NEXTGEN AFRICA TALK 2026:

Tomorrow's Leaders, Today's Conversations, Proceedings & Policy Insights

AFLIGA

AFRICA FUTURE LEADERS INSTITUTE OF GLOBAL AFFAIRS

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REMARKS BY THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, AFLIGA

DR. **EMMANUEL DEI-TUMI**

Executive Director, African Future Leaders Institute of Global Affairs (AFLIGA)

Africa stands at a defining moment in its history. As the youngest continent in the world, with a rapidly expanding and increasingly connected youth population, the decisions made today regarding leadership, governance, and economic transformation will shape not only Africa's future but also

its role within the global order. Across the continent, millions of young people are educated, innovative, and determined to contribute meaningfully to national and continental development. The central challenge before us is how to channel this immense human potential into structured leadership, policy engagement, and sustainable economic progress.

It is within this context that the NEXTGEN Africa Dialogue was conceived. The initiative brings together emerging leaders, policymakers, youth council representatives, and development practitioners from across the continent to exchange ideas, compare policy experiences, and build networks that strengthen Africa's collective capacity for progress. By convening voices from diverse national contexts—including youth leaders from Malawi, South Africa, Rwanda, Zambia, Ghana, and other countries—the dialogue reflects a deliberate commitment to Pan-African collaboration and shared learning.

This report documents the insights, reflections, and policy conversations that emerged during the dialogue. The contributions captured here demonstrate that Africa's youth are not merely observers of development processes; they are architects of the continent's future. Their perspectives highlight the importance of policy literacy, entrepreneurial innovation, regional cooperation, and the strategic use of emerging technologies in areas such as the digital economy, green development, and cross-border trade. At a time when initiatives such as the African Continental Free Trade Area are expanding opportunities for regional integration, the active participation of young leaders in shaping policy discourse has never been more critical.

Equally important is the recognition that meaningful transformation requires dialogue that bridges generations, sectors, and national boundaries. The NEXTGEN platform therefore aims not only to stimulate conversation but also to cultivate enduring networks of collaboration among youth institutions, researchers, policymakers, and development partners. Through these engagements, we seek to nurture a generation of African leaders who combine vision with competence, and ambition with a strong sense of responsibility to their communities and the continent at large.

As you engage with this report, I encourage readers to view it not simply as a record of discussions, but as a reflection of a broader movement—one that seeks to empower Africa's next generation to think strategically, act collaboratively, and lead courageously in shaping the continent's future.

FOREWORD

IBRAHIM AL-BAKRI NYEI, PhD

Deputy Minister for International Cooperation and Economic Integration
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Liberia

According to analysts, this twenty-first century is Africa's moment for peace, development and prosperity. Indeed, after decades of crisis and underdevelopment, the continents large and very youthful population presents opportunities for economic and social transformation. With a median age of 19 and vast natural resource reserves, Africa has enormous

potentials to meaningfully compete with other regions of the world in economic and technological development.

To tap into this huge potential, Africa must invest in its young people who constitute about 70% of the total population of the continent. Such investment would require providing education in labor-market-relevant fields and intellectual disciplines for leadership and critical thinking. Beyond that, is the need to build inclusive institutions and provide the opportunity structure through which young people may learn, grow, work, and thrive.

We must appreciate that young people in some countries seem to have some glimmers of hope for a better future; while for some, their lives have been defined by conflict, insecurity, and poverty. For the latter group, and perhaps for most of Africa's youth, their dream is to emigrate to regions perceived to be at peace and offering better opportunities to young people. This dream of emigration has led to a massive loss of lives for the hapless ones, who tried to use very perilous routes through the desert and the sea, in their efforts to leave the continent. Migration out of Africa has also caused brain drain as the most talented ones who can legally afford continue to leave in droves to find opportunities in other parts of the world. African leaders must work to avert this unfortunate trend.

The task for African leaders is to eradicate conflict, insecurity and poverty in order to provide for a safer and more productive environment for the young people. This would require among others, holding important policy conversations that ensure alignment of political, economic and social priorities, particularly those that address the core needs of the young people in education, healthcare and the economy.

This is where platforms like the **NextGen Africa Talk** are most needed to drive policy debates and intergenerational dialogues aimed at understanding extant challenges, discussing vexing problems and collectively generating consensus around the "what is to be done". This report on the first edition of the NextGen Africa Talk, held in February 2026, has set the stage for what promises to be a live and active forum for enriching policy dialogues among African youth and between African youth and their leaders. The Talk presents a unique opportunity for governments, civil society, and non-governmental organizations to directly interact with young people, understand their priorities, and take the appropriate actions. This is how we will reclaim the future for the youth and live the twenty-first century as African century.

PREFACE

DR VICTOR ABBEY FCILG, MIoD
Founder & Lead Consultant
The Abbey Consult

Africa's future will be defined not only by the policies adopted today, but by the leadership capacity we cultivate for tomorrow. Across the continent and within the global African diaspora, young people are increasingly stepping forward with ideas, energy, and a renewed commitment to shaping governance, enterprise, and social transformation. Their voices, perspectives, and aspirations represent one of Africa's greatest strategic assets. Yet, for

this potential to translate into sustainable development and institutional progress, deliberate platforms must exist where young leaders can engage, exchange ideas, and contribute meaningfully to conversations about the continent's future.

It is within this context that the **Africa Future Leaders Institute of Global Affairs (AFLIGA),** through its **Africa Shapers Initiative**, convened the inaugural NextGen Africa Talk 2026 on 27th February 2026. The event marked an important milestone in advancing structured continental dialogue among emerging and young African leaders. Bringing together about 250 participants from 21 countries across Africa, Europe, and North America, the virtual gathering created a vibrant forum for youth engagement, institutional benchmarking, and cross-border collaboration.

The theme **"Tomorrow's Leaders, Today's Conversations"** captured the essence of the initiative, reflecting a growing recognition that young Africans must not only be seen as beneficiaries of development programmes, but as active participants in shaping governance systems, policy frameworks, and economic transformation across the continent. The broad representation of National Youth Councils, student leaders, emerging professionals, policymakers, and development stakeholders demonstrated the depth of interest and commitment among young Africans to contribute meaningfully to national and continental development.

