



Young
Political
Leadership
School
Africa

Theme

Advancing Electoral Integrity for Political
Accountability and Leadership in the
MRU Region."



REGIONAL SUMMIT REPORT

March 23 -25 | Freetown, Sierra Leone

2022

www.yplsa.org



Acknowledgement

The Young Political Leadership School Africa's first Regional Summit held in Freetown, Sierra Leone from March 23-25, 2022, would not have been successful without the unflinching support of the Honorable Vice President of the Republic of Sierra Leone, H.E. Dr. Mohammed Juldeh Jalloh. For this, we are internally grateful to him and the government and people of the Republic of Sierra Leone for their generosity.

We also want to thank H.E. Dr. Jewel Howard Taylor, Vice President of the Republic of Liberia, and Senator Prince K. Moye for helping some Liberian delegates who attended the summit. We are grateful.

Special thanks to the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) for the sponsorship. To the Alumni chapters of the Young Political Leadership School Africa in Sierra Leone and Liberia, thank you for your immense contributions in organizing the first summit - it was awesome.

We want to appreciate ECOWAS Commission, and Mr. Francis Gabriel Oke, Head of Election Division, ECOWAS Commission Federal Republic of Nigeria for their support and recognition of the YPLS Africa.

Ms. Omolara Balogun, Head, Policy Influencing and Advocacy Unit -West Africa Civil Society Institute, Accra, Ghana thank you for your excellent presentation, inspiration, and motivation of these amazing young leaders. Our warm appreciations go to all our wonderful speakers and facilitators. We just cannot name you all; we are very grateful.

A very big thank you to Madam Alicia Kamara, Technical Advisor to the Honorable Vice President of Sierra Leone for co-hosting our first regional summit and providing overwhelming support. We are very grateful for the support and connection.

Lastly, to all our brilliant participants, you are the reason that we have dedicated our time to what we do. We are forever grateful that you took the challenge to leave your countries, communities, and busy schedules for a life-changing event. Your commitment and comportment are evident that you are on the right path to igniting change in our region. We can't thank you enough!



About the Young Political Leadership School Africa

The Young Political Leadership School Africa (YPLS Africa) was created in 2016 in response to poor leadership, bad governance, and the exclusion of the youth from political and other decision-making processes across the African Continent.

The program's overarching goal is to grow a new generation of socially conscious, character-driven young political leaders who are accessible, responsive, and accountable to the African people and their needs. It is unique in Africa and puts African youth in the spotlight. It focuses on three thematic areas: Leadership, Elections and Governance (LEG).

One-week Professional Development Training:

Fellows participate in a week-long training to enhance their skills in planning, organizing, and implementing political campaign events, strengthen their leadership, management, communication, and networking skills, etc.

Practicum (Leadership and Civic Engagement Events):

Fellows participate in three months civic engagement events in their respective countries or communities and participate in grassroots campaign events during electoral periods in their countries.

Since its establishment in April 2016, (seven hundred and thirty) 730 young politicians and social activists have participated in the YPLS Africa program and completed eight cohorts. They are playing active roles in the political processes and other important areas of their countries.

Over the course of one year, fellows engage in a series of theoretical and interactive exercises to develop their knowledge and skills to play greater leadership roles in political affairs. Our programs include the following.

Mentorship and Internship:

Fellows are placed at strategic national institutions to enhance their capacity and to learn by doing. They are supported to engage in various community organizing events and professional programs during the period of additional three months, mostly for female fellows based in Liberia. <https://www.yplsa.org/>

YPLS Africa's First Regional Summit



It was quite a rewarding trip to Freetown, Sierra Leone. Our Participants were amazing young people from Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, and the Gambia. Before the start of the summit, we visited the Fourah Bay College and interacted with student leaders, the Parliament of the Republic of Sierra Leone to understand how it works, and lastly visited the Sierra Leone National Museum to learn about the Sierra Leonean civil crisis.

The Summit started on the 23rd of March under the theme: "Advancing Electoral Integrity for Political Accountability and Leadership in the MRU Region". It was a three-day event with so much education, motivation, and networking. Several high-profile individuals spoke and inspired young people from across the region. It was indeed a life-changing experience for these young people who are determined to have a paradigm shift in their various countries.

