

COMPLEMENTARITY OF THE UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION (UNSCR) 2250 AND THE AFRICAN UNION CONTINENTAL FRAMEWORK ON YOUTH, PEACE AND SECURITY

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Mark Patrick Kwesi
Rafiu Adeniran Lawal

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List of Acronyms

- SAPRM** - African Peer Review Mechanism
- AU** – African Union
- AUC** - Africa Union Commission
- AYC** - African Union Youth Charter
- CSO** - Civil Society Organisation
- ECPF** - ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework
- GIZ** - Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
- IGAD** - Inter-Governmental Authority on Development
- ISS** - Institute of Social Studies
- NAPs** - National Action Plans
- NEPAD** - New Partnership for Africa's Development
- NUPI** - Norwegian Institute of International Affairs
- NGY4P** - Nigerian Youth 4 Peace Initiative
- OHCHR** - Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
- PAP** - Pan Africa Parliament
- PSC** - Peace and Security Council
- SADC** - Southern African Development Community
- TFP** - Training for Peace
- UMA** - Arab Maghreb Union
- UN** - United Nations
- UNDP** - United Nations Development Program
- UNFPA** - United Nations Population Fund
- UNSCR** - United Nations Security Council Resolution
- YPS** - Youth, Peace and Security

Executive Summary

The upsurge in insecurity has continued to threaten global peace and stability. This has triggered actions by the United Nations (UN) as well as the African Union (AU) with regards to policies that target conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Both the UN and AU have identified the youth as key actors in preventing violence and critical stakeholders in the peacebuilding process and thus institutionalising Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda. Both institutions now encourage member states to mainstream young people's participation at all phases of conflict resolution, prevention of violence, countering of violent extremism, transforming conflict, and peacebuilding. On the 9th of December 2015, the UN Security Council adopted the historic resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security, the first UN resolution that recognizes young people as critical stakeholders on issues of peace and security.

Young people in Africa have hitherto played significant roles in conflict prevention and peacebuilding in Africa and are capable of contributing more in contemporary times. This has become more feasible with the earlier adoption of the Constitutive Act and the African Union Commission Strategic Plan 2004 - 2007, which gave due priority to young people as important partners to strengthen solidarity and cohesion. The recent adoption of the AU's Continental Framework on YPS in 2020 has further amplified the need for young people's participation in conflict prevention and building of peace and also provided a clear path for domesticating UNSCR 2250 in Africa.

This policy brief therefore, interrogates the complementarity of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015) on YPS and the AU's Continental Framework on YPS (2020). It also x-rays the challenges that hinder the implementation of the YPS agenda in Africa. **This policy brief makes the following recommendations towards strengthening the YPS Agenda in Africa:**

- i. Need for an effective and inclusive conflict prevention mechanism;
- ii. Institutionalizing a coherent UN and AU monitoring and evaluation mechanism that provides coherent feedback on the implementation of the YPS agenda at national levels;
- iii. Prioritizing young people's capacity building and empowerment;
- iv. Increase funding of CSOs and Youth-led Organizations;
- v. Deciphering and familiarizing of YPS agenda to young people at the grass root levels.



UNOY members in Addis 2019



Introduction

In contemporary practice of conflict resolution and peace mediation, due priority is accorded to young people's development and empowerment for adequate participation in all stages of peace processes. The rapid escalation of violent extremism and gradual deterioration of global peace, coupled with the rhetoric of narratives on youth as perpetrators and victims of violence are transforming contemporary discourse and practice of sustainable development, peace and security. Significantly, these transformations have induced notable constructive paradigm shifts in the AU and UN orchestration of policy frameworks that aim for conflict prevention and building of sustainable peace.

Peace and security define the cardinal objectives of the African Union (AU) and the UN. However, achieving these objectives have witnessed an unprecedented enunciation of the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) Agenda by the UN and the AU that poignantly captures youth as an imperative custodian of conflict prevention and consolidation of sustainable peace. A major step in ensuring the recognition of the positive role of youths in peacebuilding was taken by the United Nations Security Council in 2015 through the adoption of the Resolution 2250 which gives formal legitimacy and recognition to the efforts of youths on issues relating to peace and security. Similarly, the AU has also adopted a 'Continental Framework on Youth, Peace and Security' (CFYPS) which comes with a 10-year implementation plan.

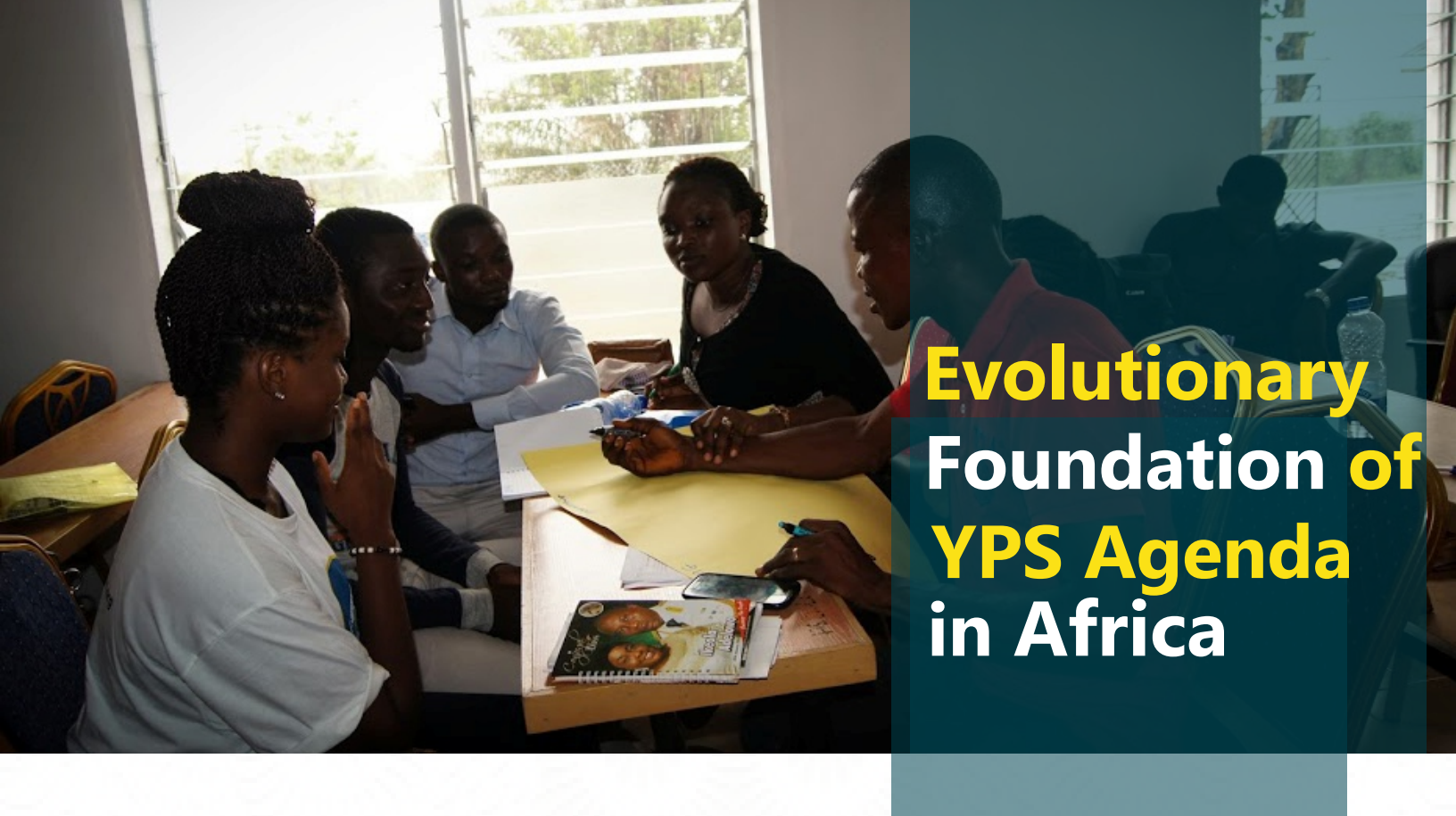
The UN and the AU's Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda are complementing policy frameworks, which mandates the mainstreaming and domesticating of young people's participation at all phases of conflict resolution, prevention of violence, countering of violent extremism, transforming conflict and peacebuilding. The policy frameworks also recognize the indispensable roles of young people, Civil Society Organizations (CSO) and local non-governmental organizations at promoting the UN and the AU's YPS policy agendas.

It is imperative to note that since 2008, global peace and security has drastically deteriorated as new cases of armed conflict and recycling of violence spurs profusely (IEP, 2009). As a matter of formidable concern, youth

involvement in extreme violence and armed conflicts most especially in Africa endangers human security, regional stability and progress. It can well be observed that young people are highly vulnerable to armed conflicts and extreme violence in Africa. During armed violence, young men and boys are recruited as combatants to take sides in conflicts, while girls are subjected to all forms of sexual violence and often suffer high fatalities. Evidence of these detrimental vulnerabilities were seen in the Burundi, Liberia and Sierra Leone civil wars and the habitual kidnapping of girls by the proscribed armed group popularly known as Boko Haram operating in Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger and Chad.

Without adequate in-depth examination on salient issues that warrant young people's involvement in violence, young people have been securitised as perpetrators of violence. Putatively, this stereotypic and distorted recognition of the youth portrays them as irrational actors that propel violence. On the converse, a careful examination of salient issues that warrant young people's involvement in violent extremism and armed conflicts in Africa has proven that young people are highly vulnerable to human security and development issues. Thus, despite a few incidences of youth participation in violence and armed conflicts, the majority of youths of Africa are actively engaged in peacebuilding and transforming conflicts to achieve long-lasting and sustainable peace (BBFORPEACE 2020).

Thus, this policy brief aims to examine existing policy frameworks particularly focusing on the complementarity of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015) on Youth, Peace and Security and the African Union's Continental Framework on YPS as well identify the challenges that pose as hindrances to the implementation of the YPS agenda in Africa. It draws heavily from expert interaction from one of the YPS dialogue series organised by the Building Blocks for Peace Foundation in August 2020. It concludes that irrespective of the slow pace of domestication of these frameworks by member states across the continent, the inclusion of youth into existing peace and security architecture is an important initiative that should be properly incorporated into local and national policies.



Evolutionary Foundation of YPS Agenda in Africa

Several issues underscore the enunciation of the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda in Africa. As much as ongoing conversation places much emphasis on young people's roles in conflict prevention and building of peace, the agenda also encapsulates very significant issues that have both short and long term effects on peace and security. Institutional codifying and prioritizing of the YPS agenda has shown that young people's ability, initiatives, skills, talents and innovations are indispensable attributes to leverage and build upon for the consolidation of sustainable development, peace and security in Africa. During the struggle for independence in Africa and the major civil wars that hitherto broke out on the continent, it was accounted that young people played plausible roles in preventing the escalation of conflicts and as well mediated peace in Africa. During these agitations, young people engaged in protests and movements that led to the independence of several African countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa etc (Atuhaire, 2019). In the contemporary moment, as new forms of extreme violence fumes and proliferate exponentially, due priority is given to young people's development and empowerment.

Enquiries into underlying issues that warranted the YPS Agenda had showcased that emergence and escalation of

armed conflicts and extreme violence strongly underpin the orchestration of the YPS policy framework in Africa. These perturbing issues are evolving exponentially, and it conspicuously touts young people as perpetrators or victims of violence. Thus, it is important to note that outbreaks of extreme violence and armed conflict often propelled by ethnoreligious, cultism, communal and political rationales are common issues that influence youth involvement in violence and conflict. Due to the gross trend of human development, which is characterized by extreme poverty, poor education, unemployable skills e.t.c. young men and boys are mobilized and armed to take sides during the outbreak of armed conflicts. As a matter of concern, arming of boys and young men as combatants became a serious issue during the Liberia and Sierra Leone civil wars. Most recently young people's involvement in violence can be seen in the ongoing political crisis in Ivory Coast, the Central Africa Republic, the secession agitations in Cameroon, the ongoing civil war in the Tigray region of Ethiopia and the manifolds of violence erupting in Nigeria. By negative implications, youth involvement in extreme violence constitutes a grave threat to national and regional development, stability and progress.



Demographically, there are about 1.85 billion young women and men 10 to 24 years of age in the world in 2020 (WPP, 2019), 90 percent of whom live in developing countries (UN, 2020). According to the World Population Review 2018 demographic report, African youth make up a third of the continent's population (WPR, 2018). This poignantly describes young people as the most populous class of population in the continent of Africa. Despite their strong demographic representation, African youth are unprecedentedly marginalized and structurally subjected to the long decades of damping challenges of underdevelopment and insecurity in Africa. The challenges of insecurity grossly affecting young people in Africa can be well observed as an outcome of perpetual neglect of good governance, development and security. Thus, the negative implications of development and security deficit tend to encourage youth engagement and involvement in various forms of criminal and illegal activities as they lack trust and confidence in government and legitimate institutions for the protection of their rights and security.

To buttress this further, the euphoria of wrong narratives and perceptions that stigmatize young people as perpetrators of violence is among the key issues that warrant the enunciation of the youth, peace and security agenda. The perception that young people are perpetrators of violence is a wrong notion and should be consistently debunked because it negates the principles of inclusive peacebuilding processes and also has the potential of affecting the future of conflict prevention and peace mediation in Africa. It is indisputable that young people like every other category of people are involved in the escalation of violence in Africa. However, it is worthy to note the push factors that foster such involvements in violence, notable among them are: political instability or poor governance, lack of socioeconomic and political

opportunities, and insecurity which creates the likelihood of violence. In most cases of armed conflict outbreak, frustrated and angered young men are exploited by extremist groups to further perpetuate the proliferation of violence; while young women are either forced into prostitution or used as sex slaves. **Thus, it is important to note that the system, rather than young people, is the cause of extreme violence and armed conflict, even where young people are the perpetrators.**

Another major underlying problem identified by researchers and policymakers which served as a catalyst for the recent international, continental and regional orchestration of the youth, peace and security agenda is the unimaginable gross marginalization of young people (Kwaja and Owonikoko, 2020). By implication, the marginalization of young people tends to foment political distrust and hopelessness, challenges systems and structures and adds to national, regional and global insecurity (UNSCR, 2020). The emergence of the youth, peace and security agenda is thus an important policy framework arising from detrimental socio-economic and political issues that African youths are confronted with.

Contemporary, the issue of gross marginalization and underrepresentation of young people in governance and decision making are fomenting worrisome agitations and demands by young people in Africa. Since the liberation of the African continent, young people have had little or no space in the enterprise of governance and decision making. As a result of this, several governmental policies do not convey the interest of the youth and are sometimes perceived as structural violence against young people. Young people's underrepresentation in governance and decision making depicts the reasons why the rates of poor education, unemployment and poverty remain very high among young people in Africa.

Policy Frameworks in Africa

The recent institutional enunciation and articulation of YPS Agenda as a policy framework by the UN and the AU and as well as Regional Economic Communities emphatically outlined the roles of youth in development, peace and security. Foremost is the codification of principles as mandates for member states to simulate in national policies. The significant relevance of Youth, Peace and Security is traceable to the African Union adoption of the Constitutive Act, a continental initiative which came into force on 26 May 2001. Considering the shrinking level of regional peace, security and development, the AU Constitutive Act expressly gave due priority to young people as important partners to strengthen solidarity and cohesion among 'our peoples' (Rhuks et al., 2020). Worth considering also is the African Union Commission's (AUC) Strategic Plan 2004 – 2007, a short term goal that aimed for the strengthening the capacities of stakeholders, installation of key institutions, and implementation of priority programmes which brought the relevance of young people into limelight.

The Africa Youth Charter (AYC), adopted by the Assembly of Head of State and Governments in Banjul, The Gambia on July 2, 2006 was the first policy expression that institutionalized the role of youth in promoting sustainable development, peace and security in Africa. The charter evidently concretized the indispensable relevance of young people's role in the development of Africa by establishing a continental policy framework that obligate member states responsibilities of protecting the rights of young people; inclusive participation of young people in the development of Africa at all level; and also empowering young people through the provision of quality education and skills development. Specifically, Article 17 of the Africa Youth Charter outlined the germane role of youth in promoting peace and security in Africa.

Upon the euphoria of negative narratives that blurry captured young people as violent actors, recent reports and studies on YPS are beginning to transform and reshape these fraudulent narratives. It is highly germane

to note that the majority of young people in Africa are actively engaged in transforming conflict and building peace at different levels. However, the contributions of young people to conflict prevention and building of peace is yet to receive adequate recognition from AU member States. In the 2017 Interpeace's annual report on "Youth at the Center of Peacebuilding", young people were conspicuously noted as becoming central actors in the pursuit of sustainable and lasting peace particularly in Burundi, Rwanda and Democratic Republic of Congo through the provision of spaces for youth participation in peace dialogue and negotiation.

With the recent appreciation and recognition of the constructive roles young people have been playing in transforming conflict and building of sustainable peace in the continent of Africa, the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the Africa Union dedicated its 807th meeting held on 8 November 2018 to the first ever Open Session on the theme: "Youth, Peace and Security," to commemorate the Africa Youth Day (Etuhaire, 2019). Reports and information presented by youth organizations during the session outcome the AU-PSC communiqué, which emphatically placed African youths at the epicenter of governance, sustainable peace, and security. Prior to the Open Session, AU-PSC engaged in an inaugural consultation with Y4P and youth organizations under the theme "Towards a Continental Strategic Framework for Youth Engagement in Conflict Prevention" to ascertain the outstanding contributions of young people to conflict prevention and peacebuilding in Africa. Follow up on the inaugural consultation paved the path for another inaugural consultative engagement held at the Africa Union Commission (AUC) headquarters in Addis-Ababa between 5- 6 November 2018 which centered on the theme "Harnessing African Youth Contributions to Peace and Security". Significant outcome of the consultations informed the presentations made by youth organizations to the Peace and Security Council at the November 8, 2018 Africa Union 807th meeting.

Detrimental vulnerability of young people to armed conflict as explicitly expounded in youth organizations reports to the council during the Open Session at the AU 807th meeting concretized the AU-PSC communiqué affirmation on the need to protect young people during armed conflict. More so, the communiqué mandated the council to establish Youth Envoy, regional ambassadors and also conduct a regional study that hinge on "The Roles and Contributions of Youth to Peace and Security in Africa" through the support of Youth 4 Peace (Y4P) program, youth-led organizations, Regional Economic Communities (RECs), the Regional Mechanisms (RMs), member states and other relevant entities. The PSC instructed study aimed to draft and finalize a continental framework on Youth, Peace and Security with the primary objective to facilitate youth participation in peace and security; empowering and capacitating young people with relevant skills to contribute to conflict preventions and building of peace; and also transforming the derogatory euphoria of narratives that define young people as violent actors.

The mandated Y4P program is thus a notable benchmark program setup and launched in September 2018 by the AU Department of Peace and Security with the primary objective of mainstreaming young people in Africa into the peace and security agenda. Basically, Y4P program was enacted to carry out a regional, continental and international agenda that relates to the role of youth promoting peace and security. This obligation succinctly defines the PSC's mandating of Y4P with the support of relevant stakeholders to carry out the study. After extensive consultations and field visits, coupled with input from RECs/RMs, fifteen (15) youth representatives from the five regions in Africa and notable partners such as UNDP, GIZ, OHCHR, ISS, ACCORD, TFP, and NUPI, Y4P reviewed and validated the draft Continental Framework on YPS and the findings on the study "Roles and Contributions of Youth to Peace and Security in Africa" on 29 October 2019. The continental framework primarily aimed to amplify meaningful participation of youth in peace and security at all levels; while the study sought to promote the outstanding overlooked contributions of

young people to conflict prevention and the building of sustainable peace in the continent of Africa.

Evidently, outcome of the council communiqué warranted institutional initiation of the AU Agenda 2063 which expressly articulate the pan-African vision of an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals emphatically refer to the role of young people in promoting long term regional and international development goals. Thus, young people's distinctive talents, technological innovations, enthusiasm and their resilience to difficult circumstances are considered as good attributes necessary to achieve the anticipated sustainable development goals in Africa. Achieving this agenda is unattainable without the elimination of war in Africa. The implication of this warranted the AU initiative "Silencing the Gun" which was designed to end all wars in Africa by 2020. The initiative also recognized the roles of young people in achieving the objective of ending all wars in Africa (AU, 2016).

Contemporary, the objectives of YPS have influenced RECs/RMs to initiate a series of regional policy initiatives and programs that are predicated upon mainstreaming youth into regional peace and security and young people development. In 2019, The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) prioritized the nitty-gritty of youth empowerment in its Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF). The Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Regional Strategy Implementation Plan 2016-2020 also emphatically mainstream and domesticate youth participation in conflict prevention and building of peace. The General Secretariat of the Arab Maghreb Union (UMA) has also developed a regional strategy for Engagement, Participation and Advocacy to amplify the voices of youth on the promotion of peace, security and sustainable development. In an attempt to address the deficit of young people's conflict prevention and decision making skills; and exponential rate of unemployment among young people, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) initiated the Youth Employment Promotion Policy in 2016.

Policy Frameworks at International/UN Level

At the global level, the United Nations unanimous declaration of the UNSCR 2250 in 2015 which expressly articulated the imperative roles of youth in governance, prevention of conflicts and promotion of peace in the world can also be said to be a germane global policy framework that gave birth to YPS policy framework. The UNSCR 2250 is thus, an archetype of the global transformative policy frameworks that mandates the mainstreaming and domesticating of young people in all phases of conflict prevention, resolution and peace mediation by member states. More so the policy frameworks offer policy blueprints for member states, civil societies and their partners to simulate YPS in their agendas.

Subsequent upon the UNSCR 2250, the United Nation has stepped further to include new narratives to amplify young people's participation in conflict prevention and building of peace and also to reinforce political commitment to the implementation of the Youth, Peace and Security agenda. This development birthed the UNSCR 2419 in 2018 which evidently sought for ways of increasing the representation of young people when negotiating and implementing peace agreements while

also recognizing the grave implications of young people marginalization and exclusion from decision making at all levels. A step further on this development was the adoption of the UN Security Council third resolution (UNSCR 2535) on Youth, Peace and Security on 14 July 2020.

In a nutshell, the momentum of YPS Agenda which indoctrinated and mandated young people's empowerment and development originated from the cataclysmic vulnerability and participation of young people in armed conflicts and violent extremism. The threat to global peace and security emanating from the escalation of new conflicts; shrinking of regional development and the recognition of youths as salient custodians of conflict prevention and peacebuilding conspicuously warrants the enunciation of the notable global and regional YPS policy frameworks as political efforts toward an inclusive sustainable peace, development and security. As peace and security become the mandated priority of the international community, mainstreaming young people into peace and security imperatively becomes a strategic policy direction to achieve sustainable regional peace and security.



Advocacy mission to the AU Commission in Addis Ababa organised by UNOY Peacebuilders in 2019



Complementarity of AU and UN YPS Policy Framework

The UN and AU YPS agenda are complementing transformative development policy frameworks that outlined institutional principles of domesticating and mainstreaming of young people in long term sustainable development, peace and security processes. Young people provide a solid foundation that offers an invaluable opportunity to the practice of conflict prevention and building of sustainable peace to leverage upon. The YPS policy framework primarily aims at ensuring regional and global peace and security, strategically recognizing the invaluable role of young people in achieving the nitty-gritty of the policy. The YPS policy framework also encompasses other areas such as young people's involvement and participation in sustainable development, governance and decision making to convey the interest of young people.

Following the outlined principles of the UNSCR 2250, the following are the 5 cardinal objectives: **Participation, Partnerships, Prevention, Protection and Disengagement and Re-integration** of youth in all phases of conflict resolution, peace mediation and conflict prevention. Comparatively, the AU YPS policy framework shares a similar structure with the UN YPS agenda. Its specific objectives are Participation, Prevention, Protection, Partnership and Coordination and Disengagement and Reintegration. The AU framework went ahead to stating how the principles will be concretely implemented and monitored which was conspicuously missing in the UNSCR 2250. The overall objective of the framework is to facilitate the meaningful engagement and participation of African youth in all spectrums of peace and security at national, regional and

continental levels. The AU Continental Framework on YPS is a critical step at domesticating UNSCR 2250 on the continent. Furthermore, these policy frameworks provide governments, youth, civil society and international partners with a framework, which underlines the rights, duties and freedoms of young people.

Recently, the global Youth, Peace and Security agenda has witnessed significant progress in the form of enunciating new resolutions such as the UNSCR 2419 adopted in 2018 and the newly UNSCR 2535 adopted in July 2020. The newly adopted United Nations Security Council Resolution 2535 (2020) sought to diversify young people's participation in conflict prevention and peacebuilding by recognizing the imperative roles of other categories of young people such as the refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). The codified principle also emphasised the importance of protecting civic spaces and also recognized how climate change affects young people. With the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, the recently adopted UNSCR 2535 copiously reiterated on the significant roles young people have been playing against the pandemic. In a more precise step further, the newly adopted resolution made the use of progressive languages and firmly places young people at the centre of implementation, monitoring, evaluation and coordination of peacebuilding programmes and projects. **Therefore, the UNSCR 2250, 2419, and 2535; and the African Union Youth, Peace and Security Framework all sought to strengthen and enhance young people's involvement in all spheres of conflict prevention and peacebuilding.**

Domesticating AU-YPS Continental Framework

Since the journey of the youth, peace and security agenda, youth-led organizations and their international partners have sought opportunities to achieve the narratives of the UNSCR 2250 and the African Union Continental Framework. Precisely, the AU and UN YPS policy framework encourages non-governmental organizations, community-based and other CSOs, which include youth-led organizations to actively participate in the efforts aimed at promoting peace, security and stability in Africa (Rhuks et al., 2020). The youth, peace and security agenda has gained significant momentum and also witnessed the formulation and implementation of initiatives that seek to practicalize the efforts of mainstreaming young people's roles in promoting peace and security in the continent of Africa. An evident example of this initiative since the articulation of the YPS policy framework is the African Union's (AU) Youth for Peace (Y4P) Africa Program, which was inaugurated in September 2018 as a practical step towards mainstreaming young people into the discourse and practice of Africa's peace and security.

Aftermath the Y4P consultations with youth organizations, RECs/RMs and other relevant stakeholders as mandated by the PSC communiqué to carry out a regional study that centered on "The Roles and Contributions of Youth to Peace and Security in Africa", the AU YPS Continental Framework was reviewed and validated in 2020. Through the support and contribution of Y4P, youth-led organizations, RECs/RMs and relevant entities, the AU YPS Continental Framework was launched in 2020 as a 10-year implementation plan for YPS agenda. Significantly, the AU-YPS Continental Framework are 23 action plans that entails: Popularization and advocacy for

the domestication and implementation of continental framework on YPS at the national and regional level; Development of National Actions Plans (NAPs) on YPS in line with continental framework and national youth policies; Advocacy for the implementation of NAPs including youth participation in decision making process; Capacity building on YPS for senior officials; Capacity building on early warning, conflict prevention mediation of youth-female and male including displaced persons and persons living with disabilities; Support for the implementation of youth-led conflict prevention and mediation initiatives as part of contributions to silencing the gun etc.

At the local levels, good efforts have also been made to realize the mandate of the UNSCR 2250 and the AU Continental Framework. For example, in 2016, the Nigeria Youth for Peace Initiative (NY4PI) was inaugurated by the Building Blocks for Peace Foundation as a youth-led movement to mobilize vulnerable youth in Nigeria for the domestication of YPS frameworks locally. This initiative is noted as the coming together of young Nigerians who felt dissatisfied by the heightened level of young people's marginalization, victimization of young people as perpetrators of violence and constant outbreak of violence in the country. This evidently demonstrates that young people in the continent of Africa have a significant history of playing constructive roles in conflict prevention and building of peace, acting in line with foundational policy initiatives that complement YPS. More so, several workshops, training, seminars and webinars have been conducted to train and equip young people with the necessary tools and resources they require to participate in African peace and security.

Challenges Hindering the Implementation of UNSCR2250 and AU Continental Framework on YPS

Despite the massive efforts by youth-led organizations in Africa to ensure adequate mainstreaming and domesticating of young people in all phases of conflict prevention and resolution; and the building of peace in Africa, a huge percentage of young people in Africa still require the skills and capacity to engage in productive conflict preventions and peacebuilding processes. To date, young people in Africa are still vulnerable to gross marginalization, abuse of human rights in the form of police brutality and extrajudicial killing, and extreme poverty.

Currently, it is evidently noted that the outbreak of the ravaging coronavirus pandemic with the code name Covid-19 has placed a huge constraint on the consolidation of YPS agenda in the continent of Africa. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, the AU Continental Framework has witnessed significant setbacks as all physical activities to propagate and pursue the mandates of the framework were abruptly pegged as a means to strictly ensure all Covid-19 precautionary measures. Due to the negative impacts of the pandemic, unemployment and poverty rates among young people have increased exponentially. This has triggered new waves of violence across the continent.

Furthermore, the lack of political will and ratification, since the enunciation of the AU-YPS Continental Framework in 2020 by the Peace and Security Council, member states of the African Union are slow or even reluctant to domesticate the mandated policy in national agenda. In terms of the decision-making process and governance, young people's representations are relatively low or without representation. For example, most African leaders are 55 years old or older, with some as old as 75 and only 14.2 percent of the parliament members under the age of 40 (Brookings, 2019). This represents a significant gap between those deciding policy and those who have to weather its effects. This implies that young people are still excluded from participating in governance and decision making. While it has been argued that young people's exclusion in the decision

making and governance process is due to their own lack of interest, Van Gyampo and Anyidoho (2019) opined that "young people's involvement and activism in alternative spaces of political engagement suggests that they may be disillusioned with formal political systems they perceive as flawed, corrupt, repressive, or exclusionary".

It is also instructive to note that the AU YPS agenda heavily lags behind in term of domestication and progress compared to the UN YPS agenda that has trickled out of the UN Security Council to be on the prioritized agenda of the Peacebuilding Commission and other UN entities like Peacekeeping missions and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Presently, the AU YPS agenda is yet to be prioritized by other AU entities such as NEPAD, APRM and PAP. It is also worthy to note that the office of the youth envoy is yet to be institutionalized by the AU. With the expiration of the tenure of the first youth envoy, Aya Chebbi in February 2021, the AU has refused to appoint a replacement nor announce the process for such action as at the time of release of this policy brief. This shows greatly the commitment of AU to youth issues.

Another key challenge that can be noted to be hindering the propagation of YPS agenda in Africa is the lack of adequate funding of youth-led organizations to propagate the nitty-gritty of the policy framework. While youth-led organizations have taken the responsibility upon them to propagate and consolidate a sustainable youth, peace and security agenda in Africa, provisions of funds for youth capacity building and empowerment are either not available or relatively low. This, however, makes it very difficult for the mandate of youth empowerment and development to be achieved. Since the enunciation of the continental framework, the AU has not been pulling enough funds for the domestication of the YPS agenda, the entity has been conspicuously noted to be playing a facilitating role while leaving the implementation of the agenda to member states. Thus, the huge debt crisis coupled with the challenge of the economic crisis in Africa suffers from the allocation of budget by the member states to youths and the YPS agenda.

Policy Recommendations

■ **Need for an Effective and Inclusive Conflict**

Prevention Mechanism: It is appropriate to fast track the implementation of the UN and AU YPS policy frameworks by member states of the African Union through the design and implementation of an effective and inclusive conflict prevention mechanism that engages young people. Consistent commitment and actions should be taken towards addressing the triggers of conflicts and ingredients of instability within the continent, especially with a youth sensitive lens. Re-escalation of armed conflicts and continual perpetuation of young people's marginalization may greatly affect the implementation of the AU and UN YPS policy agenda. Poverty, illiteracy, lack of marketable skills and unemployment rates among young people in Africa is alarming and disheartening. These issues show that the continent of Africa is far below the mandates of the UNSCR 2250 and the African Youth Charter that prioritization of young people development and empowerment.

■ **Institutionalizing a Coherent African Union Commission Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanism that Provides Coherent Feedback on the Implementation of the YPS Agenda at National Level:** Successful implementation of the YPS agenda in the continent of Africa requires the setting up of firm and strong monitoring and evaluation mechanisms by the African Union. Low turnout in the implementation of the policy in the continent of Africa depicts that there are no coherent institutional monitoring and evaluating mechanisms that provide adequate information on the implementation of the YPS policy. The negative effect of this tends to further diminish the domesticating and mainstreaming of young people in governance and decision making. Therefore, setting up and institutionalizing a strong monitoring and evaluation mechanism with a maximum concentration of young people in the M&E will strategically aid the rapid propagation of the YPS agenda. Thus, it is important for institutions such as the APRM through the support of the AU Y4P to prioritize the mandate of the continental framework in order to provide reliable feedback on the success and challenge of the policy framework. Invariably, there must be willingness by the administrators to provide clear feedback on how youth participation has influenced peace and security decisions and outcomes.

Participant at the 2019 Nigeria
Youth for Peace Forum in Lagos



■ **Strengthened Collaboration between the AU, UN, RECs/RMs, Civil Society Organizations and Youth-led Organizations in Africa:** Since the institutional declaration of the YPS articulated principles, youth-led organizations have copiously translated the policy into a mandated agenda that drives their activities. For the meaningful outcome of the youth, peace and security agenda in the continent of Africa, there is a need for an inclusive and cordial collaboration between the AU, UN, RECS, youth-led organizations and their partners. This cordial relationship will therefore provide youth-led organizations with necessary resources and tools to propagate the mandate of the policy. More so this cordial relationship will provide the United Nations and the African Union with firsthand information on salient issues that stand as barriers to the successful implementation of the policy.

■ **Prioritizing Young People's Capacity Building and Empowerment:** There is a wide vacuum existing in young people's roles in sustainable development, conflict prevention, and peacebuilding in the continent of Africa. This wide vacuum depicts that most young people lack the germane required skills to propagate and consolidate sustainable peace, security and development in Africa. Therefore, capacity building and empowering of young people should be mandated among the African Union member states, civil society organizations and youth-led organizations in Africa.

■ **Increase Funding of CSOs and Youth-led Organizations:** Lack of access or adequate funding of youth-led organizations and CSOs impedes the productive consolidation of YPS agenda in Africa. Civil society organizations and youth-led organizations in Africa need access to quick financial resources that will assist them in fostering their adopted initiatives that aim for achieving the YPS agenda.

■ **Deciphering and Familiarizing of YPS Agenda to Young People at the Grassroot:** Many young people at the grass-root level, who are unable to read and write need to be familiarized with the intent of the AU and the UN Youth, Peace and Security Agenda. Thus, this initiative will entail interpreting the outlines of the policy frameworks to local languages for a good understanding and adequate participation of young people in peacebuilding and conflict prevention at the grass-root level. Just as the NY4PI that was launched by the Building Blocks for Peace in 2016 in Nigeria, other youth-led organizations in Africa can also emulate this innovative initiative to domesticate the mainstreaming of young people into conflict prevention, decision making processes and building of peace.



Participant at the 2019 Nigeria Youth for Peace Forum in Lagos

Conclusion

Since the adoption of the Youth, Peace and Security agenda, the various policy frameworks such as UNSCR 2250 (2015), 2419 (2018), 2535 (2020) and the AU Continental Framework on YPS have gained significant momentum in the continent of Africa. Most specifically, the agenda has attracted the attention of relevant stakeholders such as the African Union, Civil Society Organizations, member states of the AU, RECs/RMs, youth-led organizations and their international partners to promote the domestication and mainstreaming of young people in peace and security in Africa. The African Union and the United Nations Youth, Peace and Security Agenda offer a wide range peace and security frameworks to CSOs and youth-led organizations to simulate in their conflict prevention, peacebuilding and sustainable development activities. The wide vacuum that exists in the spectrum of YPS in Africa simply depicts that youth-led organization curiously driven by the mandate of the YPS agenda lacks adequate resources and tools to foster the propagation of African youth participation in peace and security. More so, the neglect of youth empowerment and capacity building by the AU member states impedes young people's acquisition of relevant skills to be mainstreamed and domesticated in conflict prevention and building of peace in the continent. Young people are assets, partners and an invaluable stakeholder for the consolidation of sustainable development, peace and security in the continent of Africa. However, there is an urgent need for member states to invest in addressing the structural inequalities manifesting on the continent.

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About Authors

Mark Kwensi Patrick is a Research fellow at the Building Blocks for Peace Foundation. His areas of interest include democracy, youth participation, peace and sustainable development.

Rafiu Adeniran Lawal is the Executive Director of Building Blocks for Peace Foundation and also the National Coordinator of the Nigeria Youth 4 Peace Initiative.

About BBFORPEACE

Building Blocks for Peace Foundation is a network of young people working on conflict prevention and peacebuilding, prevention of violent extremism, accountability governance and sustainable development in Nigeria. The organization is building the capacity and resilience of youth against violent philosophies by actively engaging them through interfaith and intercultural dialogue, policy advocacy, peer to peer training, workshops, radio programming, community sensitization and research. Through our Nigeria Youth 4 Peace Initiative, thousands of young people have been empowered on conflict prevention and peacebuilding across Nigeria.

email:
info@bbforpeace.org