One of the most important realities highlighted during the discussions was that Africa is the world's youngest continent, a demographic reality that presents immense opportunities, and significant leadership challenges. Without structured engagements, mentorship, and institutional integration, the continent risks underutilizing one of its most powerful resources, the youth. Platforms such as **NextGen Africa Talk** therefore serve a critical role in bridging this gap by providing that much needed space for dialogue, leadership formation, and policy-oriented engagement.

This report documents the key discussions, insights, and strategic priorities that emerged from the inaugural edition of the Talk. It reflects the collective thinking of young leaders and stakeholders who share a common vision of an Africa where youth participation is not symbolic but substantive; where institutions are strengthened through inclusive leadership; and where collaboration across borders fosters shared solutions to common challenges.

The success of the maiden 2026 edition demonstrates the growing momentum behind youth-led governance dialogue and highlights AFLIGA's commitment to building sustainable platforms for leadership development across the continent. Significantly, as readers engage with the insights contained in this report, it is my hope that the ideas and recommendations presented will inspire further collaboration among policymakers, institutions, youth organisations, and development partners. Africa's transformation will ultimately depend on how effectively we empower and position the next generation to lead with competence, integrity, and vision.

The conversations have begun. The responsibility now is to sustain them and translate them into meaningful action for the future of our continent.

1.0

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Africa Future Leaders Institute of Global Affairs (AFLIGA) successfully convened the inaugural NextGen Africa Talk 2026 on 27th February 2026 as a landmark continental dialogue under its Africa Shapers Initiative. Held virtually via Zoom, the event brought together 250 participants from 21 countries across Africa, Europe, and North America, creating a dynamic platform for youth leadership exchange, institutional benchmarking, and cross-border collaboration.

58.7%
MALE (148)

41.3%
FEMALE (104)

This data reflected strong youth participation across genders

Registration data reflected strong youth engagement across genders, with 58.7% male participation (148 participants) and 41.3% female participation (104 participants). This balanced representation demonstrates the growing commitment of young Africans, both men and women, to shaping governance conversations and contributing to the continent's leadership transformation.

Convened under the theme "Tomorrow's Leaders, Today's Conversations," the Talk positioned Africa's youth not merely as beneficiaries of development frameworks but as active architects of governance reform, enterprise innovation, and civic transformation. Participants included members of National Youth Councils, student leaders, emerging professionals, policymakers, and development stakeholders,

reflecting strong institutional and grassroots representation.

The inaugural edition was designed as an annual platform aligned with continental and global development priorities, including the African Union Agenda 2063 and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Through keynote presentations, youth-led interventions, and structured question-and-answer sessions, the event facilitated meaningful dialogue on youth institutional capacity, governance participation, economic transformation, and Africa's positioning within evolving global geopolitical contexts.

Central discussions underscored the reality that Africa is the world's youngest continent, yet youth participation in formal governance and policy systems remains limited. Participants emphasised that harnessing Africa's demographic dividend requires moving beyond advocacy toward structured policy influence, institutional strengthening, and ethical leadership. The involvement of National Youth Councils across 21 countries further reinforced the importance of coordinated youth engagement in shaping national and continental development trajectories.

Key insights and strategic priorities emerging from the Talk included:

- **Institutional Strengthening:** Enhancing the operational capacity of National Youth Councils and related bodies to move from symbolic representation to measurable policy impact.
- **Structured Youth Participation:** Embedding youth voices within governance systems through deliberate reforms, policy engagement, and cross-sector partnerships.
- **Pan-African Collaboration:** Promoting cross-border partnerships among emerging leaders to address shared challenges in employment, education, innovation, and accountability.
- **Leadership Formation and Mentorship:** Cultivating ethical, visionary leadership grounded in integrity, civic responsibility, and intergenerational collaboration.
- **Global Positioning:** Equipping young Africans to navigate and influence emerging economic, technological, and shifting geopolitical systems in an increasingly multipolar world.

Importantly, the NextGen Africa Talk 2026 was conceived not as a one-time engagement but as the foundation of an ongoing annual continental platform. AFLIGA reaffirmed their commitment to sustaining the dialogue through the dissemination of recorded content, follow-up engagements, capacity-building initiatives, and the planned 2027 edition.

The successful execution of the inaugural Talk demonstrates AFLIGA's growing capacity to convene diverse stakeholders, facilitate high-level youth discourse, and contribute meaningfully to Africa's leadership development ecosystem. By blending structured dialogue with institutional collaboration and continental vision, NextGen Africa Talk 2026 represents a significant step toward nurturing a generation of ethical, globally competent, and strategically positioned African leaders.

2.0

EVENT OVERVIEW

The NextGen Africa Talk 2026 marked the inaugural edition of a continental youth leadership dialogue convened by the Africa Future Leaders Institute of Global Affairs (AFLIGA). Conceived as a high-level platform for structured intergenerational engagement, the event brought together youth leaders, institutional heads, policymakers, and development stakeholders from across Africa and the diaspora.

PARTICIPANTS FROM 21
countries, set the inaugural edition as a very strong precedent for sustained continental collaboration and dialogue.

Held under the banner of AFLIGA's Africa Shapers Initiative, the Talk was designed not merely as a one-day conversation but as the foundation of an annual youth leadership platform aligned with continental development aspirations, including African Union Agenda 2063 and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By convening participants from twenty-one countries, the inaugural edition set a strong precedent for sustained continental collaboration and dialogue.

The event featured keynote presentations, youth-led interventions, and interactive question-and-answer sessions, creating a dynamic environment for peer learning and policy-oriented discussion.

2.1 THEME

The inaugural NextGen Africa Talk was convened under the theme "Tomorrow's Leaders, Today's Conversations."

This theme reflected the urgency of engaging Africa's youth not as passive beneficiaries of development policies but as present actors in shaping governance, enterprise, and innovation ecosystems. It underscored the belief that leadership formation must begin with deliberate dialogue, exposure, and structured engagement in contemporary policy and institutional conversations.

The theme also resonated strongly with Africa's demographic reality as the world's youngest continent. By positioning conversations as the starting point for transformation, the event emphasised critical thinking, strategic networking, and civic participation as foundational pillars for building a new generation of ethical and competent leaders.

2.2 DATE AND VENUE

The event was held on 27th February 2026 and convened virtually via Zoom, enabling participation across multiple time zones and geographical contexts.

The virtual format enhanced accessibility and inclusivity, allowing youth leaders and institutional representatives from across Africa, Europe, and North America to engage in real time. This digital platform facilitated seamless presentations, interactive discussions, and structured Q&A sessions, ensuring high levels of participation and engagement throughout the programme.