This first regional summit was held in Freetown, Sierra Leone at the Country Lodge Hotel from March 23 – 25, 2022. The maiden event, held under the theme, "Advancing Electoral Integrity for Political Accountability and Leadership in the Mano River Union region," brought together 75 young leaders from Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and The Gambia. The summit also focused on sharing knowledge, networking, and dialoging on mitigating electoral violence, fostering electoral integrity and political accountability for national development, peace, and security across the region.



Prior to the official start of the summit, the delegates on the 22nd of March visited several historic sites and landmark features including the historic Fourah Bay College, the oldest college in West Africa, the Sierra Leonean Parliament, and the Peace Museum.

At the Sierra Leonean Parliament, the Director of Proceedings and Public Relations, Sheik Turay lectured the delegates on Sierra Leone's history and democracy and the importance of the Parliament in upholding the country's democracy since independence in 1961. He called for more youth representation in parliaments across the sub-region and the African Continent at large.

At the Peace Museum, the delegates were also given a guided tour by the curators of the Museum. Mr. Patrick Fatoma, the Museum's head of Public Outreach, drilled the delegates on the history of the Special Court of Sierra Leone (SCSL), its roles in bringing peace to Sierra Leone and ensuring justice is served following the country's brutal civil war. Participants were excited to learn about the contributions of Fourah Bay College in advancing quality education across the region, the Peace Museum, and the documentations of historic facts about the conflict and the working of the Parliament especially the involvement of local leaders/chiefs into the governance system of Sierra Leone.

The team, led by Alphaia Faith Kemokia, Coordinator of the Young Political Leadership School Africa, thanked Mr. Turay for the warm reception and insightful lecture.

YPLS Africa's First Regional Summit

At the official opening ceremony of the summit on March 23, stakeholders, government officials, diplomats, civil society actors, media, among others, graced the event with making powerful and touching statements.



Delivering the keynote address on behalf of His Excellency Dr. Julius Maada Bio, President of the Republic of Sierra Leone was the Chief Minister in the Office of the President, Hon. Jacob Jusu Saffa who described the summit as a unique platform for youths to take advantage to learn, network, and build a lasting relationship for societal transformation while at the same time being honest, transparent, determined, and avoiding corruption in different leadership positions they are or will be occupying in their respective countries.

The summit, he said, is part of a series of platforms offering opportunities to establish a solid foundation for development. The government of Sierra Leone will continue to work with national and international institutions like Nanyote Partners for Democratic Development to harness the potentials and functional competencies that will position young people to be proactive and socially responsible citizens.

He told participants that as part of President Bio's vision for young people in Sierra Leone. The government has invested in a *Free Quality Education Program*. The young people in Sierra Leone and the continent represent a great resource that should be supported. The Chief Minister appreciated the organizer of the Summit, and motivated young people to be servant leaders in their generation and welcomed them to the Republic of Sierra Leone.



The Secretary-General of the Minor River Union (MRU), H.E. Esq. Medina Wesseh, in a special statement, made a rallying call on governments, the civil society, the private sector and faith-based institutions to support youths to take on major leadership roles now, and not allowing them to wait for an elusive future. "We must be able to create the enabling environment for them to meet their full potential, thus advancing various levels of interest in the socio-economic or political spheres" "we must put meat to the bones and avoid the well-known cliché of referring to youth as the future leaders. Leadership should not be considered as a factor of age. They need to be treated as leaders today without postponing it to an elusive future. Whether it is in governance, in socio-economic development in general or peace building programs, the future is now- act today to determine and better shape tomorrow." She pledged the MRU's willingness to work along with the YPLS Africa to widen the perspectives of youth in a more positive and peaceful oriented manner; especially in our post-conflict region that is still very fragile.



The Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. Embassy in Sierra Leone, Ellen French inspired the delegates to lead the renaissance in the region as envisioned by the founding fathers of the African Union. continue on page 5

“Democratic institutions need to be continually cultivated, encouraged, and protected and that is where you come in. As young people, you hold the key to cultivating and enhancing these democratic traditions in your respective Countries. You can be the ones that lead the renaissance in the region as envisioned by the founding fathers of the African Union. When the Mano River Union was faced with civil conflict and challenges to democratically transition, we saw the crucial role that young people played. And now with the new tools in your hands, like advanced technology and social media, you have the chance to develop innovative solutions that will foster electoral integrity and accountable governance. Be the generation that will champion equality, peace, accountability in your countries, and defend democracy.”



