



YOUNG
POLITICAL
LEADERSHIP
SCHOOL
AFRICA



YPLS AFRICA

COHORT 13

EMPOWERING THE FUTURE:

FROM LEARNING TO LEADERSHIP FOR AFRICA'S AGENDA 2063



LEARN.

Gain the knowledge
to lead with purpose.



CONNECT.

Build networks that
transcend borders.



LEAD.

Transform ideas into
impact for Africa.



About Naymote

Naymote Partners for Democratic Development is a leading Liberian civil society organization, founded in 2001 by student leaders and activists: dedicated to promoting democracy, human rights, and political accountability. Its mission is to bridge the gap between citizens and government by empowering individuals, advocating for transparent governance, and building the capacity of local government officials and emerging leaders.

Key programs include: the President Meter Project (PMP) and Young Political Leadership School Africa (YPLS Africa). Through these initiatives, Naymote conducts civic education, tracks campaign promises & national development agenda's implementation, and trains youth about leadership, elections administration, and governance. While headquartered in Paynesville City, the organization's reach spans across all 15 Liberian counties, with extensive influence throughout the broader West African region.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	4
YPLS Africa in Numbers	5
Who We Are and Why	6
Part One: A Continent Gathers	10
Part Two: The Learning Week	17
Day 2: Democratic Governance, Ethics, and Integrity	18
Day 3: Political Participation, Civic Engagement, and Policy Influence	20
Day 4: Politics, Ideology, Digital Democracy, Youth, Peace & Security	23
Day 5: Synthesis, Action Planning, and Closing	26
Part Three: Voices of Cohort 13	30
Part Four: The Network Effect: Alumni Stories	33
Part Five: Commitments and the Road Ahead	36
• Statement from the Board Chair	38
• Facilitators	39
• Team	40
• Partners	41
• Cohort 13	42

Acknowledgements

Naymote Partners for Democratic Development extends its sincere appreciation to the partners, speakers, facilitators, volunteers, alumni, staff, and friends whose contributions made YPLS Africa Cohort 13 - and the program's tenth anniversary - possible.

We extend special gratitude to Dr. Mmusi Maimane, Member of the Parliament of South Africa, President of the African Democratic Alliance for Freedom and Progress (ADAFP), and Leader of Build One South Africa, for delivering the keynote address; and to Mr. Aliou Mamadou Dia, UNDP Resident Representative in Liberia, for his remarks as Guest Speaker. We also recognize our Guests of Honor: Dr. Ibrahim Nyei, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Liberia; H.E. Karl Bäckéus, Ambassador of Sweden to Liberia and Sierra Leone; and Ms. Massa Crayton, for their support and encouragement.

YPLS Africa remains deeply grateful to the Embassy of Sweden, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Liberia for their continued partnership and investment in democratic leadership. We further acknowledge the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and the Embassy of Sweden in Monrovia through the Democracy Advancement Program, as well as the Liberia Petroleum Refining Company (LPRC), whose support contributed to the successful convening of this milestone cohort.

The quality of Cohort 13 was shaped long before the opening ceremony. We therefore extend special appreciation to the Interview and Vetting Committee - Mr. James Earl Kiawoin, Country Manager, Liberia, The Luminos Fund; Ms. Lilian Best; Ms. Cynthia Akhagbeme-Simeon, Head of Programs, Research and Development at the Lateef Jakande Leadership Academy (LJLA), Lagos State Government, Nigeria; and Mr. Alex Kayee - for the time, judgment, and care invested in reviewing applicants and supporting a selection process designed to identify promising political and civic leaders.

We recognize the YPLS Africa alumni network, whose continued service, leadership, and civic engagement remain the strongest evidence of the program's long-term value. We also acknowledge the Naymote Board of Directors and the full program team, with special recognition to Program Manager Alpha Faith Kemokai for coordinating the planning and delivery of Cohort 13.

Finally, we thank the facilitators and resource persons who brought experience and substance into the learning space, including Ms. Omolara Balogun of the West Africa Civil Society Institute in Accra, Ghana, and Mr. Emmy Otim of the Program for Young Politicians in Africa, Uganda, along with every speaker, moderator, panelist, volunteer, and participant who helped make the tenth-anniversary cohort a meaningful learning and leadership experience.

To everyone who has believed in YPLS Africa over the past decade: thank you for helping build a platform where young Africans can learn, connect, lead, and serve.

YPLS Africa in Numbers

Impact of the Young Political Leadership School Africa, 2016–2026.

Since 2016, the Young Political Leadership School Africa has grown from a Liberian leadership initiative into a Pan-African platform for preparing emerging political and civic leaders. Across 13 cohorts, YPLS Africa has combined intensive training, mentorship, internships, regional networking, and post-training civic engagement - building a growing pipeline of young leaders prepared to influence institutions, political parties, civil society, and communities across the continent.

A decade of leadership development and civic impact



1,300+

leaders trained



13

cohorts since 2016



15

African countries reached
over the decade



50

alumni have contested for
national political seats



35+

appointed to government
and other professional offices



100+

elected to leadership roles

Who we are and why we do this



Africa is the youngest continent on earth. Its median age is 19. By 2050, one in every four people in the world will be African. In a century that will be defined by competition for talent, by the politics of climate, by the governance of technology, and by the question of whose values shape the global order, Africa's young people are not a gloss. They are the story.

And yet, across the continent, the systems responsible for preparing young people to lead remain chronically underfunded, structurally exclusive, and, too often, designed to manage youth participation rather than enable it. The gap between Africa's demographic reality and its political reality transcends a statistical curiosity. The continent is facing a governance crisis. The average age of an African head of state is ~63; the average age of an African citizen is ~19. No continent can govern itself well across a forty-year age gap between the governed and those who govern them.

The Young Political Leadership School Africa (YPLS Africa) exists to address this gap.

Created in Liberia in 2016 by Naymote Partners for Democratic Development, the YPLSA began as a conviction, an argument that the quality of democratic governance in Africa depends directly on the quality of the leaders entering political and civic life, and that quality leadership does not emerge by accident. It is built, deliberately, through values formation, political education, peer networks, and deep engagement with ideas that ignite action.

Ten years later, that conviction has been tested, refined and validated. More than 1,300 young leaders have completed YPLS Africa's cohorts. Of them, 50 alumni have contested for national political seats, more than 35 appointed to government and professional offices, and over 100 have been elected to leadership roles across institutions, political parties, student bodies, and communities. More than 200 have received recognition for leadership, civic engagement, entrepreneurship, and community service.



1. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, World Population Prospects 2024. See also Bruno Venditti, "Mapped: Median Age by Region in 2026," Visual Capitalist, March 12, 2026, available at visualcapitalist.com, which reports Africa's median age as the lowest of any region globally, citing the same UN source.
2. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, World Population Prospects 2024 (New York: United Nations, 2024), available at population.un.org/wpp.
3. Cited by Mr. Emmy Otim, Regional Manager, Christian Democratic International Center (Sweden), during the Principles of Democratic Governance session, YPLS Africa Cohort 13, Margibi County, Liberia, June 9, 2026. See also Aya Chebbi and Mamphela Ramphele, "How to Close Africa's Generation Gap," Club of Rome, January 17, 2024. Available at clubofrome.org.

More than 300 remain politically active across the region. Alumni-led civic initiatives have reached more than 10,000 citizens. And through one partnership announcement at the Cohort 13 opening session, YPLS Africa's reach expanded by a continental order of magnitude: 44 political parties across 25 countries now in formal alignment through African Democratic Alliance for Freedom and Progress, (ADAFP). None of this happened merely because the initiative is popular, but because it offers substance. Young people do not just lodge at a hotel for a week and depart with certificates, they are immersed into a structured encounter with ideas, with evidence, with each other, and with the demands of genuine leadership. Through its alumni network, the program creates a structure for continued engagement and accountability to the commitments participants make during the immersive program.