2.3 ORGANISERS AND PARTNERS

NextGen Africa Talk 2026 was organised by the Africa Future Leaders Institute of Global Affairs (AFLIGA) and powered by the various National Youth Councils in attendance.

As part of AFLIGA's broader Africa Shapers Initiative, the event forms a strategic youth engagement pillar aimed at cultivating governance literacy, institutional competence, and continental collaboration among emerging leaders. The involvement of National Youth Councils strengthened the event's institutional credibility and reinforced its focus on structured youth participation in governance systems.

The organisers communicated a clear intention for the Talk to become an annual event, with subsequent editions, including the 2027 edition, designed to deepen policy engagement, expand country representation, and institutionalise cross-border youth collaboration.

2.4 PARTICIPANTS

The inaugural edition attracted 250 participants from 21 countries, reflecting strong engagement across the continent and internationally. Countries represented included:

1. Ghana
2. Eswatini
3. Lesotho
4. Kenya
5. Uganda
6. Zambia
7. South Africa
8. United States

9. Togo
10. Mauritius
11. Malawi
12. Gambia
13. Zimbabwe
14. United Kingdom
15. Turkey
16. Liberia
17. Tanzania
18. Ethiopia
19. South Sudan
20. Rwanda
21. Somalia

The target audience comprised youth across Africa, including members of National Youth Councils, student leaders, emerging professionals, policy advocates, and institutional representatives.

Participation was conducted entirely via Zoom, enabling engagement from participants across multiple regions and time zones. Registration data indicated a gender distribution of 148 male participants (58.7%) and 104 female participants (41.3%), reflecting strong participation from both genders and demonstrating the growing interest of young Africans in leadership dialogue and continental collaboration.

Interactive Q&A sessions accompanied the presentations from youth leaders, fostering dynamic dialogue and allowing participants to engage directly with speakers. These exchanges enriched the discussions by surfacing practical challenges, cross-country comparisons, and collaborative opportunities.

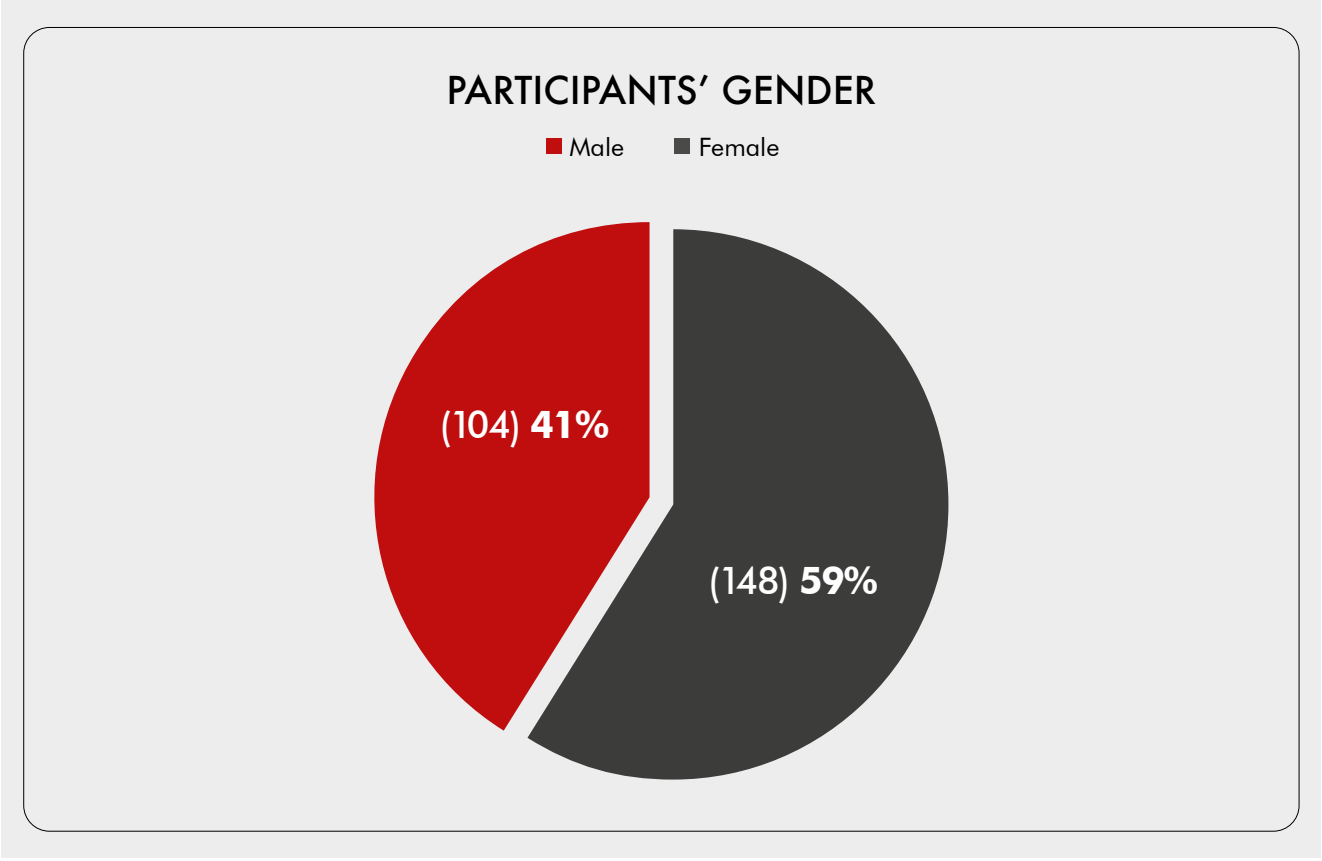


Figure 1: Participants' Gender

2.5 OBJECTIVES OF THE EVENT

The NextGen Africa Talk 2026 was designed as a strategic platform for youth leadership exchange and peer learning across Africa. Its primary objectives were to:

1. **Facilitate Cross-National Learning and Dialogue:** To convene youth leaders, institutional heads, policymakers, and development stakeholders from diverse African countries to share experiences, strategies, and lessons in youth empowerment, institutional reform, and leadership development.
2. **Strengthen Youth Institutional Capacity:** To provide National Youth Councils and related bodies with an opportunity to benchmark their programmes against continental peers, thereby enhancing institutional effectiveness in governance participation and socio-economic transformation.
3. **Promote Structured Youth Engagement in Governance and Development:** To move youth engagement beyond advocacy toward strategic policy influence, embedding youth perspectives within national and continental development frameworks in alignment with AFLIGA's mission.
4. **Cultivate Pan-African Collaboration and Networking:** To foster cross-border partnerships among emerging leaders, enabling shared initiatives and collective problem-solving in areas such as employment, education reform, innovation ecosystems, and governance accountability.
5. **Position Youth within Emerging Global and Geopolitical Contexts:** To deepen understanding of how young Africans can strategically navigate and contribute to a changing global order shaped by technological transformation, economic shifts, and evolving governance models.
6. **Encourage Continuous Engagement and Follow-Up Action:** To sustain the dialogue beyond the one-day session through the dissemination of recorded content, follow-up engagements, and integration into future leadership programmes and high-level dialogues under AFLIGA's Africa Shapers Initiative.