The British High Commissioner to Sierra Leone, Ms Lisa Chesney, inspired the participants to be the change they want to see in their respective countries. Addressing the young people, she said: “There are three things that pop into my mind. First, nothing is for you without you. We need to hear your voice despite the barriers, your voice is what matters. Second, you cannot be what you cannot see. And third, I wish us all in our countries to think about the country, not the politics, to think about the people not the politics.”



Josephus J Ellie, a representative of the Irish Embassy remarks: “As it has been demonstrated in this room already, the enthusiasm and energy of our young people for governance processes cannot be understated and we must support them through program like this to build their capacity, give them experiences where they will make mistakes but will learn their lessons. We need to empower our young people, listen to them, resource them so they can be strong leaders in their generation and be guidance of our well fought peace and democracies.”



Mr. Joe H. Pemagbi, OSIWA MRU Hub Manager: “When we took that leap of faith to invest in NAYMOTE in Liberia, we weren’t sure about our destination with tvhis Young Political Leadership School Africa. But today, I stand here very proud on behalf of my colleagues, my board and management that we took this venture to invest into young people. Because young people form most of our populations, so they are major assets that we must continue to invest. We hope eventually that this initiative will go beyond the Mano River Union and cut across other countries in Africa. These are examples that we must allow our young people to also follow. Thank you so much Eddie for this inspiring platform you are providing for young people and as a foundation, we will continue our support to mobilizing and organizing young people because the future of our continent is in the hands of the young people.”



Mr. Ngolo Katta, Commissioner of the National Youth Commission of Sierra Leone said "There is no way Africa is going to turn around without making use of this asset that we have, the young people. Our Continent is very youthful; therefore, we must make use of the demographic dividend in a positive way."

Presentations

The summit featured expert facilitators that drilled the delegates on several thematic issues focusing on electoral management, integrity, accountability, advocacy and political governance, Francis Gabriel Oke, the Head of Election Division of the ECOWAS Commission, deepen participants' understanding of the three phases of elections: *pre-election, election, post-election*.

Participants learned about the legal framework, the roles, and responsibilities of the Electoral Management Body (EMBs), the composition of the EMBs, different types of the EMBs that vary per country but still have a unique role to manage the conduct of credible elections in their countries. He stressed the need for inclusive election law to enable credible electoral management bodies that will conduct free, fair, and credible elections across the region. He recommended the need for the constitutions of countries across the region to be respected if a vibrant electoral management body should be built.



Mr. Oke also lectured on the roles and responsibilities of young people in improving electoral integrity. He encouraged them to be organized for political leadership instead of always being used as political militants to instigate electoral violence, they must have an understanding of the legal electoral framework in their respective countries and they should serve as observers (party agents or national) on the day of the elections and ensure the right processes are followed at the centers. These interactive sessions were significant as two MRU countries, Liberia and Sierra Leone go to the polls in 2023 to choose their Presidents and Members of Parliament. Participants developed deep interest in Mr. Oke presentations and requested opportunities for more trainings in electoral management and to be able to train political parties on the subject matter - something they think if adequately understood, will reduce electoral violence.

Panel Discussion: "Strengthen public trust and integrity of Electoral Management Body (EMBs). The role of citizens and civil society organizations."

A panel of four experts in good governance, the rule of law, and electoral management shared practical lessons learned with participants at the summit.

In a region that is often marred by conflict and violence during elections, the panelists dedicated most of their time discussing the importance of EMBs and key stakeholders in building public trust and upholding electoral integrity. Francis L. Keillie, Chairman of the Integrated Elections Security Planning Committee for the 2023 General Elections in Sierra Leone said the state security, in times of election, must enforce professional order and not political order.

Presentations

The Panelists told participants that it's good to identify early warning signs of distrust in the electoral process and find a way to increase trust and reduce negative public perception in the process. Members of EMBs must include the best minds in each country, be nonpartisan, unbiased, and have high-quality moral standing before assuming offices, security bodies during elections should not be used by the government against oppositions vying for similar office, rather, they should always exhibit professionalism and avoid operating based on partisanship. Mrs. Marcella Samba Sesay, Chairperson, National Elections Watch, Executive Director, Campaign for Good Governance said "if you allow politicians to steal an election if elected, they will steal governance" she encouraged participants to position themselves to unearth and prevent electoral fraud and corruption on the continent.



A fascinating presentation was done by one of Africa's leading facilitators and experts on advocacy and civic engagement, Ms. Omolara Balogun, Head, Policy Influencing and Advocacy Unit at the West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI). She deepened participants' understanding about the essence of advocacy as a mean to change a direction either forward or backward. She told participants to build stronger trans-national solidarity to succeed in civic engagement. *"You don't buy social contract, you build it" "until what becomes a problem in one African country becomes the problem of another country; we have not started in our quest to build a united and developed Africa. Let's build a borderless Africa where we totally forget our nationality." "If you are going to be an advocate and not ready to repeat yourself a thousand times then seek a job at a commercial bank."* She told participants that networking in advocacy helps in internal strengthening, high-profiling, providing a wider audience, enhancing credibility, and integrity.

At the end of the summit, the Young Political Action Committee (Young PAC) was established to serve as a leading advocacy arm of the young people across the continent. Speaking on the establishment of the Young PAC,



Eddie Jarwolo, Founder and President of the YPLS Africa said the decision stemmed from the many challenges from across the continent. "We feel that we need that advocacy group that we can use to advocate for reform in the governance processes across the region to see how we can advocate on issue that will promote political accountability, electoral integrity, holding the electoral body more accountable, supporting young people's participation in election, not only as voters but as candidates and observers. The Political Action Committee is going to be a vocal platform for young people to discuss those issues that are of concern to them."



Chris Zinnah Harris, - Liberia:

“Our approach for going forward will now be in a unique way. I can remember a case when I was a youth chairman in my community, I led a group which felled a tree and blocked a road. I am not going to do that anymore; I’m refined now.”



Rosalina Conteh - Sierra Leone:

“I am proud to have been part of this year’s Young Political Leadership School-Africa Regional summit. I take home a whole lot, not just one. All what I have learned from here will be used to impact young girls so that they know how to stand up for themselves and know how to make good choices, clear choices that will bring positive results especially as regards to politics and good governance.”



Amb. Fanta Seysay - Gambia:

“The summit has taught me a lot. I can’t wait to do civic engagements with the vulnerable and the people who need to change their mindset. I will conduct advocacy trainings and train students (senior secondary students) and women who are interested in politics but do not have the voice and platform.”



Mohammed Koromah -Sierra Leone:

“The summit came at the right time. Elections in my country will be held in June of 2023 and there are lots of important issues that are being taught about elections, advocacy, and young people’s participation. The knowledge acquired here will be used properly during next year’s election process unlike other election years.”



Dansira Condé -Guinea:

"The summit has taught me a lot. I can't wait to do civic engagements with the vulnerable and the people who need to change their mindset. I will conduct advocacy trainings and train students (senior secondary students) and women who are interested in politics but do not have the voice and platform."



David Owen -Liberia:

"Back in Liberia, when we get there, we are going to be more civil in engaging issues. We are going to help other young people to change their mode to engaging issues by teaching them the principles of advocacy as was taught at this summit."



Asatu Koroma - Sierra Leone:

"I am really impressed because I wasn't expecting such. Lectures given are very educational and lively and you can feel it. It has been a great time learning about how to contribute to my country. "



Alex Kayee-Liberia

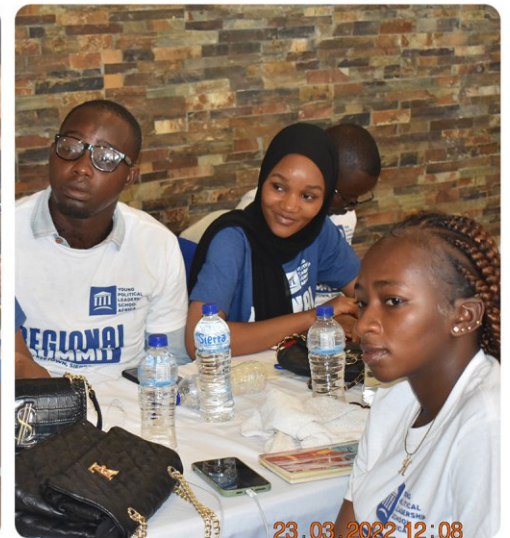
"The summit was a wonderful experience. Being in a gathering of young people who are passionate about positive change has inspired me in so many ways. Back home, as we gradually approach elections, I will use my education from the summit to promote peace and provide civic education among young people."



Rashell Scott -Liberia:

There are things that I didn't know but now I know. I have never been an outspoken person, but this summit has taught me to be self-confident. From now on, I will stand up and speak for what is right and will lead the way."

Photos



Photos