Cohort 13, convened in Margibi County, Liberia, in June 2026, marks the program's tenth anniversary. Under the theme Empowering the Future: From Learning to Leadership for Africa's Agenda 2063, it brought together emerging leaders from seven African countries (Liberia, Nigeria, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Ghana, South Africa, and Sudan) for six days of political education, ethical leadership development, peer learning, and continental networking.

This report tells the story of the week, but it also captures a wider narrative: the case for why programs like this are not a luxury, but a necessity.

Our Pillars

1. **Prepare.** We equip emerging leaders with political knowledge, ethical frameworks, and the practical skills of democratic leadership before they enter positions of influence.
2. **Connect.** We build a continental network of young leaders who share values rather than borders, turning individual potential into collective power.
3. **Inspire.** We hold up the evidence in alumni stories, in data, in the examples of what becomes possible—that a different Africa is not a dream but an outcome that can be built, deliberately, by the people in our rooms.

A decade in the making

The story of YPLS Africa begins with crossing a border, not a strategy document or a concept note.

In 2012, Eddie Jarwolo traveled to Lima, Peru, to attend a democracy assembly. While there, he encountered a structured, substantive school for young political leaders. He returned home and built one for Africa's young people.

The first cohort convened in Monrovia in 2016 with a small group of Liberian participants, a borrowed curriculum, and the intense belief that the nexus between Africa's ambition and democratic reality was, at its root, a leadership preparation problem. The program was regional from the start: connecting young leaders across the MRU countries of Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea. And it was always deliberately Liberian; grounded in the particular experience of a country that had been through the worst a democratic breakdown can produce and was choosing, against considerable odds, to rebuild.

Each subsequent year expanded the geography, deepened the curriculum, and grew the network. Cohort two brought Guinea in more formally. Later cohorts added Nigeria, Ghana, and partners from across the continent. By 2024, YPLS Africa was reaching young leaders from 14 African countries. With Cohort 13 and the arrival of a delegation from South Africa, that number reached 15.

The program has also grown in stature. The Open Society of West Africa (OSIWA) invested the first fund, followed by the National Endowment for Democracy; and The Swedish Embassy has provided multi-year support. UNDP became a partner. West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI) sends their practitioners as facilitators.

Heads of State and ministers have graced its opening sessions. And in 2026, African Democratic Alliance for Freedom and Progress (ADAFP), a newly formed alliance of 44 democratic political parties across 25 African countries announced a formal partnership with YPLS Africa for continental leadership training. Both signed a memorandum of understanding to establish the ADAFP Leadership Academy as a pan-African center of

excellence. But the most important measure of a decade is not the partnerships. It is the people.

The alumni of YPLS Africa are in parliaments, in party leadership, in civil society, in local government, and in communities across the continent. Some of them entered the program shy, uncertain, narrowly focused on their immediate context. They left with a continent-wide frame of reference, a network that crossed borders, and a sense of obligation to use what they had been given. The stories in this report from Titilope in Nigeria, Mohamed in Sierra Leone, Abdourhamane in Guinea, Mary in Liberia reflect what YPLS Africa represents.

Alpha Faith Kemokai, YPLS Africa's Program Manager, put it this way at the Cohort 13 opening: ***"These are not just numbers. They are stories of young people who came with passion and left with stronger values, sharper tools, greater confidence, and wider networks."***

She then turned to the program's founder and said: ***"Mr. Eddie Jarwolo, I hope this vision of yours is making sense now."***

Because it is.



A CONTINENT GATHERS...



Opening – A continent gathers

The weight of this moment

There is a particular quality to the opening of a gathering that understands its own significance. The official opening session of Cohort 13 carried that weight. Delegates represented countries across Africa, senior public officials and development partners shared the platform, and the room was filled with emerging leaders considering the kind of leadership they intended to practice. This was not simply the beginning of another cohort; it was the opening of YPLS Africa's tenth-anniversary edition - a moment to reflect on what had been built and to look ahead to what could come next.

The opening session was moderated by Ms. Rochelle Amour Sandolo, Student Council President of Heritage International Leadership Academy and a member of Cohort 13. Entrusting a young participant with the responsibility of guiding a high-level opening ceremony reflected a central principle of YPLS Africa: young people should not only be present in important rooms; they should be trusted with responsibility in them.



*Ms. Rochelle Amour Sandolo -
Master of Ceremony / Cohort 13 Participant*



*Peace Thor Mahteh Boyee - Program Director,
Naymote Partners for Democratic Development.*

Opening remarks were delivered by Peace Thor Mahteh Boyee, Program Director at Naymote Partners for Democratic Development. She welcomed delegates to the milestone cohort and described the week as “a celebration of a decade of impact, sacrifice, partnership, and belief in the power of young people to lead differently.” She then guided participants through the structure of the week and reflected on a decade in which YPLS Africa alumni have moved into appointed government roles, civil society leadership, elected offices, political parties, and community institutions across the continent.

Her closing charge captured the spirit of the week: “You are not leaders of tomorrow alone; you are leaders of today.” A video documentary on YPLS Africa's decade of impact, presented by Program Manager Alpha Faith Kemokai, followed. With the opening complete, the cohort moved from celebration into the work of learning, reflection, and leadership practice.

A region on stage

Three ministers of youth from the Mano River Union sat together on the same platform: from Sierra Leone, from Guinea, and from Liberia. It was, as the Liberian minister would later note, intentional. And overdue.



Hon. Ibrahim Sannoh, Minister of Youth Affairs, Republic of Sierra Leone, organized his remarks around a single phrase: “Together We Can.” But he was not trading in slogans. He named four specific collective tasks. Building an Africa where everyone is each other’s keeper. Creating seamless trade between African countries. Enabling free movement across borders. Consolidating the continent’s natural resources for collective benefit.

In a crucial statement, he emphasized, **“Nothing for us without us. As Africans, we need to believe in ourselves and transform our minds. If we do, we will not always need the IMF and the World Bank.”** Directed inward, at a generation of young leaders who have grown up in a political culture that too often asks them to wait for permission from institutions outside Africa to pursue their own continent’s future.

A representative of Hon. Cellou Baldé, Minister of Youth and Civic Education, Republic of Guinea, and Atty. Cornelia Wonkerleh Kruah, Minister of Youth and Sports, Republic of Liberia, completed the MRU ministerial delegation. Their presence, representing three countries that share not only borders but decades of conflict and shared rebuilding, was itself the argument the morning was making.

The first revolution is internal

If there was a moment in the opening session that delegates would still be thinking about days later, it was the address by Atty. Cornelia Wonkerleh Kruah, Minister of Youth and Sports, Republic of Liberia, the country’s youngest minister, and youngest ever minister of youth and sports speaking on behalf of President Joseph Nyuma Boakai and the Government of Liberia.

Atty. Kruah opened her address by highlighting that Liberia has over the last thirty years been both a wound and a healing, both the problem and the solution. This was the precise reason, she believes, the country is worth gathering in. The Mano River Declaration of 1973 was signed by Presidents Siaka Stevens and William Tolbert, named after a river that traces the border between Sierra Leone and Liberia down to the Atlantic. “It is a river,” she said, “that has never asked for a passport.” When the civil war tore through the region in the 1990s, Liberia and Sierra Leone did not fall apart in isolation, but together, and rebuilt together. YPLS Africa, she argued, is part of the rebuilding story.