3.0

EVENT STRUCTURE AND PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS

The inaugural NextGen Africa Talk 2026 was structured to facilitate focused, policy-oriented dialogue and cross-national youth engagement within a cohesive virtual format. The programme combined keynote interventions and youth-led presentations from National Youth Council representatives, enabling participants from 21 countries to exchange experiences, benchmark institutional practices, and reflect on pathways to strengthen youth participation in governance. The structure ensured balanced contributions, strategic thematic alignment with *"Tomorrow's Leaders, Today's Conversations,"* and meaningful inter-country learning under AFLIGA's Africa Shapers Initiative.

3.1 OPENING REMARKS

DR DEI-TUMI

Executive Director, African Future Leaders Institute of Global Affairs (AFLIGA)

The programme commenced with opening remarks delivered by Dr Dei-Tumi, who situated the convening within Africa's evolving demographic and geopolitical reality. He underscored the continent's position as the youngest globally, noting that nearly 60% of young people in countries such as Ghana and Nigeria are under 30. While this demographic structure presents an unprecedented developmental advantage, he noted that widespread youth unemployment and underemployment across nations such as Kenya, South Africa, and Ethiopia continue to undermine Africa's economic productivity and labour market stability.

Dr Dei-Tumi emphasised that Africa's youthful population constitutes an extraordinary reservoir of human capital whose productive organisation into structured systems of innovation, enterprise, and governance will significantly influence not only national trajectories but also the global economy. In a rapidly shifting international environment marked by trade tensions, geopolitical realignments, and technological disruption, he argued that Africa must adopt deliberate and coordinated approaches to development policy and youth engagement to safeguard its future interests.

Referencing national and continental responses such as Ghana's Accra Reset Initiative and broader institutional commitments to productivity enhancement and domestic capital formation, he asserted that young Africans must transition from passive observers to active participants in policy, innovation, and enterprise ecosystems. In this regard, the NextGen Africa Talk 2026 was introduced as a continental platform designed to catalyse youth participation in leadership, trade, governance, and technological development.

He further highlighted the operationalisation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), particularly its Protocol on Women and Youth in Trade, as a structural opportunity for inclusion through expanded cross-border commerce, regional value chains, and digital trade systems. However, he stressed that translating these opportunities into tangible prosperity would require young Africans to acquire skills oriented toward competitiveness in areas

such as artificial intelligence, advanced manufacturing, agri-tech, digital finance, and green technologies.

Concluding his remarks, Dr Dei-Tumi described the Talk not merely as a forum for dialogue but as a leadership and enterprise incubation platform aimed at fostering partnerships, refining strategies, and strengthening youth-led continental cooperation toward the realisation of Agenda 2063.

3.2 WELCOME ADDRESS

DR WARDAH MUMMY RAJAB-GYAGENDA

Deputy Vice Chancellor, Kampala University

The Welcome Address was delivered by Dr Wardah Rajab-Gyagenda, Deputy Vice Chancellor of Kampala University and Vice Chair of the Governing Council of AFLIGA, who expressed appreciation for the opportunity to engage with emerging African leaders committed to shaping the continent's developmental trajectory. She characterised Africa's greatest strength as residing in its people, innovative, resilient, and driven youth who represent not only the future but also the present agents of transformation across socio-economic sectors.

Drawing on African communal philosophy, Dr Rajab-Gyagenda stressed the importance of collective action in addressing pressing contemporary challenges, including climate change, fragile supply chains, and digital economic transitions. She observed that Africa's developmental challenges can no longer be addressed through isolated national efforts but instead require coordinated continental collaboration grounded in ethical leadership principles.

Central to her address was the call for values-driven governance rooted in service, transparency, and accountability. She contended that ethical leadership is not externally imposed but deeply embedded in African philosophies such as Ubuntu, which prioritises collective well-being and intergenerational responsibility. According to her, leadership devoid of integrity ultimately compromises future prosperity by diverting resources from sustainable development pathways.

Dr Rajab-Gyagenda further highlighted Africa's growing global cultural and technological influence, noting that innovations such as mobile banking systems and the international popularity of African music genres demonstrate the continent's capacity to shape global trends rather than merely respond to them. She argued that African ingenuity, often manifested in grassroots solutions and informal economies, reflects an adaptive resilience that can inform global approaches to sustainability, circular economies, and community-centred development.

Finally, she encouraged participants to engage continental and global partnerships from positions of agency rather than dependency, advocating for the establishment of indigenous development frameworks informed by African universities, enterprises, and investment ecosystems. She challenged youth leaders to actively mentor others, foster ethical hiring practices, and champion service-oriented leadership as pathways toward sustainable continental transformation.

3.3 REMARKS [GUEST OF HONOUR]

MR JOHN YOHANNES MAGOK

Mineral Resources Development Expert, AUC

Delivering the Goodwill remarks, Mr John Magok of the African Union Commission framed Africa's evolving role within the emerging global order as an opportunity rather than a crisis. Anchoring his remarks within the aspirations of Agenda 2063, he emphasised that achieving an integrated, peaceful, and prosperous Africa requires active generational commitment from the continent's youth over the coming decades.

Adopting a resource-based metaphor, Mr Magok described Africa's young population as "strategic minerals" whose renewable intellectual and innovative capacities surpass the finite value of traditional extractive resources such as oil and gold. He argued that youth must therefore be recognised as primary drivers of the African century, capable of advancing industrialisation, technological innovation, and governance reform.

