a process, not just a one-time event. At its core, advocacy is about people; it is meant to influence communities to take action. For advocacy to be effective, several key components must be incorporated: research and analysis, fact-based evidence, understanding decision-makers, knowledge of the legal framework, persuasive communication, citizen organization, and an enabling environment.



She explained that identifying a cause requires pinpointing an issue that affects a significant portion of the population, ensuring the case is relevant and credible, not just concerning one ethnic group but the nation at large. Timing is crucial, and advocates must be strategic in addressing their concerns to the right stakeholders. Most importantly, there must be solid evidence to prove that an injustice is occurring. Without a well-framed case and factual backing, advocacy efforts may struggle to gain traction.

Omolara outlined seven central themes that anchored her presentation:

1. Citizen and Citizenship – Citizenship is both legal and moral; it entails rights, responsibilities, and allegiance to a state. It is the foundation for civic action.

2. Civic Engagement – Involves community participation, political action, and social responsibility, especially among young people.

3. Status of Civic Space – She highlighted growing restrictions in West Africa, including surveillance, internet shutdowns, frozen bank accounts, and bans on peaceful protests, all of which silence youth voices.

4. Advocacy for Social Change – Advocacy is more than protest. It's about strategic communication, legal awareness, amplifying marginalized voices, and influencing those in power.

5. Elements of Advocacy – Effective advocacy must be based on evidence, framed within legal and policy contexts, and guided by clear goals and strategies.

6. The Role of Young People – Youth are not just future leaders—they are now leaders. But influence requires preparation, self-discipline, and a deep understanding of issues.

7. Moving from Mobilization to Organization – While mobilizing large groups is important, real impact comes from structured organization, with systems that outlast individuals and movements that are sustained beyond momentary action.

Participants shared expectations ranging from learning how to better engage in advocacy and influence policy to understanding the causes of statelessness, identifying effective solutions to youth challenges, and understanding the strengths and limitations of African political systems. Many were also eager to learn how change could be driven at the community level, and what blueprints already exist that could guide their work.

In group discussions, participants were asked to identify major issues affecting their communities and how they might be addressed through collective advocacy. Commonly mentioned topics included unemployment, drug abuse, teen pregnancy, health crises, climate change, and religious tension. Each group developed advocacy strategies, including awareness campaigns, engagement with local authorities, data-driven storytelling, and legal literacy.

Omolara concluded by reminding the group that advocacy must be intentional. Protesting without a follow-up strategy is not enough. Young people must learn to engage with the system while challenging it. They must organize, build alliances, and understand policy to make lasting impact. Her message was clear: citizenship is not just a status; it is a responsibility. And young people must rise to meet it with focus, strategy, and courage.



Open Government Partnership Initiative: Advancing Accountable Democratic Governance and Enhancing Integrity in National Institutions

W. Lawrence Yealue, II, *Country Director, Accountability Lab Liberia*, delivered an engaging and reflective session centered on civic space, governance, and accountability, using both music and political critique to drive home his points. He opened with Bob Marley's "One Drop (Survival)", urging participants to listen carefully to the lyrics. The message was clear, music and culture are not separate from politics; they are tools for awareness and resistance.

He introduced the Open Government Partnership (OGP) initiative, launched in 2011, which brought together civil society, government, and the private sector to promote co-creation in development. According to Lawrence, this model is essential because at the heart of open government lies the idea of shared decision-making, not just consultation. Real development must be designed jointly, not imposed.

As the session progressed, Lawrence challenged participants to think about civic space and its core pillars, particularly rights, responsibilities, whistleblower protection, and judicial accountability. He emphasized the need for safe environments where individuals can speak out without fear. He also reminded the audience that even judges can make mistakes, which is why judicial review and dissenting opinions are necessary to uphold integrity within legal systems.

Another song was played, continuing the reflective mood, and participants were then asked to consider and respond to four probing questions:

1. What is the media landscape like in Liberia, Nigeria, and Cameroon?
2. What is the role and independence of the Legislature in these countries?
3. If police are appointed by the president under Article 56 of the Liberian Constitution, can they truly serve the state or only the government?