She drew a distinction that she described as central to the purpose of a program like this one. **“Political education is not the same as political recruitment. It is not preparation for a campaign, but for citizenship – active, informed, conscious, critical citizenship.”** She invoked Antonio Gramsci, writing from a fascist prison cell in 1930s Italy, who argued that systems of power are maintained not only by force but by ideas. To change the system, you must first change the ideas. She also highlighted Kwame Nkrumah, who believed that you cannot build a free state with an unfree mind. And she brought both through Edward Wilmot Blyden—born in 1832, denied admission to an American seminary because of his race, and eventually one of the most consequential African thinkers of the nineteenth century—who argued that Africa’s liberation had to be rooted in the recovery of the African identity, not in the limitation of [the West].

“Bob Marley was not speaking metaphorically when he said, ‘Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery,’” she told the room. **“He was speaking practically. The first revolution is internal.”**

Atty. Kruah asked delegates to carry three things when they leave. The first, consciousness of knowing who they are, where they come from, and what their society has survived. The second, relationships. Everyone could be a co-conspirator in progress. And finally, responsibility. What will the return on investment in such a program be – not for those who financially invested, but for the communities where these young leaders are from.

Crossing borders we did not know



Two goodwill statements bookended the ministerial segment, and between them laid out the full complexity of what Africa’s young leaders are inheriting a set of challenges that respects no map, no single continent, and no easy division between “here” and “elsewhere.”

H.E. Karl Bäckéus, Ambassador of Sweden to Liberia and Sierra Leone, opened his remarks by widening the lens well beyond Africa’s borders. Democratic backsliding, he told the room, is not an African problem. It is a worldwide one, as visible in Asia, Europe, and North America as it is on this continent. In making this point, Ambassador Bäckéus resisted a framing that too often treats democratic fragility as a uniquely African affliction, insisting instead that the pressures on democratic institutions polarization, distrust in public institutions, the erosion of civic norms are shared pressures playing out on every continent, including his own.

He grounded this observation in a paraphrase of Winston Churchill’s famous line on governance: that democracy is the worst form of government, except for all the others that have been tried. For Ambassador Bäckéus, the value of the line was not in its wit but in what it implies about responsibility. If democracy is worth defending precisely because every alternative has proven worse, then its survival cannot be taken for granted or left to institutions alone. It requires people, generation after generation, who are willing to actively defend it through participation, through vigilance, and through the everyday work of holding leaders and systems accountable.

That, ultimately, was his call to action for the young people in the room: not simply to inherit democratic institutions, but to see themselves as their custodians. His remarks served as a reminder that the struggle Africa’s young political leaders are preparing to take on is not theirs alone. It is part of a broader, global contest over whether democratic governance can renew itself for a new generation a contest playing out in Stockholm and Washington as much as in Monrovia.



The challenge is transition.

Mr. Aliou Dia, Resident Representative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Liberia, took the podium to deliver a pointed address on the role of young people in shaping the continent's political future. He opened not with an assertion but with a challenge, framing the debate in terms that left no room for complacency. "The real question," he told the room, "is not whether young people will shape Africa's future. The question is, what kind of future will they shape? Will it be a future of unity or division? Opportunity or exclusion? Integrity or corruption? Hope or fear?" He let the words settle before adding, "The answer lies in the choices you make as leaders, starting now."

Turning to the Liberian context specifically, Mr. Dia was candid about the structural barriers young people continue to face. He pointed to limited access to finance, weak support systems, a persistent mismatch between education and labor market demand, cumbersome bureaucratic hurdles, and gender inequality that compounds disadvantage for young women in particular. Despite this, he was equally emphatic about what he sees on the ground: Liberian



youth, he said, demonstrate resilience, creativity, and ambition every day, often in spite of the systems meant to support them rather than because of them. "You are ready to lead," he told the audience. "What you need are systems that connect your potential to real opportunities."

He closed his remarks with a challenge that reframed the entire conversation around leadership itself. Africa, he argued, does not need more politicians; it needs more ethical leaders. It does not need more promises; it needs action. It does not need leaders who seek power for themselves; it needs leaders who use power responsibly. "History rarely remembers those who simply held positions," he said, "but those who transformed societies. Those who expanded opportunity, defended justice, and inspired hope."

Reflecting afterward on the engagement, Mr. Dia described it as a pleasure to spend time with the Young Political Leadership School Cohort 13 on the subject of youth political participation across Africa. His central message to the cohort was direct: Africa does not have a youth participation problem. Young people are already active participants in politics, advocacy, and civic life across the continent. The real challenge, he argued, is converting that existing participation into genuine influence, leadership, and decision-making power moving young people from the margins of political life to its center.

Drawing on his own background as a development practitioner across Africa and as a presidential candidate in Senegal's 2024 election, Mr. Dia encouraged the young leaders in the room to move beyond protest and to actively prepare to govern. He framed this preparation around three pillars: building competence, strengthening institutions, and embracing public service as a vocation rather than a stepping stone. This shift in orientation, he suggested, is what separates movements that generate noise from leadership that generates lasting change.

He concluded with a broader observation about the trajectory of African democracy. Its future, he argued, will depend not only on whether young people are heard, but on whether they are genuinely empowered to lead — a distinction that runs through both his remarks to the cohort and his reflections on the state of youth political participation across the continent more broadly.

A new architecture for African democracy

Hon. Dr. Mmusi Maimane, Member of the South African Parliament, Leader of Build One South Africa, and President of the African Democratic Alliance for Freedom and Progress (ADAFP), delivered the keynote address at the opening of the 13th Cohort of the Young Political Leadership School Africa on June 8, 2026, in Liberia. Held under the theme, “Empowering the Future: From Learning to Leadership for Africa’s Agenda 2063,” the occasion also marked YPLS Africa’s tenth anniversary.

Dr. Maimane challenged young Africans to take responsibility for the continent’s future and not wait for formal appointments, electoral victories, or a certain age before demonstrating leadership. He encouraged them to lead within their communities, institutions, political parties, and civil society organizations; speak truth to power; challenge injustice; and resist corruption and democratic decline.

He emphasized that Africa’s progress depends on democratic leadership, strong institutions, accountability, integrity, and public service. Warning against authoritarianism, military takeovers, and weak governance, he stressed that public office must serve citizens rather than political elites. He called on young leaders to defend constitutional governance, the rule of law, human rights, credible elections, and the peaceful transfer of political power.



**YOUNG
POLITICAL
LEADERSHIP
SCHOOL
AFRICA**

COHORT 13



YOUNG
POLITICAL
LEADERSHIP
SCHOOL
AFRICA



Empowering the Future:
From Learning to Leadership for
Africa's Agenda 2063

Addressing Africa’s economic challenges, Dr. Maimane highlighted poverty, unemployment, excessive national debt, inadequate infrastructure, and limited opportunities for young people. He urged governments to manage public resources responsibly, ensure that borrowing supports productive development, and invest more in education, healthcare, infrastructure, innovation, and youth empowerment. He also called for Africa’s natural resources to be transformed through local production, value addition, and entrepreneurship to create employment and expand the continent’s middle class.

Dr. Maimane identified the African Continental Free Trade Area as an important opportunity to increase intra-African trade and regional economic integration. However, he emphasized that its success requires improved transportation, energy, digital infrastructure, and cross-border connectivity. He encouraged Africans to draw on the continent’s history, knowledge, creativity, and institutions in developing solutions to their challenges.

His central message was clear: young Africans are not merely the leaders of tomorrow, they must lead today, defend democracy, strengthen institutions, and advance Africa’s political and economic transformation.