Highlighting key African Union initiatives, including the 1 Million Next Level Programme, he outlined policy priorities targeting education, employment, entrepreneurship, and civic engagement. He stressed the need for future-oriented educational systems aligned with socio-economic development objectives, alongside macro-investment strategies that can scale youth-led industrial and technological enterprises beyond microfinance frameworks.

Mr Magok further advocated for value addition in Africa's mineral sector through local processing of lithium, cobalt, and rare-earth resources, noting that continued reliance on raw-material exports undermines long-term industrial competitiveness. He positioned the African Continental Free Trade Area as a critical vehicle for overcoming colonial-era economic fragmentation by enabling cross-border trade, simplified customs procedures, and digital payment systems that facilitate youth and women's economic participation.

In conclusion, he called for strengthened collaboration among National Youth Councils and regional institutions to ensure policy harmonisation and shared learning across countries. Emphasising the importance of collective agency, he urged participants to contribute their expertise toward a unified, sovereign, and youth-driven Africa capable of bridging divides between the Global North and South.

ROUND ONE: PRESENTATIONS BY NATIONAL YOUTH COUNCIL LEADS

3.4 PRESENTATION

MR REX CHAPOTA

Executive Director, National Youth Council of Malawi

Mr Rex Chapota, Executive Director of the National Youth Council of Malawi, delivered a strategic and policy-focused presentation under the theme "Youth: The Untapped Power to Drive the Africa We Want." His intervention centred on institutional strengthening as the foundation for effective youth transformation and national development.

He began by contextualising Malawi within Africa's broader demographic landscape, noting that over 70% of Malawi's population is under the age of 35. Despite this demographic advantage, approximately one-quarter of young people are classified as not in employment, education, or training. He posed a critical question: whether

Africa's youthful population represents a demographic dividend or a demographic disruption. According to him, the answer depends on the strength and positioning of youth institutions.

Mr Chapota outlined the recent institutional resurgence of the National Youth Council of Malawi, originally established by an Act of Parliament as the coordinating authority for youth development. Over the past two years, he explained, deliberate reforms have been implemented to reposition the Council as a credible and influential actor within national governance structures. These reforms focused on restoring institutional credibility, expanding resource mobilisation, and elevating youth issues within national policy processes.

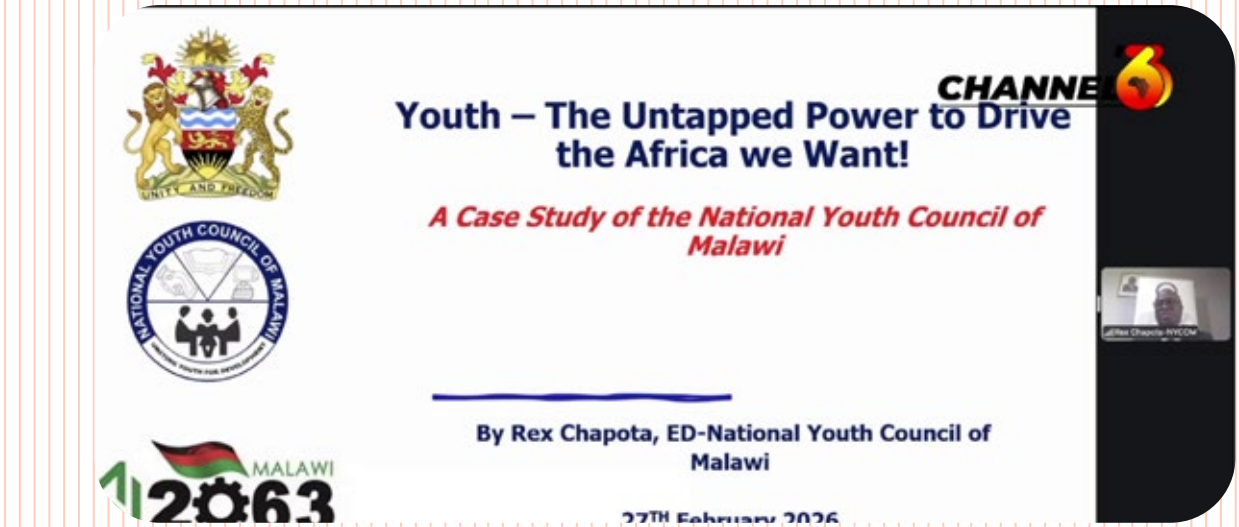
He introduced a five-point strategic framework summarised under the acronym "RISES," symbolising that when youth rise, Africa rises. The framework includes: raising the youth agenda to the highest decision-making levels; fostering innovation to drive economic empowerment; shaping governance to amplify youth voices; empowering youth-led institutions; and shifting societal mindsets about youth capacity and agency.

A key element of his address was the call to embed youth priorities within national development frameworks and budgets, including Malawi's Vision 2063. He emphasised that youth development must transition from marginal relevance to strategic influence, ensuring representation at cabinet, parliamentary, and decentralised planning levels.

On economic empowerment, Mr Chapota highlighted the establishment of a Youth Innovation Fund designed to support industrialisation-oriented youth enterprises. He argued that young people must be repositioned from informal survival activities toward structured, growth-oriented enterprises capable of leveraging opportunities under the African Continental Free Trade Area.

In governance, he stressed the importance of structured dialogue mechanisms that move youth participation from protest-driven activism to policy influence. He cited Malawi's bi-weekly national youth dialogues as examples of intergenerational engagement that critically examine presidential addresses, national budgets, and policy directions.

Concluding his presentation, Mr Chapota affirmed that structural transformation requires psychological transformation. He underscored that youth empowerment must combine institutional reform, economic opportunity, participation in governance, and mindset change to secure Africa's place in a shifting global order.



3.5 PRESENTATION

MS REATILE POLAKI

Social Worker and writer - South Africa

Ms Riatile Polaki, a social worker, writer, and feminist advocate from South Africa, delivered a compelling presentation examining the intersection between youth mental health and Africa's development trajectory. Her intervention positioned mental health as a critical but often overlooked dimension of human capital formation.

She began by emphasising Africa's demographic reality, with approximately 60% of the population under 35, while simultaneously noting that one in seven young Africans experiences significant mental health challenges. She defined mental health as a state of emotional, social, and psychological well-being that enables productivity, resilience, and community contribution. Without this foundation, she argued, sustainable development becomes unattainable.

Ms Polaki framed mental health as an economic issue, asserting that human capital encompasses knowledge, skills, health, and well-being. Poor mental health, she explained, leads to reduced educational

attainment, increased dropout rates, and diminished workforce participation. Consequently, this undermines innovation, productivity, and economic transformation across the continent.

She further analysed the cyclical relationship between poverty and mental illness, highlighting how economic deprivation generates psychological stress, which in turn reduces earning capacity and perpetuates inequality. This cycle, she noted, disproportionately affects vulnerable groups and limits youth participation in civic and economic life.

Addressing systemic barriers, Ms Polaki identified limited healthcare infrastructure, high treatment costs, social stigma, and chronic underfunding as significant constraints. In many African countries, mental health receives less than 1% of national health budgets, restricting access to professional care and early intervention services.

Importantly, she challenged the misconception that mental health discourse is "un-African," arguing instead that African societies have long embraced holistic models of well-being grounded in communal philosophies and indigenous healing traditions. She called for integrating culturally responsive approaches with modern healthcare systems to create inclusive and accessible mental health services.

Her recommendations included integrating mental health into primary healthcare systems, prioritising early intervention, increasing funding allocations, and fostering cross-sector collaboration among ministries and institutions. She concluded by warning that neglecting youth mental health risks sidelining a generation endowed with creativity, energy, and transformative potential.

3.6 PRESENTATION

MR SHERIFF GHALI

CEO, Ghana Chamber of Young Entrepreneurs & President, Ghana Youth Federation

Mr Sheriff Ghali, Chief Executive Officer of the Ghana Chamber of Young Entrepreneurs and President of the Ghana Youth Federation, presented Ghana's ecosystem-based approach to youth economic empowerment and policy engagement.

He began by describing Ghana as one of Africa's stable democracies, with approximately 57–60% of its population under the age of 30. He highlighted the country's vibrant startup ecosystem, particularly within agriculture and small-scale enterprise sectors, as well as its strategic role as host of the African Continental Free Trade Area Secretariat.

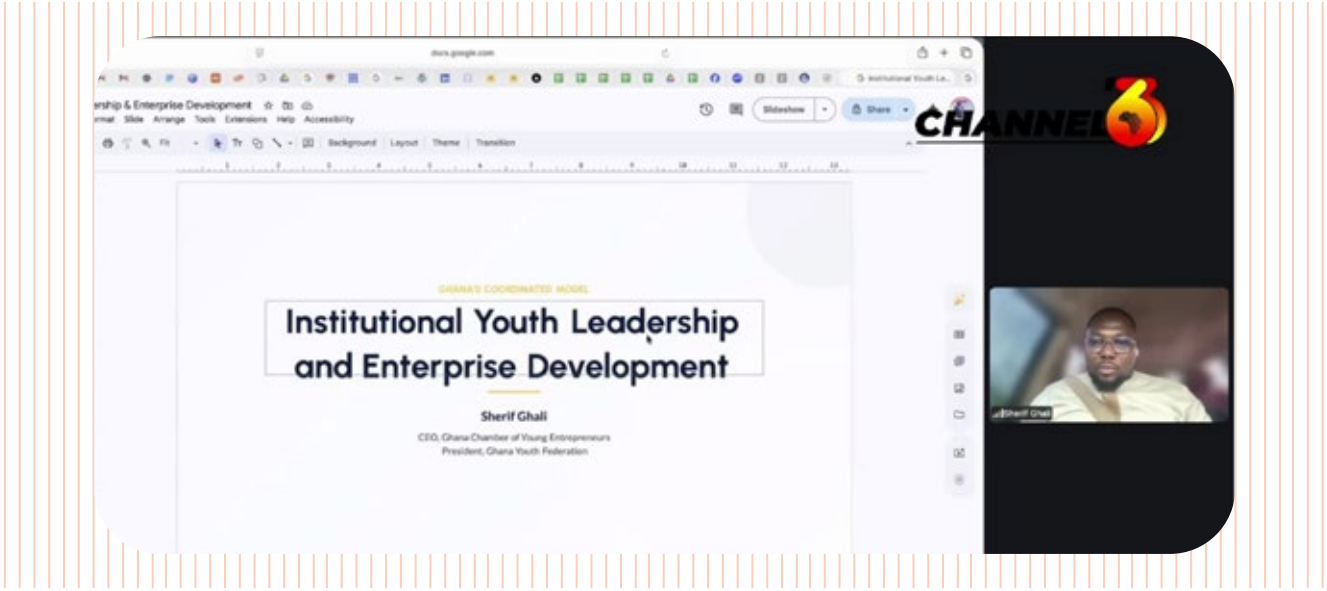
Mr Ghali outlined the mandate of the Ghana Chamber of Young Entrepreneurs, established to serve as a national association supporting youth-led businesses. Its core functions include enterprise development, capacity building for small and medium enterprises, formalisation of informal businesses, grant facilitation, and market linkages. He cited ongoing collaborations with government programmes to finance youth enterprises across Ghana's different regions.

A central theme of his address was the importance of aligning programming with policy. He detailed the Chamber's active engagement in policy advocacy, including contributions toward the Ghana Innovation and Startup Bill and tax incentives for young entrepreneurs. He argued that sustainable youth development requires structural integration between government policy frameworks and private sector initiatives.

As President of the Ghana Youth Federation, he explained the significance of establishing an independent youth body capable of mobilising young people beyond partisan affiliations. While the National Youth Authority oversees youth development under statutory authority, the Federation provides an autonomous platform for youth advocacy and civic participation.

In conclusion, Mr Ghali emphasised the necessity of unity and collaboration among African youth institutions. He encouraged

cross-border partnerships among young entrepreneurs, suggesting that collective agency could amplify economic influence across the continent. He maintained that youth-driven cooperation, rather than exclusive reliance on government intervention, is key to unlocking Africa's full developmental potential.



ROUND TWO: PRESENTATIONS BY NATIONAL YOUTH COUNCIL LEADS

3.7 PRESENTATION

MR ERNEST DUKU JALIAH

President of Liberian Youth, Liberia

Mr Ernest Duku Jaliah, representing Liberia's youth constituency, presented an overview of youth demographics and institutional challenges within the Liberian context. He began by noting that approximately 74% of Liberia's population is under the age of 35, positioning young people as the absolute majority within the national demographic structure.