4. How do you genuinely feel about the fact that, since 2005, no senior public official has been held accountable for corruption despite widespread allegations?

The discussion that followed revealed deep frustration. One response focused on the outdated nature of the 1986 Constitution of Liberia, written during a military regime. It was noted that the original committee for the constitution was disbanded by the president because their proposals were too independent, leading to a more favorable version being produced instead. This origin, participants argued, left Liberia with a constitution that has serious flaws. For instance, Article 54/56 gives the president excessive power, making key appointments “at the will and

pleasure” of the presidency, fueling corruption, weakening checks and balances, and compromising institutional independence, including that of the police.

There was also strong critique of the inclusion of blanket amnesty within the constitution and a broader call for constitutional reform to reflect current democratic realities. Lawrence’s session concluded with a sense of urgency: that unless civic space is protected, whistleblowers are empowered, and institutions truly reformed, accountability will remain elusive, and the promise of democracy unfulfilled.



Day 4: Thursday, June 12, 2025

Citizens' Access to Justice and the Rule of Law

Prince Deji Adeyanju, Esq. Discussed Citizens Access to Justice and the Role of the Liberia National Police in upholding the rule of law illustrated the importance of earning one's rights through a personal story about showing his son the "good life" and then taking it away to teach him its value emphasizing that rights, like privileges, must be fought for, not given. Referencing figures like Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela, and Mahatma Gandhi, he reminded participants that "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

The session explored the foundations of justice through social contract theory (Locke, Hobbes, Rousseau, Rawls) and highlighted judicial corruption as a barrier to true justice, stressing that courts must be independent from political, institutional, and personal interference. Pretrial detention and compromised judicial integrity were cited as key issues. The discussion also touched on how economic hardship influences

political choices, with examples like Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso prioritizing resource control and development over democratic ideals. A provocative statement, "a country where religion sells more than products will never develop," underscored the need to focus on economic empowerment and self-determination rather than distraction or dependence.

He mentioned that in Nigeria, there is a common saying: "May Nigeria never happen to you." He then presented a case study based on A.V. Dicey's statement, emphasizing that a country must uphold three key principles: (1) Supremacy of the law, meaning no one is above the law; (2) Equality before the law, ensuring that all individuals have equal opportunities regardless of their status; and (3) The predominance of legal spirit, reinforcing that the law should apply universally, regardless of skin color. He referred to Martin Luther King Jr.'s advocacy for racial equality, highlighting that everyone should have the freedom to board a bus without discrimination.



During his lecture, he argued that the law was originally created to protect the weak but now favors the powerful, often working against the marginalized. He pointed out that judges frequently grant favors to politicians due to personal associations, which undermines judicial independence.

He explained that photography and video recording are prohibited in court sessions to prevent people from approaching judges in public and seeking preferential treatment. He clarified that politicians or spokespersons should never be appointed as judges, as they are highly exposed and often partial, whereas judges must maintain integrity and neutrality in their rulings.

While engaging with participants, he humorously suggested the creation of an “African Hall of Shame” to publicly expose human rights violators. He criticized Africans for often waiting for a “messiah” to fight for their rights, instead of taking responsibility for their own liberation.

He referenced Liberia, noting that the individuals causing instability in the country are fewer than 500, and if the majority of citizens united to reclaim their nation, they would succeed. He concluded by emphasizing that responsible advocacy is essential for institutional reform, urging strategic and deliberate efforts to address injustices and strengthen governance.



The Electoral Cycle and Best Practices for Electoral Administration and Management based on Case Studies on the Continent

Hon. C. A. Lamin Lighe, *Former Country Director, International Foundation for Electoral Systems Tanzania*

In a session led by Hon. C.A. Lamin Lighe, Former Country Director of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) in Tanzania, participants reflected on the full electoral cycle, pre-election planning to post-election accountability, and the importance of treating elections as a continuous process, not just a one-day event.

Drawing on case studies from across Africa, the discussion highlighted key best practices in electoral administration and management, including the need for early planning, inclusive voter education, strong legal frameworks, and inter-agency coordination. The speaker also emphasized the importance of public trust, transparency, and the professionalization of electoral bodies.

Due to Chatham House Rules, specific comments and identities are not attributed, but the session encouraged open reflection and exchange on lessons learned from other country contexts, with a focus on strengthening electoral integrity in Liberia and the region.



Strategies to Navigate Challenges and Harness Women's Leadership in Local Government for Inclusive Development the case of Nimba County

Hon. Kou Meapeh Gono, *Superintendent, Nimba County, Republic of Liberia*

Hon. Kou Meapeh Gono discussed strategies to navigate challenges and harness women's leadership in local government for inclusive development, the case of Nimba County. She mentioned that women in leadership mostly focus on child health, health, education and more emotional areas.

She added that a few barriers that women face in leadership are: ego, not open minded concerning one another, not supportive of each other, jealousy, financial issues, lack of expression, not open minded to work with opposite gender, entitlement issues of men, stereotype of being weaker than men so men feel compelled to take the lead, women suffer for her strength and men suffer for his vulnerability.



A conversation about the Unleashed Dreams: A Thorny Journey to Tranquility

Titilope Tawakkaltu Anifowoshe, *Alumna and Director of Programs at The Presidency, Federal Republic of Nigeria*

This session was designed to provide an inspirational and reflective space for participants through a conversation led by YPLS Africa alumna Titilope Tawakkaltu Anifowoshe. Drawing from her book, *Unleashed Dreams: A Thorny Journey to Tranquility*, she shared her personal journey of overcoming adversity and finding purpose in public service. As Director of Programs at the Nigerian Presidency, her story represents a tangible example of the potential of youth leadership when matched with courage, conviction, and character.

Key Themes & Insights Resilience Through Adversity

Ms. Anifowoshe's narrative emphasized that obstacles can serve as fuel for transformation. She walked participants through her personal struggles, both emotional and social, and how those experiences shaped her vision and leadership style.

Authenticity in Leadership

Participants were challenged to embrace their unique stories and lead from a place of truth. She argued that authenticity, not imitation, is what sustains effective leadership.

Women's Voice and Leadership

She shared her experience as a woman in government, navigating barriers and biases. Her message encouraged young women to take up space, speak with confidence, and assert their leadership without apology.

Dreams and Purpose

Her main call to action: "Unleash your dreams." She stressed that achieving dreams often involves discomfort, rejection, and failure, but that growth comes through those very trials.

Service Over Self

True leadership, she reminded the audience, is not self-serving. It is grounded in a desire to serve others, create impact, and leave institutions better than they were found.

Participant Reflections

- The session sparked personal reflections and vulnerability among participants.
- Many cited the conversation as one of the most emotionally resonant moments of the program.
- Participants shared how the session gave them permission to own their pasts and reframe their leadership identities around lived experience.

This motivational session enriched the YPLS Africa experience by grounding policy and governance training in personal transformation and lived truth. Ms. Anifowoshe's journey from hardship to high office served as a powerful reminder of what is possible when courage meets purpose.

Day 5, Friday, June 13, 2025

Understanding the Significance of Youth Advocacy, Engagement, and Policy Formation to Strengthen Democratic Governance & Developing an Advocacy Strategy and Tools to Improve Performance in Government and Decision-making

Omolara Balogun, Head, Policy Influencing and Advocacy Unit West Africa Civil Society Institute, Accra, recapped the previous day's discussions, during which participants shared what they had learned. Some mentioned gaining insight into the key elements of citizenship, obligations, rights, and responsibilities. Most of them agreed that all these elements are equally important because they are interconnected. Others noted that advocacy is only successful when its timing is perfect, emphasizing the need to recognize the problem and understand its legal framework before proceeding.

One participant highlighted key elements of advocacy, stating that data is essential for carrying out advocacy, and evidence is necessary for making it successful.

Friday's discussion focused on understanding the significance of youth advocacy, engagement, and policy formation in strengthening democratic governance. Omolara listed key elements of advocacy, emphasizing that advocates do not look away, they speak up. She explained that an advocate must research and analyze facts and evidence, possess knowledge of the legal framework, be persuasive in communication, build networks, and organize citizens to enable a movement.



She also noted that while one person can initiate advocacy, it requires collective effort to bring it to completion. Additionally, she stated that an advocate must be fearless, speaking the truth without hesitation or concern for whom they are addressing. Advocacy, she asserted, is not merely an event but a continuous process a call for change that can only be successful through thorough research and analysis.

She also discussed about developing an advocacy strategy and tools to improve performance in government and decision-making.

Public Policy Discussion

Public policy is defined as anything the government chooses to do or not do. During the session, the speaker posed a thought-provoking question: Is policy made by the government, and how can young people contribute to it? A participant from Sierra Leone answered that young people can contribute through stakeholder engagement.

Defining Public Policy

There was a segment where participants were given the opportunity to share key words that define public policy. The words mentioned included:

- **Government**
- **Decision-making**
- **Action**
- **Implementation**
- **Purposive**
- **Addressing societal problems**
- **Actors**
- **Change**
- **Commitment**
- **Goals**
- **Remedy**

The Policy-Making Process

One participant responded to the question about how public policy is created by stating that the process begins with identifying the problem and discussing what needs to be done. From there, the issue is brought to parliament for debate before being accepted.

Omolara then clarified the six global standards for policymaking:

1. Policy implementation and monitoring
2. Policy design (government agencies)
3. Evaluation
4. Constructing policy alternatives
5. Problem definition
6. Choice of preferred solution

She also outlined the correct order in which policymaking should follow:

1. Problem definition (agenda setting)
2. Constructing policy alternatives and policy formation
3. Choosing a solution (selection of the preferred policy option)
4. Policy design (policy makers)
5. Policy implementation and monitoring
6. Evaluation (final step)

Roles in Policymaking

Omolara further explained who is responsible for each step of the process:

- Steps 1, 2, and 3 are primarily driven by local people.
- Steps 1 and 4 fall under legislative responsibilities.
- Step 5 involves administrative oversight.
- Step 6 is primarily handled by NGOs.

She clarified the distinction between policy and law: Laws are mandatory, and breaking them results in punishment, whereas policies serve as guidelines if broken, they carry no legal repercussions.

Advocacy Strategies

Omolara listed various advocacy strategies:

- **Educational strategy**
- **Collaborative strategy**
- **Persuasive strategy**

- **Legal action against the government (if necessary)**

- **Confrontational strategy** (only as a last resort when all other strategies have failed)

She emphasized that every country operates within its own political context, meaning what is allowed in one country may be restricted in another. For instance, while protesting freely in Liberia is permitted, such actions are not tolerated in Korea.

Political Contexts Worldwide

Omolara outlined five political contexts found across the globe:

- 1. Closed context (autocracy)** – Advocacy and protests are prohibited (e.g., Korea).
- 2. Repressed context (semi-autocracy)** – Not fully autocratic but still restrictive (e.g., Rwanda).
- 3. Obstructed context** – Governments can issue decrees and amend constitutions (e.g., America).
- 4. Narrowed context (partially democratic)** – Some democratic principles apply (e.g., Liberia).
- 5. Open context (fully democratic)** – Complete freedom in advocacy and governance.

She noted that, according to legal and accurate data, no African country is fully open in terms of democratic governance.

The Election Process

The names of the teams formed for the election process were called to verify their participation in the voting. At 9:40 AM, the candidates engaged in a heated debate. The election process resumed at 2:49 PM, when participants began casting their votes.

There were two parties in the election:

- 1. Pan African Integration Movement**
- 2. The Bridge Builders**



The campaign for the election took place on Friday, June 13, 2025.

The two contesting teams were the Bridge Builders and the Pan African Integration Movement. The election resumed at 2:49 PM. During the election, participants were asked to leave the room where voting was taking place and were called in one by one to cast their votes for their preferred candidate.

As the election progressed, the results were projected for everyone in the election hall to see. However, those who had not yet voted were not allowed to view the results until they had cast their votes.

It was observed that more women voted for the male candidate of the Bridge Builders team, while many men voted for the female candidate of the Pan African Integration Movement team. After a transparent and peaceful election process, the Pan African Integration Movement team won with a majority vote of 59.6%, while the Bridge Builders team secured 40.4%.

The Pan African Integration Movement led by a female, Ms. Abbie Y. Kamara, won the election as the president of the Young Political Leadership School Africa Cohort 12.



Special remarks and presentation of certificates United Nations Development Programme Liberia

Mr. Louis Kuukpen, *Resident Representative of UNDP*

He started his remark by greeting everyone and then praised the participants for a successful and peaceful election process.

On behalf of UNDP Liberia, heartfelt appreciation is extended to the participants of Cohort 12 for a truly inspiring week of learning and leadership. Youth from across Africa came together to reflect, engage, and grow as future leaders, exploring civic responsibility, ethical leadership, and inclusive development.

Drawing on Ambassador Josephine Nkrumah's thought-provoking questions: Who are you? What is your purpose? What values define you? Participants were encouraged to reflect deeply on their leadership identity and share their responses publicly.

UNDP reaffirmed its commitment to supporting youth-led initiatives aligned with national development goals, Agenda 2063, and the SDGs. As the cohort returns home, they are urged to lead with purpose, uplift others, and act as agents of transformation in their communities. The journey does not end here; the real work begins. He ended by giving some advice to the participants and said that you must be the change you wish to see in the world.

Nikolina Stålhand, *Program Officer, Democracy and Human Rights/Second Secretary, Swedish Embassy*

The Youth Political Leadership School Africa Cohort 12 is not the final destination; it's the beginning of each participant's leadership journey. The program ignited purpose, reflection, and responsibility, urging young leaders to turn inspiration into action. What was learned here must now be applied through service, strategy, and integrity. Participants were chosen not just to attend, but to lead, and the world awaits their impact. Nikolina Stålhand thanked YPLS Africa for a successful program and congratulated the winner of the election. She later commended the class for a peaceful election and mentioned that she now has faith in democracy because of YPLS Africa.



Amb. Jakob Haselhuber, Ambassador of Germany

He stated that he was very pleased with the level of democracy he saw during the cohort, election process and explained that the government process is different in his country and then ended by saying politics is about compromising not about who wins or not.

Omolara T. Balogun

In her remark she said that regardless of who you are, connecting with other people is more important. You need principles in life and commended the everyone on a successful program and announced the Nigeria is open to host cohort 13 in their country.





CONCLUSION

Over the course of five days, the Youth Political Leadership School Africa – Cohort 12 offered far more than a series of lectures and workshops. It delivered a transformative journey, one that challenged, equipped, and inspired young Africans to reimagine their role in shaping the continent's future. Through intensive engagement with governance experts, civil society leaders, and regional actors, participants were guided to reflect deeply on what it means to lead with purpose, principle, and responsibility.

A recurring thread throughout the week was the call for ethical and accountable leadership. Participants were reminded that true leadership is not rooted in power, but in service—grounded in humility, integrity, and an unwavering commitment to the public good. They explored how institutional reform, and public trust can only be built when leaders place people above politics.

Just as critical was the theme of emotional intelligence. The ability to understand and manage emotions, one's own and others', emerged as a vital leadership tool. Participants were encouraged to cultivate empathy, resilience, and the soft skills that foster genuine human connection, especially in times of conflict and uncertainty.

Youth were called to move beyond the margins and into the decision-making spaces where policies are shaped, and futures are defined. They were urged not to wait to be invited to the table, but to build new ones, ones that are inclusive, transparent, and responsive to the realities of their generation. The message was clear: young people are not the leaders of tomorrow; they are leaders now.

Civic engagement, advocacy, and active citizenship formed another pillar of the program. Participants were taught that real change does not come from protest alone, but from coordinated, evidence-based advocacy that is rooted in both legal frameworks and moral conviction. They learned that to truly own their role as citizens, they must balance rights with responsibilities and commit to the hard work of reform.

Speakers also impressed upon the cohort that Africa's strength lies in its unity. Through discussions on regional integration and Pan-Africanism, participants were encouraged to transcend national borders and work toward shared goals of peace, mobility, and economic resilience. They were reminded that Africa's development must be driven by African solutions, grounded in a shared vision and cultural self-confidence.

The rule of law and justice systems were examined critically, with frank conversations about the gaps in access, the erosion of independence, and the urgent need for judicial reform. Participants learned that democracy cannot survive without courts that are impartial and police forces that serve the people rather than the state. Strategic advocacy was positioned as a powerful tool for building accountability from the ground up.

A vital focus was placed on gender equity and inclusive governance. Through testimony and lived experience, participants saw clearly that progress depends on the full and equal participation of women. They were called to confront bias, dismantle stereotypes, and foster political spaces where everyone, regardless of gender, can lead and thrive.



Finally, participants engaged deeply with the policymaking process and democratic practice through a live simulation of elections. This hands-on experience illuminated the challenges of fair campaigning, voter engagement, and peaceful contestation. It also offered valuable insights into how democratic values are cultivated through institutions, culture, education, and behavior.

In all these areas, governance, emotional intelligence, civic responsibility, regional cooperation, justice, gender equity, public policy, and electoral integrity, the message was consistent: leadership is a choice made daily. It is a lifelong journey rooted in values, shaped by experience, and defined by action.

As this cohort returns to their communities across Africa, they do so not as observers of change, but as its authors. They carry with them the knowledge that leadership begins with self but must always serve others. The future of Africa belongs to those willing to lead with courage, compassion, and clarity. This cohort is ready to lead.

Certification

Certificate Presenters: Nikolina Stålhand, Omolara Balogun, Louis Kuukpen, Ambassador Jakob Haselhuber.

Closing Reflections

- Leaders must combine conviction with collaboration.
- Cohort 13 is slated to take place in Nigeria, signaling continued continental expansion.

Strategic Recommendations

- Institutionalize Youth Pipelines – Embed mentorship and training into governance systems.
- Modernize Legal Frameworks – Advance anti-corruption and constitutional reforms.
- Mainstream Civic and Emotional Intelligence – Embed in curricula and leadership development.
- Promote Regional Cooperation – Facilitate cross-border youth networks and dialogues.
- Strengthen Data-Driven Advocacy – Equip youth with research and communication tools.



NEARING A DECADE: YPLS AFRICA'S COUNTDOWN TO 10

Since its founding in 2016, the Young Political Leadership School Africa (YPLS Africa) has grown into a bold, pan-African force, grooming over 1,200 ethical and visionary leaders from 13 countries. Now, as 2026 approaches, YPLS Africa is gearing up to celebrate a historic 10-year milestone, a decade of nurturing changemakers, igniting civic action, and building accountable leadership across the continent.

To mark this occasion, YPLS Africa has embarked on a powerful rebranding journey, revamping its logo to reflect authenticity and copyrighting its trademark and founding year to preserve its legacy and protect its growing identity.

As part of this transformational moment, an Interim Alumni Coordinating Team has been appointed to lead the alumni body into its next chapter. This exceptional team is charged with organizing the movement's first-ever alumni elections, hosting cross-border alumni events, and creating a grand celebration of a decade of impact, one that will spotlight the untold stories of alumni shaping Africa's future.

The team is led by Chairperson Titilope Tawakkaltu Anifowoshe, supported by a dynamic group of leaders:

- Shiphrah Kenemassa Saydee and Sandra J. Dorbor – Programs & Mobilization Leads
- Musu Davies and Alphonso P. Johnson – Communications & Outreach Leads
- Mohammed M. Bamba Jr. and Leslie Jones – Governance & Policy Coordinators
- Nicole B. Weeks and Danta T. Saryee – Finance & Fundraising Coordinators
- Welley T. Baar and C. Augustus Nimely – Membership & Welfare Coordinators
- Moijama L. Dunor and Millias Z. Sheriff – Advisors

Together, they represent the heart and spirit of YPLS Africa collaborative, committed, and forward-looking. With their leadership, the YPLS Africa Alumni Network is poised to deepen its continental footprint and inspire a new generation of political leaders.

As the countdown to 2026 begins, YPLS Africa invites partners, supporters, and alumni to be part of this celebratory movement one decade down, and a lifetime of leadership ahead.

ANNEXES

Full Program Agenda (June 9–13, 2025)

Day 1: Monday, June 9, 2025		
Opening Session		
07:30 - 08:50 am	Registration/Breakfast	Secretariat
9:00 - 9:45 am	Arrival of Dignitaries and Guests	Protocol
10:00 - 10:10 am	Introductory Remarks	Omolara T. Balogun Board chair, Naymote Head, Policy Influencing and Advocacy Unit West Africa Civil Society Institute, Accra, Ghana
10:10 - 10:15 am	Overview of the YPLS Africa	Alphia Faith Kemokai Program Manager, YPLS Africa
10:15 - 10:40 am	Goodwill messages from partners (Motivational Statements)	Titilope Tawakkaltu Anifowoshe Alumna and Director of Programs at the Presidency, Federal Republic of Nigeria Nikolina Stålhand Program Officer, Democracy and Human Rights and Second Secretary, Embassy of Sweden near Monrovia Republic of Liberia H. E. Gerard Considine Ambassador, Embassy of Ireland near Monrovia Republic of Liberia Ms. Christine Umutoni Resident Coordinator, United Nations Liberia H. E. Nona Deprez Ambassador, European Union in Liberia, Republic of Liberia
10:40 - 11:00 am	Keynote Address	H.E. Josephine A. Nkrumah Resident Representative of the President of the ECOWAS Commission in Liberia, Republic of Liberia

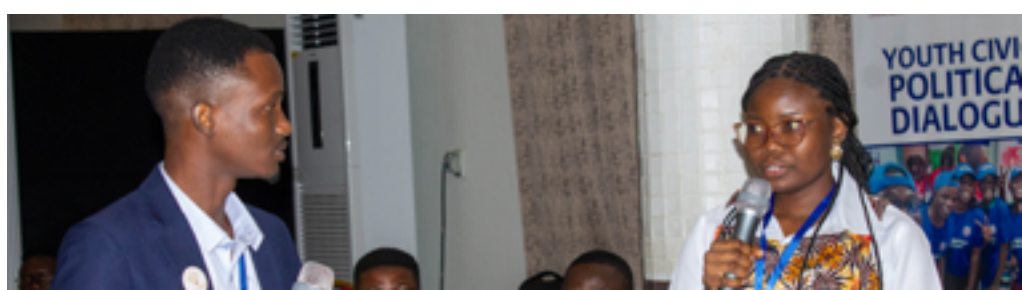
11:05 - 11:30 am	Honorary Guest Solidarity Remarks	H.E. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf Former President, Republic of Liberia
11:35 - 11:40 am	Vote of thanks	Alphonso P. Johnson Alumnus, Young Political Leadership School Africa
11:45 am - 12:00 pm	Photos and Departure of Special Guests & Dignitaries	
12:00 - 1:00 pm	LUNCH	Hotel and Naymote
1:00 - 2:30 pm	Governance and Leadership in the Public Sector: the case of Liberia	Dr. Josiah F. Joekai, Jr Director-General Civil Service Agency-Liberia
2:35 - 4:30 pm	The importance of emotional intelligence in political leadership and inclusive development.	Dr. Tanya A. Garnett Associate Dean Amos C. Sawyer College of Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Liberia
Day 2: Tuesday, June 10, 2025		
08:00 - 09:00 am	Registration /Breakfast	Secretariat
09:00 - 09:35 am	Recap Day 1	Participants
9:30 – 11:00 am	Transformational leadership and the significance of ethical decision-making for national and inclusive development	Rudolph Monsio Bropleh, Ph.D. Vice President, School of Graduate & Professional Studies Cuttington University
11:00 am - 1:00 pm	The fundamental principles of the ECOWAS Commission and how they impact the region's youth.	H.E. Josephine A. Nkrumah Resident Representative of the President of the ECOWAS Commission in Liberia Republic of Liberia
1:00 - 2:00 pm	LUNCH	
3:35 - 5:00 pm	Regional integration as a pathway towards political stability, peace, and security.	Kelvin Kamei Research & Policy Analyst Department of International Cooperation & Economic Integration (ICEI), Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Day 3: Wednesday, June 11, 2025		
9:00 to 9:30 am	Recap of Day 2	
9:35 - 11:00 am	Program for Young Politicians in Africa: Building the capacity of young political leaders and increasing youth participation and influence within politics.	Emmy Otim Regional Manager, Program for Young Politicians in Africa/Uganda
11:05 - 1:00 pm	Dividends and Politics: Leadership in political parties and political ideology that promotes dividends for everyone	Emmy Otim Regional Manager, Program for Young Politicians in Africa/Uganda

1:00 - 2:00 pm	LUNCH	
2:00 - 4:00 pm	The importance of youth in politics and civic engagement for national development and advocacy for social change	Omolara Balogun Head, Policy Influencing and Advocacy Unit West Africa Civil Society Institute, Accra, Ghana
4:00 - 5:00 pm	Open Government Partnership Initiative: Advancing accountable democratic governance and enhancing integrity in national institutions	W. Lawrence Yealue, II Country Director, Accountability Lab Liberia
Day 4: Thursday, June 12, 2024		
9:30 – 10:30 am	Citizen Access to Justice and the Role of Government in Upholding the Rule of Law	Prince Deji Adeyanju Human Rights Activist and Lawyer Convener, Concerned Nigerians
10:30 am -12:30 pm	The electoral cycle and best practices for electoral administration and management based on case studies on the continent.	Hon. C. A. Lamin Lighe Former County Director International Foundation for Electoral Systems, Tanzania
12:30 - 1:30 pm	LUNCH	
3:00 - 4:00 pm	Strategies to navigate challenges and harness women's leadership in local government for inclusive development the case of Nimba County	Hon. Kou Meapeh Gono Superintendent Nimba County Republic of Liberia
4:10 - 5:30 pm	A conversation about the Unleashed Dreams: A Thorny Journey to Tranquility.	Titilope Tawakkaltu Anifowoshe Alumna and Director of Programs at The Presidency, Federal Republic of Nigeria
Day 5: Friday, June 13, 2025		
08:00 - 9:00 am	Registration /Breakfast	Secretariat
09:00 - 09:55 am	Recap Day 4	Participants

10:00am-1:00 pm	Understanding the significance of youth advocacy, engagement, and policy formation to strengthen democratic governance.	Omolara Balogun Head, Policy Influencing and Advocacy Unit West Africa Civil Society Institute, Accra, Ghana
1:00 - 2:00 pm	LUNCH	
2:00 - 3:30 pm	Developing an advocacy strategy and tools to improve performance in government and decision-making	Omolara Balogun Head, Policy Influencing and Advocacy Unit West Africa Civil Society Institute, Accra, Ghana
	Closing Ceremony	
3:35 - 3:40 pm	Arrival of Guests	MC
3:40 - 4:00 pm	Special Statement	
	Special remarks and presentation of certificates	Nikolina Stålhand Program Officer, Democracy and Human Rights/Second Secretary, Embassy of Sweden near Monrovia Republic of Liberia Mr. Louis Kuukpen Resident Representative, United Nations Development Programme Amb. Jakob Haselhuber Ambassador Federal Republic of Germany Republic of Liberia Ministry of Foreign Affairs, RL
4:10 - 5:00 pm	Vote of thanks, pictures, and departure	

Photo Gallery









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2025**

**NAYMOTE PARTNERS FOR
DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT**

ELWA, Paynesville, Monrovia -
Liberia
eddie@naymote.com
+231886784328

www.naymote.com
www.yplsa.org