On behalf of ADAFP, Dr. Maimane also signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Naymote Partners for Democratic Development to establish the ADAFP Leadership Training Academy in Monrovia. The Academy will serve as a Pan-African centre of excellence dedicated to developing ethical, competent, and democratic political and civic leaders through training, fellowships, mentorship, policy dialogue, and executive education.



The afternoon: from inspiration to instruction

The afternoon sessions shifted the register from the ceremonial to the practical. Two sessions, back to back, brought the morning's grand themes into operational territory.

Dr. Tanya A. Garnett, Associate Dean, Amos C. Sawyer College of Social Sciences, University of Liberia, opened her session on Emotional Intelligence with a foundational claim: leadership is a community activity. It cannot be understood apart from the people it affects, and it cannot be practiced in isolation from them. Leaders set the emotional tone of their units, and that tone is felt before any policy is announced, in how people are spoken to, whether people feel seen, and where trust is present or absent.

She pushed back on the conflation of leadership with position. Leadership is defined by perception, not title. It can be demonstrated at every level of an organization, and people who hold no formal authority can lead, just as people who hold formal titles can fail to. She outlined the behaviors of excellent leaders: attentive and responsive, reliable and reciprocal, managers of expectations, because unmet expectations not failure itself are what erode trust.

Mr. William Kofi Dowokpor, Executive Director of the Free Trade Network Africa, took on the African Continental Free Trade Area – what it is, what it was supposed to be, and why its failure to fully materialize is not a technical problem but a political one. He presented that intra-African trade sits at 15 – 18 percent of the continent's total trade. Europe trades 70 percent within itself. Asia, 51 percent. The largest free trade area in the world, by member count, barely trades with itself. "Skepticism about AfCFTA is legitimate," he said. "That is not an argument to give up. It is an argument to hold this one to a higher standard."

In closing, he pointed to one concrete output already visible: Rwanda tea in Ghanaian shops. Small. Real. Scalable, if the political will follows. He challenged delegates to find out, before they left, whether their own countries have a National AfCFTA Implementation Office, and to learn the implementation status, not the signing status. ***"Signing is easy. Implementation is where the work lives."***



THE LEARNING WEEK...





Day 2. Democratic Governance, Ethics, and Integrity

The second day moved deliberately from inspiration to mechanics. If Day 1 asked delegates why they were here, Day 2 began answering the harder question: how do the systems they want to lead actually work, and where are the points where those systems can be fixed or broken?

Elections and Technology: Enhancing Integrity, Transparency, and Inclusion

Mr. Archie Delaney, Senior NEC/UNDP Data and Spatial Management Consultant, opened his session on elections and technology with a diagnosis: Africa's electoral problem is not primarily a technology problem. A governance culture problem. Leaders who see themselves as rulers rather than servants produce political cultures where winning at almost any cost feels justified, where holding power past its natural term feels natural, and where governing as a public trust has been replaced by governing as a personal reward.

His framework was built on three pillars integrity, transparency, and inclusion anchored in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government." He noted that this clause was removed from the

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and that more countries were willing to ratify it as a result. "That tells you where we stand."

Areas where technology is applied, in his presentation, comprise electoral management: GIS-based delimitation, biometric registration, electronic voting, results transmission, and open data.

Strategic Political Communication: Engaging Citizens and Shaping Public Trust

Dr. Francis Gabriel Oke, former Head of the Election Division, ECOWAS Commission, reduced political communication to two non-negotiables: the right channel and the right message. Neither works without the other.



Channel selection is entirely dependent on the audience. In rural communities, radio remains primary, alongside direct engagement and the endorsement of traditional leaders. For universities and the younger urban population, the channels are social media, WhatsApp, and email. The evolution is predictable. Radio dominated the 1960s, television took over, social media has replaced both. But what has not changed is the principle: find the people where they are.

He used three examples to illustrate what a strong message looks like. Obama's "Yes, We Can" was not a slogan. For Black Americans, it was a psychological



permission slip. The explicit claim that change was possible at a moment when that belief was not widely held. Tinubu's "E don be my turn" mobilized the northern Hausa base by framing an election as a collective turn rather than a personal bid. Trump's 2024 messaging anchored to what conservative and religious voters were actually experiencing and afraid of. The lesson across all three is consistent: the message has to meet people where they are, not where the candidate hopes they might be.

He gave counterexamples equal attention. A 2016 Benin candidate with the backing of three major parties assumed a 60 percent first-round victory and lost. He had spoken French in Abomey, wore traditional dress awkwardly, and cited GDP growth to communities that could not afford food in the market. A Niger president promised to train 10,000 people in technology within 400 days and delivered 300 people in one week. "Realistic promises consistently outperform grand ones." The instruction was direct: before you campaign anywhere, know the context. Know what people are living.

Political Ideologies and Party Systems: Foundations of Democratic Governance and Political Competition

Mr. Adil Abdel Aati, Deputy Secretary General,

ADAFP, opened his session on political ideologies with a definition and a warning in the same breath. Ideology is a system of beliefs that shapes how a group understands human nature, the role of state, and the organization of society. But he cautioned against over-attachment to any single framework. "The ideology is gray. The sphere of life is green."

His central argument was that Africa does not need to borrow its political philosophy from elsewhere. The Mande/Mandingo Charter of the Mali Empire predates both the American and French constitutions. Ubuntu is not a philosophical abstraction but a practical governance framework. "We did not receive constitutionalism from Europe. We have governance traditions. We have philosophy. We have ideas. We need to build on them."

He closed on trade. Africa holds approximately 70 percent of the world's natural resources and generates 3 percent of its economic activity. Only five or six African countries offer visa-free access to other Africans. "Africans pay to visit each other. Europeans cross our border more freely than we do."

Understanding the Electoral Cycle: Processes, Actors, and Actions for Electoral Integrity

Eddie Jarwolo closed Day 2 with a session that, in many ways, gives the Day 1 structure. Elections, he argued, are not single-day events. They are continuous processes, and credible outcomes depend on what happens long before voters reach the polls and long after results are announced.

He framed the cycle in three phases. The pre-election period is where elections are won or lost before a single vote is cast: legal frameworks are reviewed, electoral boundaries are drawn, election officials are trained, and voters are registered. Weakness anywhere in this phase a compromised voter roll, an unclear code of conduct, an under-resourced election commission compounds into the next phase rather than disappearing.

The election period itself is the most visible but, in his framing, the least consequential in isolation: the campaign, voting operations, and verification of results are the culmination of months of preparation, not a self-contained event. A well-run election day cannot rescue a poorly prepared pre-election period.

The post-election period, he argued, is the phase African electoral systems most consistently neglect. Audits and evaluation, institutional strengthening, legal reform, and the archiving and updating of voter lists are rarely funded with the same urgency as the vote itself; yet, they determine whether the next cycle improves or repeats the same failures.

His closing message tied the session to the broader argument running through the week: “Elections are a continuous process. Credible elections depend on effective preparation before voting, efficient management during voting, and continuous improvements after voting.” For young leaders intent on building durable democratic institutions, he said, the electoral cycle is not a calendar to observe. It is a system to manage.

Day 3. Political Participation, Civic Engagement, and Policy Influence

Day 3 belonged, in large part, to one facilitator and one sustained argument: that African youth are not failing democracy. Democracy, as currently structured, is failing them. And that gap can be redesigned.

The following three sessions were facilitated by Mr. Emmy Otim, Regional Manager, Christian Democratic International Center (Sweden), who manages programs across Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania.

Principles of Democratic Governance

Emmy Otim opened with a question he said every leader should ask themselves at least once a year: “Why should anyone be led by [me]?” Not rhetorically, but as a genuine audit. He paired it with Frantz Fanon: “Each generation must, out of relative obscurity, discover its mission, fulfill it, or betray it.” The question for this generation of African youth, he said, is which one it will choose.

The only democratically elected young leader in recent African political history is the current president of Senegal. Every other young African who has held executive power got there through a coup or armed conflict. “We have normalized the idea that the only way a young African gets to lead is by taking power by force. That is a crisis.”

Ethics and Integrity in Political Leadership

The second session turned from structure to character. Otim drew a distinction that became a reference point for the rest of the week: mobilization is reactionary, organization is permanent. Young people across Africa are skilled at filling streets



and forcing a moment. They are poor at the harder work: shared vision, resource mobilization, sustainable systems. ***“A protest that disperses without structure can be waited out. A critical mass that is both mobilized and organized cannot be ignored.”***

The narrative problem. African youth are a majority with a minority mindset – 70 percent of the population begging 5 percent for affirmative action. “Every time you keep quiet, the narrative grows. When someone says something negative about your generation, stand up and correct it there and then.”

Reflection and Applied Exercise

The afternoon moved from argument to action. Participants worked through the governance problems identified in discussion—bad governance, corruption, weak institutions, youth exclusion, obsolete policies—and pushed toward solutions: civic education, institutional transparency, and direct youth inclusion in decision-making.

Otim closed with a practical instruction for anyone wanting to create space inside a political party: write a three-page document on what you would change. The electoral process, the women’s quota, the recruitment system. Send it. “Parties will call you in to explain yourself. That is how you get to the table.”



Personal Branding and Connecting Through Your Story

Mrs. Shoana Cachello Solomon, Brand Strategist & Founder, Cachello International, opened her session with a story that reframed the entire concept of personal branding. In 1999, she was offered an ABC News anchor position. The network asked her to use a stage name “Shoanna,” they said, was too ethnic and to wear a European wig. She turned them down. That refusal became the foundation of everything she has built since: a marketing firm, an arts school, a summer performance camp, and a creative space at the Monrovia Super Mall.

Her definition of a personal brand captures what you are known for, what you stand for, and how people feel after interacting with you. “Authenticity is not a soft concept,” she told the room. “It is a strategic asset.”

She came to Liberia the way she does everything, by showing up. She arrived unannounced at President-elect Ellen Johnson Sirleaf’s gate with a camera, offered to photograph her for free, and delivered the photos before leaving the country. Sirleaf’s team called. She relocated to Liberia seventeen years ago and has not left.

“Knock and the door shall be opened. Don’t wait for permission. Don’t wait for appointments. Show up.”

The Alumni Panel: what the program produces

The alumni panel on Day 3 gave Cohort 13 something no session could manufacture: evidence. Four graduates of earlier cohorts, from four countries, each describing a trajectory that began in a room very much like the one Cohort 13 was sitting in.

The panel’s central argument was that African unity should be a practice. The Berlin Conference of 1884 divided the continent by language and economic control. Youth networks, they argued, are one of the few mechanisms that can cross those divisions in practice rather than in rhetoric. The examples from their own lives made the case: social visits turned into institutional introductions, casual connections became permanent professional partnerships, and one social media post led to the United Nations. None of it was planned. All of it was possible because the program had put the right people in the same room.

Titilope Omo Anifowose of Nigeria came to PYLS Africa focused on Kwara State. She left with a pan-African lens. “You cannot always trace the line at the time. You can only see it afterward.”

Mohamed Barrie of Sierra Leone returned, organized a national youth leadership conference, and drafted a national youth policy. A post about his YPLS Africa experience led to Kenya, then the



United States, then the United Nations.

Mary Kerkula of Liberia became the second female president of the University of Liberia student union, and watched women across the country point to her election as the reason they decided to run. Beyond symbolism, representation tells other people what is possible.

Abdourhamane Bah of Guinea returned, and reorganized his political party, and helped field a presidential candidate. What young leaders are building transcends their borders.





Day 4. Politics, Ideology, Digital Democracy, Youth, Peace & Security

Day 4 was the most programmatically dense of the week. The thread running through all four sessions was the same question the week had been building toward: given everything these delegates now know about governance, systems, and power – what do they actually do with it?

Civic engagement and policy influence

Ms. Omolara Balogun, Head of Policy Influencing and Advocacy Unit at the West Africa Civil Society Institute opened with a highlight of civic space. Any physical or digital space where citizens not governments, not businesses exercise their fundamental rights and participate in governance.

She presented CIVICUS Monitor data from 2025, with sobering West Africa results: Cape Verde scored 88, the only open civic space in the region. Ghana scored 60, obstructed. Liberia, 55. Sierra Leone, 55. Guinea, 29, repressed. Nigeria, 36, repressed. Cape Verde's outlier status, she argued, is not primarily the result of its citizens' choices. It has no significant natural resources, which means no external actors competing for influence over its politics. ***“Resource wealth can close civic space. Because it attracts interests that have no stake in an empowered citizenry.”***

Policy fails, she said, when citizens are not part of the process. Youth associations, student unions, and civil society organizations are the mechanisms through which individual voices aggregate into policy influence. Religion, ethnicity, and political party identity are the tools most frequently used to divide

citizens and prevent them from acting collectively.

Digital governance and civic technology

Ms. Elyn Wright, Democracy and Digital Governance Specialist, began by separating three terms routinely conflated: digital governance, civic technology, and digitization. The distinction matters because conflating them can produce the wrong expectations and failed implementation.

She used Estonia as a benchmark. A country of 1.3 million people that declared internet access a basic human right in 2000, launched a national e-ID card in 2002, and now delivers 99 percent of public services online – saving the equivalent of 2 percent of GDP annually. The key lesson is the commitment to change. Estonia took 25 years to get there.

Her assessment of Africa was country-specific. Liberia lacks both infrastructure and public trust for rapid digital adoption. Sierra Leone's barrier is not technology but willingness. Corruption thrives when invisible, and digitization threatens that invisibility, generating active resistance from those whose interests depend on opacity. Ghana has made meaningful progress. In Nigeria, notably, it was civil society, not government, that built the national budget tracking app now holding public spending accountable.

On Artificial Intelligence, facial recognition historically could not accurately identify Black people. This was not a neutral technical failure, but a direct consequence of biased training data. Africa is broadly underrepresented in online data. Anything not published online does not exist for AI systems. If Liberians are not writing about Liberia, AI systems will continue defaulting to someone else's version of the country.



The Women in Politics and Civic Leadership Panel

The Women in Politics and Civic Leadership panel brought together women working at the intersection of law, political reform, institutional leadership, and the advancement of women in public life. The session was moderated by Nusone E. Perkins, Fundraising and Grants Officer at the Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Presidential Center for Women and Development. She was joined by Cllr. Charlyne M. Brumskine, Judge of the ECOWAS Court of Justice and Senior Partner at CMB Law Group and Mme. Ellen O. Pratt-Harris, Executive Director of the Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Presidential Center for Women and Development.

The range of experience on the panel gave the conversation particular weight. It brought legal practice, political organizing and reform, and institutional work on women's public leadership into the same discussion - allowing participants to examine both the structural barriers that keep women out of decision-making and the personal disciplines required to enter, remain, and exercise influence in political and civic spaces.

The session opened with a difficult question: why, in 2026, are institutional "firsts" for women still occurring in Liberia? The country appointed its first female foreign minister in 1972, its first female Chief Justice in 2003, its first female president in 2006, and its first female Senate President in 2024. Yet these achievements remain separated by long periods in which women continue to be significantly underrepresented in political decision-making. The panel challenged participants to look beyond celebrating the exceptional woman in the room and ask why so few women are able to enter the room in the first place.