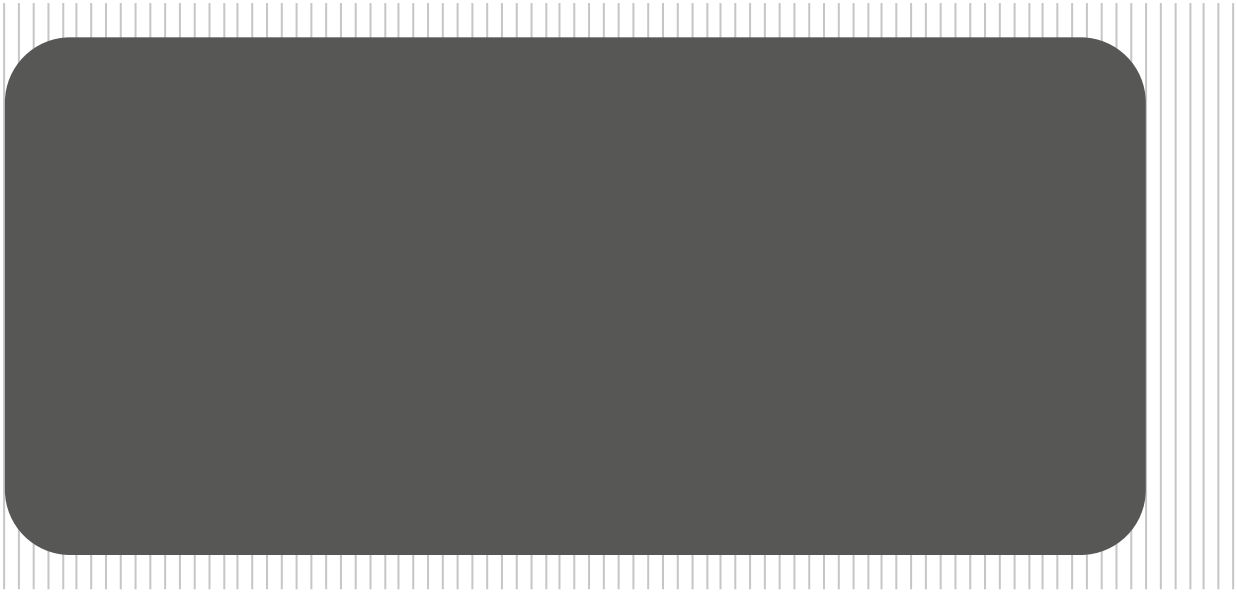
Despite this demographic dominance, he observed that youth participation in formal governance remains limited. Decision-making bodies, including the legislature and senior executive institutions, are largely dominated by older generations. Youth engagement, he explained, is frequently confined to activism rather than substantive policy influence.

Mr Jaliah outlined the historical formation of the Federation of Liberian Youth (FLY), established in 1978 to serve as a bridge between the government and young citizens. However, he acknowledged that the Federation has faced internal administrative and financial challenges over time, compounded by Liberia's historical political instability, including the 1980 revolution, which significantly altered national governance structures.

Recent reform efforts, he explained, have focused on strengthening institutional credibility, improving financial transparency, and rebuilding trust between youth leadership and government actors. The Federation is working to reposition itself not as an oppositional force but as a constructive partner committed to national development and youth empowerment.

He further emphasised the importance of projecting youth power responsibly advocating for dialogue, collaboration, and strategic engagement rather than confrontation. A major constraint remains limited funding, which restricts the Federation's capacity to implement nationwide programmes and advocacy initiatives.

In conclusion, Mr Jaliah reaffirmed the need for youth institutions across Africa to reinforce internal governance structures and foster cooperative relationships with governments to ensure that young people transition from marginal stakeholders to central actors in national development.



3.8 PRESENTATION

MR THOMAS MWESIGYE

National Commissioner – Rwanda Youth Council

Mr Thomas Mwesigye, National Commissioner of the Rwanda Youth Council, delivered a presentation highlighting Rwanda's structured and institutionalised model of youth leadership and engagement in national development.

He began by outlining the constitutional recognition of the Rwanda Youth Council, established in 2003 and operating under the Ministry of Youth, with leadership structures extending from the national to the village level. The Council carries a ten-point mandate that includes youth advocacy, mobilisation for government programmes, economic empowerment initiatives, and fostering cooperation among diverse youth networks across the country.

Providing demographic context, Mr Mwesigye noted that youth in Rwanda are defined as individuals aged 16 to 30 years and constitute 27.1 percent of the national population, approximately 3.6 million people. He emphasised the importance of clearly defined structures and data-driven planning in designing responsive youth programmes.

He organised his presentation around three principal pillars: economic transformation, social transformation, and good governance. During the economic transformation, he highlighted significant mobilisation efforts to create jobs, noting that nearly one million young people have been engaged in employment-related initiatives over the past five years. He referenced technical and vocational short-course training reaching over 51,000 youth, the formation of more than 15,000 youth savings groups, and the strengthening of youth cooperatives as vehicles for grassroots economic empowerment. He further underscored the importance of exposure, explaining that the Council intentionally supports young entrepreneurs to participate in national and international trade fairs to scale their businesses and increase income generation.

A flagship initiative he discussed was the Youth Connect Awards, a competitive entrepreneurship platform that has evolved from a national programme into a continental engagement mechanism. Through this initiative, approximately

20,000 jobs have reportedly been created, with annual financial awards granted to outstanding young entrepreneurs to expand their ventures.

In the area of social transformation, Mr Mwesigye described nationwide campaigns focusing on sports engagement, reintegration of school dropouts, and youth education on sexual and reproductive health. He stressed that youth health and well-being are essential foundations for effective leadership and long-term national productivity.

Regarding governance and civic participation, he highlighted structured engagement mechanisms, including annual general assemblies for youth leaders, holiday leadership programmes for students, and large-scale civic education initiatives conducted through the Itorero programme. These platforms are designed to cultivate responsible citizenship, enhance participation in governance processes, and strengthen youth leadership capacity. He also referenced annual high-level youth engagements with national leadership, including forums where young people meet the President to present ideas and receive guidance.

Additionally, he noted the role of organised youth community service initiatives conducted quarterly under national community work programmes, where young people contribute to infrastructure development, environmental conservation, and social support activities. According to him, such programmes deepen youth ownership of national development processes.

In conclusion, Mr Mwesigye reaffirmed the importance of collaboration among youth institutions across Africa, emphasising that coordinated efforts and shared learning are critical to maximising the continent's demographic potential. He maintained that structured leadership frameworks, intentional mobilisation, and sustained engagement remain central to transforming youth participation into measurable development outcomes.

ROUND THREE: PRESENTATIONS BY NATIONAL YOUTH COUNCIL LEADS

3.9 PRESENTATION

MR LWAZI MAMBA

CEO – Eswatini National Youth Council, Eswatini

Mr Lwazi Mamba, Chief Executive Officer of the Eswatini National Youth Council, delivered a comprehensive presentation outlining the state of youth affairs in Eswatini and the institutional mechanisms guiding youth development interventions.

He began by presenting key findings from Eswatini's State of the Youth Report, developed in alignment with African Union requirements for member states. He noted that over 70 percent of Eswatini's population is under the age of 35, with 35 percent falling within the 15–35 age bracket. He further highlighted that 70 percent of young people reside in rural areas, underscoring the need for rural-focused youth programming.

Mr Mamba drew attention to significant socio-economic challenges, including a youth unemployment rate of 48 percent and a NEET rate of 36 percent. He also cited gender disparities, with young women disproportionately affected by unemployment. In governance representation, he noted progress, with 17.3 percent of Members of Parliament under the age of 40, though only two are under 30. He further highlighted pressing concerns in youth well-being, including high male suicide rates (75 percent of recorded cases), unintended teenage pregnancies, and declining school completion rates across primary and secondary education levels.

Within this context, he outlined the mandate of the Eswatini National Youth Council, which operates under the Ministry of Sports, Culture and Youth Affairs and is guided by a nine-pillar National Youth Policy framework.

A key programme highlighted was the development of a Mindset Change Toolkit, designed to transition young people from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset. Through trained youth facilitators operating at the community level, the initiative encourages young people to view challenges as opportunities and to pursue sustainable career pathways with resilience and innovation.

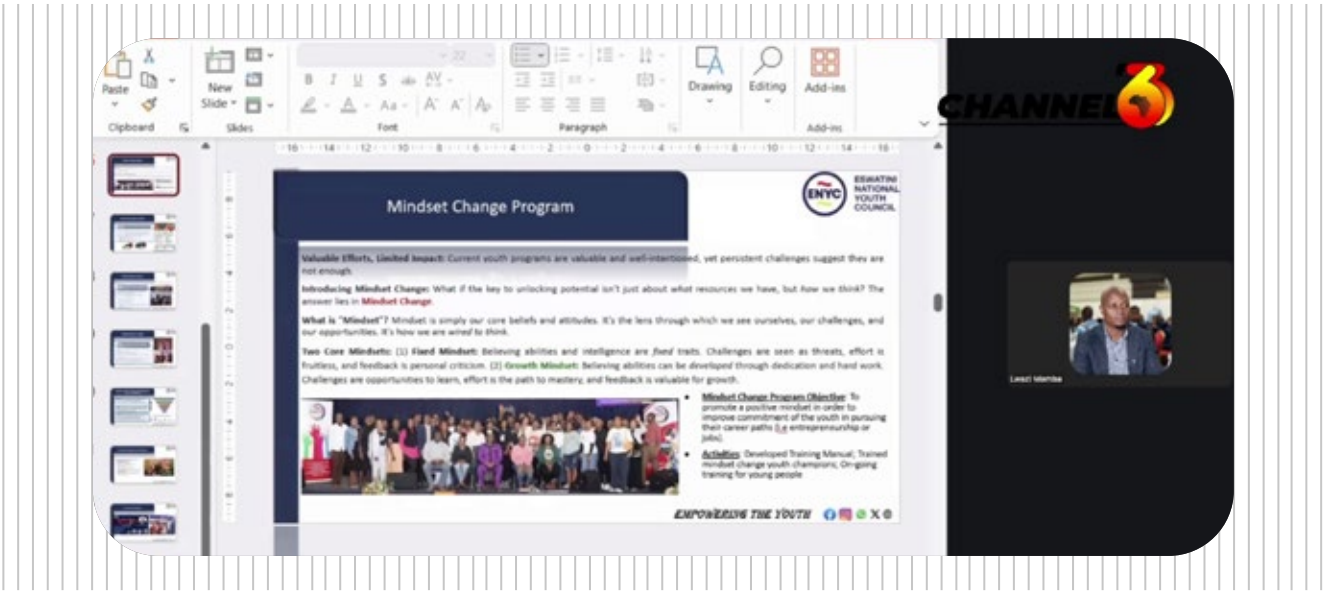
To address unemployment, Mr Mamba detailed collaborative efforts with the Ministries of Labour and Education to deliver annual career guidance and career exposition programmes, reaching thousands of in-school and out-of-school youth. Complementary initiatives include CV-writing and interview preparation training, as well as an Internship Programme implemented in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), providing six-month placements to enhance employability outcomes.

Entrepreneurship support was also emphasised, including agribusiness promotion, technical and vocational training, provision of start-up toolkits, trade testing, scholarships, and access to a revolving fund that enables youth to secure business loans. He further noted the recent approval of a significant youth empowerment loan facility valued at approximately USD 27 million, set to run until 2030 to expand income-generating opportunities.

In the area of social development, Mr Mamba highlighted life skills education initiatives implemented in partnership with the Ministries of Health and Education, focusing on reproductive health awareness, prevention of gender-based violence, and responsible decision-making.

Concluding his presentation, he stressed the importance of coordination across public, private, and civil society actors. He referenced the establishment of a National Youth Development Coordination Framework designed to align youth interventions across national, district, and community levels. He further noted that the Council is supported through an annual fiscal allocation of approximately USD 600,000, complemented by development partner contributions.

Mr Mamba affirmed that structured coordination, mindset transformation, and targeted economic empowerment programmes remain central to advancing youth inclusion and sustainable national development in Eswatini.



3.10 PRESENTATION

ARC. OSMAN A. AYARIGA ESQ

Chief Executive Officer – National Youth Authority, Ghana

Arc. Osman A. Ayariga Esq, Chief Executive Officer of the National Youth Authority (NYA) of Ghana, had his presentation delivered by his Director of Programmes, Mr Archibald Donkor. Mr Donkor started by outlining Ghana's statutory framework, strategic priorities, and institutional mechanisms for youth development and participation.

He began by explaining that the National Youth Authority was established under the National Youth Authority Act 939 (2016) as Ghana's principal government institution mandated to coordinate, harmonise, and implement youth development policies and programmes nationwide. