



YOUTH AND POLITICAL GOVERNANCE IN WEST AFRICA

INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUE AND EXPERIENCE
SHARING WITH PARLIAMENTARIANS AND LOCAL
ELECTED OFFICIALS

JUNE 2021



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The African Youth Charter defines youth as anyone between the age of 15 and 35. In West Africa, young people make up more than 53% of the population of about 412,453,951 million¹, and current demographic projections suggest that this number could double by 2050.² Unfortunately, this demographic weight is not translated into youth involvement in the management of public affairs.

In politics, young people are in minority at both, elective and nominative positions. In 2009, the African Union declared the “Africa Youth Decade” (2009-2018) with an action plan to empower youth and promote their participation in politics. Three years after the end of the youth decade and despite the adoption of other international, continental, and regional frameworks³ there is not much evidence of youth meaningful participation in political governance. Many young people continue to face a variety of legal and socio-economic barriers, limiting their full participation in political life and decision-making processes. Also, there is an intergenerational gap that impedes youth learning and readiness to participate in governance.

The year 2021 is an election year for some countries in West Africa. The parliamentary and local elections, precisely in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal, present an opportunity to promote youth political participation by creating platforms for intergenerational experience sharing to maximize the chances of success for youth candidates.

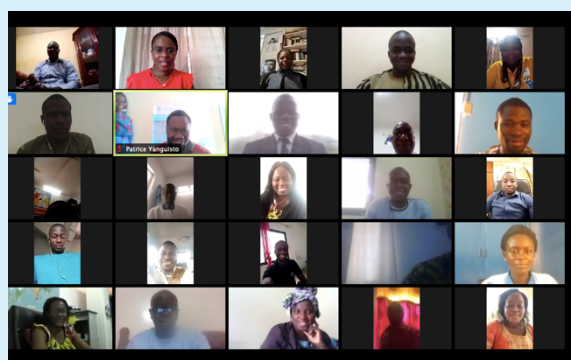
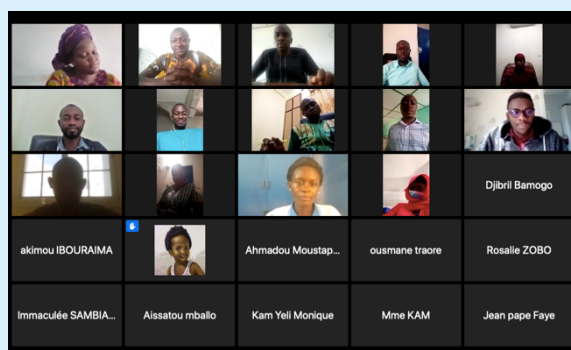
In this context, the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), under its Youth, Peace and Security Program, organized a webinar on the 26 of February 2021 on the theme: Youth and Political Governance in West Africa. The webinar was intended to enhance confidence in youth through experience sharing with their peers and elders on strategies to engage and succeed in a

political career. Eighty-two (82) persons, including parliamentarians, local elected officials, youth contestants and youth activists were in attendance.

Discussions with panelists and participants centered around:

- ◇ lessons learnt from the political life;
- ◇ progress and challenges of youth political participation;
- ◇ recommendations for an increased engagement of youth in political governance.

This paper summarizes the key reflections and take- aways from the webinar.



¹ <https://worldpopulationreview.com/continents/western-africa-population>

² <https://www.tresor.economie.gouv.fr/Pays/CI/perspectives-demographiques-en-afrique-de-l-ouest>

³ The United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250, the African Union's Continental Framework on Youth, Peace and Security, the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework.

Lessons learned from the political life

- A major lesson that emanated from the discussions is that having a political vision and assessing your personal skills and abilities to lead the realization of that vision are key steps to take in political life. This is important to remain focused and conscious of your strengths, weaknesses as well as comparative advantages to leverage on or address to maximize chance of success in the political career.

At 23, I was on the top list of my party's candidates for the 2020 parliamentary elections in Burkina Faso. This happened, not because I have any financial influence, but only my vision and commitment paid the price." **Samiratou Ouedraogo**

- Getting to a leadership position in the political career, requires some values such as patience. For some of the panelists, this patience or waiting period, considered as part of the learning process, lasted for about 10 years. Though long, this was necessary to acquire the prerequisites to embrace their political career.
- There are many entry points for youth participation in political governance. Being an active party member, engaged in party's activities and the grassroots mobilization, could not only pave way for a position within the party, but also helps to gain the trust and confidence of the communities they engage with to prepare for future electoral contest.

'It all started with a strong activism at the grassroots level. My dedication, hard work and perseverance contributed to my election as a Municipal Councilor. I invite my peers to get involved from the grassroots within their parties and give themselves time to learn. Grace Atindekoun, 27-year-old, Councilor of the Municipality of Sô Ava, Benin.

- Young people could equally start on their own, without any affiliation to political parties. This option has the advantage of sparing them from parties' administrative and filing burdens that discourage youth participation and the disadvantage of losing the learning opportunities from the group dynamics. In both options, there are pros and cons that need to be carefully weighted to take the appropriate decision.

Perspectives from Panelists

'Political governance is not just about elective positions. Young people can also influence politics at a nominative/administrative position'.

Zida Abdoul Razak, 32-year-old Burkinabe, Economist/Planner, Youth and Education Advisor and Director of Prospective, Partnership and Youth Cooperation.

'Young people have the ability to impose themselves in politics through a strong will and determination'. **Honorable Diarra Banyoua**, 37 and the youngest Parliamentarian in Niger.

'The age and financial autonomy are not a necessary condition to succeed in politics. Only the vision of a better society and the commitment to achieve it are key'. **Samira Samiratou Ouedraogo**

'For the conduct of their electoral campaign, young people can do more with their limited resources by opting for less budget-consuming expenditure, such as door-to-door outreach, no printing of gadgets -- to only focus on their programs'. **Honorable Johnwan Teke**, Côte d'Ivoire

'Young people have a comparative advantage in terms of communication tools that they can leverage on for effective communication on their social project/program to mobilize a strong support of their electorate'. **Honorable Johnwan Teke**

Participants, in this section, acknowledged existing national efforts in addition to regional and international milestones in promoting youth participation in governance and decision making. However, these efforts remain limited in view of the profound and multifaceted challenges facing young people in engaging in political life.

MILESTONES

Key milestones include the development of national youth policies, the establishment of youth structures and the increasing awareness of youth regarding their participation in politics.

◇ *Development of national youth policies and establishment of youth structures*

Majority of the West African States have developed national youth policies, as a strategic document that addresses cross-sectoral issues of youth, including their participation in political governance. National Youth Councils have also been established to provide advice and strategic orientations on youth related issues to inform policy development, implementation, and assessments.

◇ *Increased awareness of youth on their role in strengthening political governance*

The growing number of youth groups and movements across the region, claiming their rights, demanding for inclusive and people-centered political governance, attest to the increased awareness of youth on their responsibility in sharpening a governance architecture that best respond to their current and future needs. Very active on social networks, engaged in political debates and democratic movements, the youth in the region are increasingly demonstrating their ability to influence policy. Social movement groups such as “Y’en a mare”⁴ in Senegal and “Balai Citoyen”⁵ in Burkina are good examples of youth positive engagements for policy influencing.

⁴ <https://sites.clas.ufl.edu/africanquarterly/files/Volume-14-Issue-3.pdf>

CHALLENGES

Challenges to youth participation in political governance include: limitations in legal frameworks, lack of inclusion in political parties’ leadership and limited capacity of youth in politics

◇ *Limitations in legal frameworks*

In West Africa, although the right to participate in the management of political life is a fundamental right enshrined in many constitutions and electoral codes, the participation of young people in politics remains a matter of debate, especially in elective positions and in decision making processes.

First, it is noteworthy to indicate the contrast between the voting age and the age of eligibility for elected office in presidential, parliamentary and local elections. In many cases, the right to vote is recognized for all citizens aged 18 and above, while the age for contesting for elective positions remains beyond the age of 18. Secondly, the non-binding nature of the electoral law in relation to the integration of young people on the lists of political parties does not pave the way for youth leadership, especially in political parties.

◇ *Lack of youth Inclusion in political parties’ leadership*

Within political parties, the concept of seniority, rooted in the culture and patriarchy system of African societies, seems to impede on youth political participation. Political elites tend to reproduce an ideology of seniority in which the ruling class is identified as the group of elders. This political instrumentalization of social seniority has the effect of giving them a sense of legitimacy in order to perpetuate their power at the expense of young people. This practice questions the intergenerational transfer of knowledge and power for parties’ sustainability.

Another factor limiting the inclusion of young people on the lists of political parties, as candidates, is inevitably their weak economic

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Le_Balai_Citoyen

power to contribute to the filing and campaign related costs; which disadvantages them against more financially influential candidates within the party.

◇ **Limited capacity of youth in politics**

Politics is a science and an art that needs to be learned to groom future leaders. Engaging in political life calls for a better understanding of systems of governance and power, the analysis of political activities, political thoughts, political behavior, the constitutions and laws⁶. It requires some analytical, communication and critical-thinking skills to better examine, predict and address critical issues that affect lives. Many people, including youth express willingness to embrace political career, ignoring the fundamental principles that govern it and the required capacity for an effective leadership.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INCREASED YOUTH POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Participants of the webinar made the following recommendations to foster youth political participation.

To the Governments

- States should adopt a youth quota policy to foster youth political participation and leadership at all levels of decision making, across sectors;
- Revise electoral laws to lower the legal age to contest for an election and maximize the chances for youth political engagement;
- Domesticize the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 by developing and implementing National Action Plans on the resolution to encourage youth participation in governance, peace and security.

To the Political Parties

- Create an enabling environment for youth capacity building and participation in leadership positions within and outside the party.

To the Youth/Youth Groups

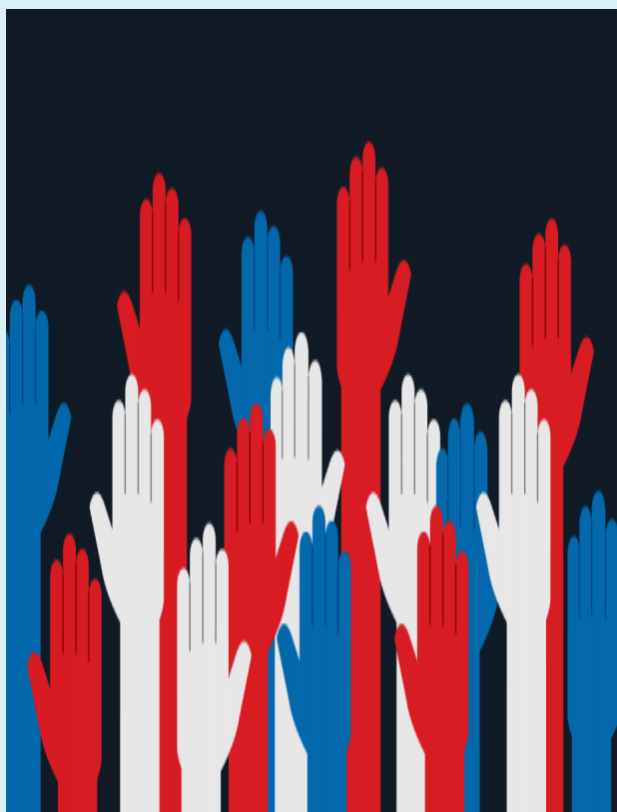
- Improve their knowledge in governance and prepare for future leadership positions;
- Continue the engagement with stakeholders to ensure youth meaningful participation in political governance and decision making processes;
- Encourage solidarity and networking for mutual learning and policy influencing.



⁶https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_science#:~:text=Political%20science%20is%20the%20scientific,and%20associated%20constitutions%20and%20laws.

The third edition of the Youth Perspectives Series organized around the theme: Youth and Political Governance in West Africa, was an interactive session. It created opportunities for intergenerational dialogue and experience sharing on youth political participation and equally contributed to deepening reflections on progress and challenges to youth meaningful participation in governance.

Five panelists from across the region shared their experiences on their political journey, challenges encountered and ways to overcome them. Unanimously, the panelists agreed that having a political vision and demonstrating a strong commitment to the realization of that vision are essential to staying focused. A key take-away of the discussions was the fact that the age and financial constraints that impede on youth political participation can be overcome with political will and commitment from the youth. It is therefore a shared responsibility to achieve inclusive governance where youth are not only beneficiaries but key actors throughout the process.



ANNEX: MODERATORS AND SPEAKERS

Moderators:

- **Mrs. Josiane Sombo,**
Youth and Peace Education Program Officer, WANEP Regional Office

Speakers:

- **Mr. Zida Abdoul Razak,**
Economist/Planner, Youth and Education Advisor, Director of Prospective, Partnership and Youth Cooperation, Burkina Faso
- **Ms. Grace Atindekoun,**
Student in Political Science and International Relations, Councilor of the Municipality of Sô Ava, President of the Commission in charge of Social, Cultural and Sports Affairs, Benin
- **Mr. Jean Armel Dogouin,**
Coordinator of the MOJEC platform (Youth in Peacebuilding Network), Candidat for the 2021 parliamentary elections for the constituency of Daloa, Côte d'Ivoire
- **Ms. Ouedraogo Sibila Samiratou,**
Secretary General of the Young Leaders Association of Burkina Faso, Director of protocol at the Ministry of Youth ministry in charge of women's issues, Candidate, heading the list of the political movement 'SENS' for the 2020 parliamentary elections in Burkina Faso
- **Honorable Diara Banyoua,**
MP and Mayor, Niger
- **Honorable Johnwan Norbert,**
Former MP and Mayor, Côte d'Ivoire

Guest of Honour:

- **Mrs. Yéli Monique KAM NGANKAM,**
Only female candidate during the 2020 presidential elections in Burkina Faso



YOUTH PERSPECTIVES

ELECTRONIC BULLETIN

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