Financing emerged as one of the most persistent barriers. Political participation requires networks, organization, and resources long before an election campaign begins, and women often enter these spaces with less access to capital than their male counterparts. The panel also examined Liberia's 30 percent gender target for political-party candidate listings, stressing that legislation or policy commitments are meaningful only when there is the institutional and political will to implement them. As Cllr. Charlyne M. Brumskine emphasized, "The law is not the problem. The will to implement it is."



The conversation also addressed the ways ethnicity, party identity, age, and other divisions can be used to fragment women and young people who might otherwise build collective influence. The response, panelists argued, is deliberate coalition-building across difference and a willingness to develop relationships before moments of political urgency.

The panel's practical counsel was equally direct: identify a niche and develop the competence to become difficult to ignore; seek mentorship intentionally rather than approaching relationships only when a favor is needed; build financial and political networks early; and protect personal character as a non-negotiable leadership asset. The session ultimately moved the conversation beyond representation as a numbers issue. It asked what women need to gain access, exercise influence, sustain leadership, and open political space for those coming behind them.

Youth, Peace, and Security in Africa:

Dr. Nathaniel B. Walker, Political Advisor, ECOWAS Resident Representative Office (Liberia), grounded his session in UN Security Council Resolution 2250—adopted December 9, 2015 which reframes youth from perceived threats into recognized agents of peace. Its five pillars are Participation, Prevention, Partnership, Disengagement & Reintegration, and Protection. The core principle, he shared, premises that youth are not merely beneficiaries of peace. They are peacebuilders.

He facilitated a country-by-country assessment of how governments actually treat their youth populations. Nigeria is making visible moves toward treating youth as stakeholders. Liberia directs more than 70 percent of the national budget to current expenditure, leaving critical areas underfunded. Sierra Leone is making temporary investments to prevent youth from becoming a destabilizing force. South Africa has 60 percent youth unemployment and a tendency to criminalize protest rather than engage with it.

His central argument emphasized that exclusion from decision-making is a driver of instability, not just an equity concern. Youth shut out of governance are vulnerable to recruitment and radicalization. "Consultation without power is not participation. Youth need to be in decision-making positions, not just engagement processes."

Each participant left with a commitment a specific action within thirty days and an instruction to return home as an ambassador for the YPS pillar most needed in their own context.





The political tolerance panel

Three YPLS Africa alumni from three different Liberian political parties the Coalition for Democratic Change, the Alternative National Congress, and Unity Party convened to demonstrate political difference without personal enmity.

The crux of the panel was emphasizing that political tolerance is not accepting violations of the law, nor agreeing with someone's beliefs. It is accepting a person for who they are, regardless of where they stand. That, they argued, is the minimum condition for a functioning democracy.

The panel concluded on a simple closing charge: knowledge application matters more than its acquisition alone. Delegates were encouraged to take with them what they had learned back to their political parties and other institutions and actually use it.

Day 5. Synthesis, Action Planning, and Closing

Day 5 opened with a circle. Participants passed a token among themselves while singing together, each person who received it invited to name something they had carried from the days before. Emotional intelligence surfaced repeatedly, as did a harder admittance that many of the challenges facing their countries were not created by their generation, but that addressing them would require a deliberate choice that previous generations had not made. The exercise set the tone for a day that was less about new materials and more about what to do with everything the week had given them.

Pathway to political leadership

Ms. Balogun, on her return to facilitation, launched her session by firstly acknowledging what the cohort had just done: conducting their own internal elections. Campaigning. Negotiating. And genuinely contesting. "That," she said, "was itself a demonstration of everything the week has been teaching." She congratulated those elected and spoke about what comes next: leadership carries accountability, and they would be judged by their actions from this point forward, not by the speeches that got them elected.

The session revisited public policy and advocacy, reinforcing the week's central argument from a different

angle. Policies fail when citizens are excluded from the process. Advocacy asking for change to the status quo requires strategy, not just energy. She outlined five core advocacy approaches: education, collaboration, litigation, persuasive advocacy, and confrontational advocacy. On the last one, she unambiguously encouraged the participants to first exhaust the first four, before resorting to it. Governments respond poorly to confrontation because public demonstrations signal governance failure. The right to protest is unambiguous. The strategy for using it requires judgement.

The power of networking and advocacy in dancing social change in Africa

On networking, she offered the frame that tied the week together: advocacy is a numbers game, and collective voices carry more weight than individual ones. “When spider webs unite, they can tie up a lion.” Effective networks, she said, share four characteristics, they are: diverse, democratic, dynamic, and decentralized.

She closed the session with a challenge she asked participants to treat as rhetorical. The major struggle in every country represented in the room is that abnormalities have become normalized because people look away. The first step toward change is to identify what isn’t right and call it out, reflecting on more than twenty years of her career in social advocacy.

The closing ceremony

Romeo T. Barr, elected President of YPLS Africa Cohort 13, used his acceptance remarks to make demands. He first extended appreciation to Eddie Jarwolo and Alpha Kemokai; and then, turned that appreciation into a set of concrete asks for the program’s future. He raised the absence of participants with disabilities in Cohort 13, a gap that had surfaced prior. He called for structural excursions so foreign delegates could experience Liberia beyond the conference venue. He proposed expanding to more Francophone countries, with interpretation support, so that language never becomes the barrier to participation. He suggested specialization tracks within the program, and articulated a long-term ambition: a national YPLSA Day in Liberia.

Manjuru Nimley, speaking on behalf of the participants, captured what had shifted. “I arrived understanding leadership as a title. I leave understanding it as a responsibility.”



YPLS Africa Honours Three Champions of Youth Leadership

The Young Political Leadership School Africa (YPLS Africa), a flagship initiative of Naymote Partners for Democratic Development, marked its 10th anniversary by honoring three distinguished partners whose support helped transform the program into a respected Pan-African platform for developing ethical, accountable, and visionary leaders.

Ms. Massa Crayton: Supporting the Founding Vision

Ms. Massa Crayton, a prominent Liberian educator and former Liberia Country Director of the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), was recognized for helping secure the first funding that launched YPLS Africa. Receiving the award, she recalled recommending the initiative to the OSIWA Board and expressed pride in seeing the original vision grow into an impactful continental program. She commended Naymote's leadership for sustaining and expanding the initiative across Africa.

H.E. Dr. Ibrahim Al-Bakri Nyei: Strengthening Partnerships



H.E. Dr. Ibrahim Al-Bakri Nyei, Deputy Minister for International Cooperation and Economic Integration, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and former Naymote Board member, was honoured for his strategic guidance and long-standing commitment.

Dr. Nyei connected YPLS Africa with the Program for Young Politicians in Africa, creating opportunities for exchanges, continental facilitators, and curriculum development. He expressed gratitude for the recognition and reaffirmed his commitment to supporting YPLS Africa's mission.

H.E. Karl Backéus: Sustaining the Programme



H.E. Karl Backéus, Ambassador of Sweden to Liberia and Sierra Leone, was honoured for Sweden's exceptional partnership. During a critical funding transition, the Embassy supported four cohorts, strengthened the program's continuity and reach, and provided a dedicated minibus to enhance its activities and support post-training civic engagement initiatives.

As Sweden concluded its development cooperation in Liberia, YPLS Africa recognized Ambassador Backéus and the Swedish Government for their lasting investment in youth leadership, democratic governance, and institutional sustainability.

These awards celebrated three defining contributions to YPLS Africa: the support that launched its vision, the partnerships that expanded its continental reach, and the investment that sustained its growth.

NED Reaffirms Commitment to Youth Leadership and Democratic Development

Ms. Ana Lisa Le Pera of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), Washington, D.C., became the first NED representative to attend and address a YPLS Africa cohort. She also presented certificates to participants, marking an important milestone in the partnership between NED, Naymote, and YPLS Africa.

Ms. Le Pera highlighted NED's mission of supporting locally led initiatives that strengthen democratic institutions, citizen participation, human rights, and the rule of law. She noted that NED's support to Naymote and YPLS Africa reflects its commitment to investing in emerging leaders who can advance accountable and inclusive democracy.

Recognizing Africa's large youth population as a valuable democratic asset, she described youth leadership development as a strategic investment in the continent's future. She commended YPLS Africa for equipping young political and civic leaders with the knowledge, values, and skills required to participate meaningfully in governance. She encouraged participants to apply their training, uphold democratic principles, and become courageous defenders of democracy in their countries and communities.



COHORT 13 VOICES



The week produced no shortage of polished remarks from podiums. But some of its most honest moments came from participants speaking for themselves. In reflection circles, in the brief windows between sessions when the formality of the program gave way to something more direct. What follows are the voices of Cohort 13, in their own words.

On the call to act now, not later

“There are many people who hate being told no, and just as many who find it impossible to say it. That is a genuine societal problem. Speaker Emmy Otim said something that many people are afraid to say aloud: never keep quiet about a narrative, especially if it is negative. In gatherings like these, it is easy to tell people to speak up while quietly rewarding their silence. That cycle produces people who are overly polite, overly apologetic, and too afraid to say what they actually see.” – **Mariama Jalloh, Liberia**

“One of the most powerful things I heard this week was ‘Nothing for us without us.’ I only wish I had heard it five years ago. I used to believe that the positive change I wanted to see should be led by people older than me. Today I know better. Real change begins when we choose to be part of it. Nothing for me without me.” – **Annie Kemokai, Liberia**

On redefining leadership

“One of the biggest shifts for me this week was realizing that leadership is not just about holding a position or having influence. It is about service, accountability, and creating impact in communities. I now have a deeper appreciation for the role young people can play in shaping Africa’s future through active participation and principled leadership.” – **Frank J. Franachie, Liberia**

“Bad governance is what keeps me up at night. I intend to be part of solving it— not running for office tomorrow, but by educating and empowering emerging leaders so they are liberated from stereotypes attached to political figures. I will teach accountability, integrity, and the value of human life and human need. That is where change begins.” – **Blessing M. Collins, Liberia**

On peace, conflict, and rebuilding relationships

“When I ran for student body president, I became so focused on winning that the competition created real tension. After the election, we came together, talked through our differences, and rebuilt those relationships. That experience taught me something I carry everywhere: peace is better than conflict, and leadership is about uniting people, not dividing them. Today’s competitor can become tomorrow’s strongest supporter.”

– **Rochelle Sendolo, Liberia**

“One thing my country gets right that the rest of Africa should pay attention to is our peaceful transition of power.”

– **Emerald Star Bedell, Liberia**





On the gap between where they are and where they're going

“The gap between the leader I am today and the leader I want to be is experience, confidence, and greater strategic influence. This cohort is part of how I close that gap.” – Isha Koroma, Liberia

“The first thing I will do when I return home is establish a daily reading schedule. At least one hour thirty minutes, every day. Knowledge is not optional in leadership. It is the foundation. If I am serious about my goals, I have to be serious about how I prepare for them.” – Thierno Oumar Diallo, Guinea

“This week, I join fellow changemakers from across Africa at YPLS Africa to learn, connect, and contribute to shaping “The Africa We Want” through leadership, governance, and youth-driven development. The future of Africa is being written today, and I am grateful to be part of the conversation.” – Ayanda Nkabinde, South Africa

“One of my biggest takeaways was the reminder that leadership is not about titles but about service, vision, and the courage to create change where you are. I am proud to represent Sierra Leone in this space and excited about the lessons, networks, and opportunities that continue to emerge from this journey. The future of Africa is being shaped by young people who are willing to learn, lead, and collaborate and Day 1 was proof of that.”

– Chuwetta Alditha Cream-Wright, Sierra Leone

“Intensive Training Sessions at the Young Political Leadership School Africa which aims to train a new generation of Leaders, potential (present and future) African decision-makers driven by ethics and responsibility in actions and public service to accelerate the Continent’s progress. It’s an opportunity for our delegation to take part in this experience, as it will further boost our confidence in our respective countries and the continent. Our continent needs this confidence! “ – Thierno Oumar Diallo, Guinea

“Among the many lessons I am taking away is the reminder that “nothing is so simple that it cannot be misunderstood,” highlighting the importance of intentional and effective communication. More importantly, YPLSA reinforced the belief that leadership is not about position, but about service, integrity, and impact. I leave inspired, better equipped, and even more committed to contributing to democratic governance and sustainable development across Sierra Leone and Africa.” – Rashidatu Umarr, Sierra Leone

“Attending YPLS Africa Cohort 13 in Monrovia, was a truly transformative experience. The leadership training was powerful and inspiring, reinforcing my belief that the Africa we want will be built by its youth; we are the changemakers of today. Although I was the only participant from my country, I never felt alone because I was surrounded by one African family united by a shared vision. I have always introduced myself as a citizen of Africa, and this program strengthened that identity.” – Alamin Durmus, Sudan

“To me, YPLSA was more than a leadership program. It was a reminder that Africa’s greatest resource is its young people. It reinforced that leadership is about service, integrity, and the courage to work with others in shaping the prosperous and united Africa envisioned in Agenda 2063. I leave inspired, better equipped, and more committed to creating meaningful impact in my community and beyond. “ – Fasasi Ahmed, Nigeria.

“The entire YPLSA experience inspired me to strengthen my communication skills and challenged me to strive for even greater impact. It is proof that when young people are empowered, nations prosper. YPLSA reminded me that my growth is not just for me, but for Ghana and the future of Africa. “ – Philip Afran Gaisie, Ghana

The network effect, alumni stories...



The network effect, alumni stories

The YPLS Africa alumni network is the program's most persuasive argument. The program has built and validated an impressive curriculum and facilitators' roster. However, the network, what happens to people after they leave, is the evidence.

Four alumni joined Cohort 13 on Day 3 to demonstrate, from their own lives, what that argument looks like in practice.

1. Titilope Omo Anifowose, Nigeria

Titilope entered YPLS Africa focused on Kwara State and Nigeria. She left with a pan-African lens. Her NGO now incorporates non-Nigerians. She stopped doing the work and started building other leads to do it. A conversation with Eddie Jarwolo at a YPLS Africa event the casual, unscheduled exchange that happens when you put this many serious people in proximity led, eventually, to a book she published in 2023. "You cannot always trace the line at the time. You can only see it afterward."

2. Mohamed Barrie, Sierra Leone

Mohamed returned to Sierra Leone and organized a three-day national youth leadership conference. He drafted a national youth policy. He posted about his YPLS Africa experience on social media. A contact who saw the post invited him to Kenya as a parliamentary delegate. That trip led to the United States in 2023, which led to an address at the United Nations. "One post." The implication was not only that social media is magic of course, it is but that the program had given him something worth talking about. When you commit to doing important work, the connections that open are not accidental.

3. Mary Kerkula, Liberia

Mary became the second female president of the University of Liberia student union. She did not describe her election as a personal victory, but as a data point that other women pointed to when deciding whether to run. "Representation is not only symbolic, it tells other people what is possible."

4. Abdourhamane Bah, Guinea

Abdourhamane came back to Guinea, reorganized his political party, and helped field a presidential candidate. Connections made at YPLS Africa led to a major civic event in Nigeria and to permanent working relationships with Nigerian counterparts. "What you are building here will not stop at your borders."



**Commitments, and
the road ahead...**





Commitments and the road ahead

Cohort 13 concluded not when the certificates were distributed. It began.

Across the week, participants made commitments—some formal, some personal, some institutional, some still forming that reflect the full ambition of what YPLS Africa is building.

From the Youth, Peace, and Security session, each participant committed to a specific action within thirty days: establishing an NGO, engaging communities on peace during electoral processes, and promoting respectful dialogue among political peers. Each was asked to return as an ambassador for the YPL pillar most relevant to their own context.

From the political tolerance panel, a cohort of delegates from three different Liberian parties sat together, disagreed with each other about policy, and then articulated, out loud in front of their peers, why the relationship across that disagreement matters more than the disagreement itself. This signified the practice democracy requires.

From the women in politics and civic leadership panel, the commitment was structural as well as personal. A 30 percent women's quota on party tickets exists in Liberian law and has not been enforced. From the cohort's elected leadership, President Romeo T. Barr articulated an agenda that extends the program forward: disability inclusion, Francophone expansion, specialization tracks, excursions that embed foreign delegates in Liberia's actual life, and a national YPLSA Day. Leadership priorities of a cohort president who used his inaugural remarks to make structural demands of the program shaping him.

From the program's leadership, Alphaia Faith Kemokai reinforced the vision from the start: a permanent training center for young political and civic leaders from across Africa. A home, not a hotel ballroom rented for a week, but an institution. A place where the skills, mentorship, networks, and environment that Cohort 13 was about to experience could be available year-round, to a much wider community.

And from every speaker, in different words, across five days, one instruction: Africa's future is not being written by institutions, but by people. The people in that room. Starting now.

The final action of Cohort 13 culminated in the Alumni Commissioning – new members inducted into a network of more than 1,200 graduates across the continent, each carrying a version of the same charge.

**Go home. Lead where you are.
The work is not waiting for you to be ready. It
never was.**

Statement from the Board Chair

Distinguished guests, development partners, facilitators, mentors, members of the diplomatic community, representatives of political institutions, members of the media, ladies and gentlemen, and most importantly, our young leaders from across Africa. It is both an honor and a privilege to stand before you today as we bring to a close this remarkable five-day Young Political Leadership School Africa, Cohort 13, organized by Naymote Partners for Democratic Development.

Over the past week, we have witnessed something truly inspiring. We have seen young Africans from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and political traditions come together with a shared commitment to leadership, democratic governance, civic responsibility, and the future of our continent. We have engaged in difficult conversations, challenged assumptions, exchanged ideas, and built connections that transcend borders.

At a time when many democracies around the world are facing unprecedented challenges, the importance of investing in the next generation of ethical, visionary, and accountable leaders cannot be overstated. The future of Africa will not be determined solely by the decisions made in government offices or international institutions. It will be shaped by the courage, integrity, innovation, and commitment of young people, like the ones gathered here today.

As Board Chair, I am immensely proud of Naymote's continued commitment to creating platforms that nurture leadership, strengthen democratic values, and empower young people to actively participate in shaping their societies.

I would like to express our profound gratitude to our valued development partners whose support made this program possible. Your investment in young leaders is an investment in stronger institutions, more resilient democracies, and a more prosperous and peaceful continent.

I also wish to recognize our facilitators, resource persons, mentors, coaches, and panelists who generously shared their expertise, experiences, and insights throughout this program. Your contributions have enriched the learning experience and inspire our participants to think critically and lead courageously.

Our appreciation also goes to our collaborating institutions, partners, supporters, and the dedicated Naymote team whose hard work behind the scenes ensured the successful delivery of this program.

To the 200 participants from seven countries, Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Nigeria, Guinea, and South Africa, I congratulate each one of you. You arrived here as individuals with aspirations and ambitions. You leave as part of a growing network of changemakers committed to advancing democratic values and transformational leadership across Africa.

The true measure of this program will not be found in certificates received today. It will be reflected in how you engage your communities, how you uphold integrity in public life, how you advocate for inclusion and justice, how you bridge divisions, and how you inspire others to believe that positive change is possible. Africa needs leaders who listen before they speak, who serve before they seek power, and who place the interests of their people above personal gain.

I encourage you to remain connected to one another, to continue learning, and to use the knowledge and networks you have gained here to drive meaningful change in your respective countries and communities. Together, we can build the Africa we want – an Africa led by principled, competent, and visionary leaders.

Thank you for your dedication throughout this week. Thank you to our partners and supporters. And thank you for believing in the power of youth leadership to transform our continent.

Long live the Young Political Leadership School Africa. Long live Naymote. And long live Africa.

Mme. Omolara Balogun

Board Chairperson

Naymote Partners for Democratic Development



Facilitators

1. Dr. Tanya A. Garnett

a. Associate Dean, University of Liberia College of Social Sciences and Humanities

2. Dr. William Dorwrokpo

3. Archie Delaney

a. Sr. NEC/UNDP Data and Spatial Management Consultant, National Elections Commission (Liberia)

4. Dr. Francis Gabriel Oke

a. Former Head of Election Division at ECOWAS Commission

5. Dr. Adil Abdel Aati

a. Deputy Secretary General of the African Democratic Alliance for Freedom and Progress

6. Eddie D. Jarwolo

a. Executive Director, Naymote Partners for Democratic Development

7. Emmy Otim

a. Regional Manager, Program for Young Politicians in Africa (Uganda)

8. Shoana Cachelles Solomon

a. Brand Strategist and Founder, Cachelles International

9. Omolara Balogun

a. Head, Policy Influencing and Advocacy Unit, West Africa Civil Society Institute (Accra)

10. Elyn Wright

a. Democracy and Digital Governance Specialist

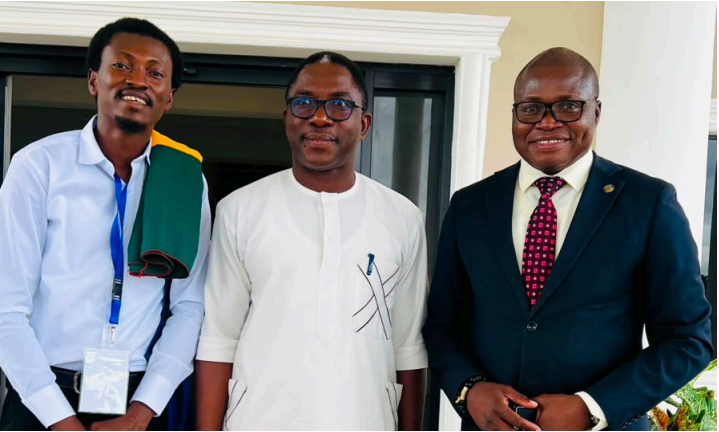
11. Dr. Nathaniel B. Walker

a. Political Advisor, ECOWAS Resident Representative Office (Liberia)

Cohort 13



Cohort 13



Cohort 13



PARTNERS



Sweden
Sverige



NATIONAL
ENDOWMENT
FOR
DEMOCRACY

SUPPORTING FREEDOM AROUND THE WORLD



YPLS AFRICA COHORT 13

PROGRAM REPORT 2026

Empowering the Future: From Learning to
Leadership for Africa's Agenda 2063



📍 House #19, Tubman Boulevard
Paynesville City, Liberia

☎️ +231 880 655 328 / +231 886 524 608

✉️ info@naymote.org

🌐 www.naymote.org

FOLLOW US



@Naymote Partners

ISBN: 978-9988-53-001-3



9 789988 530013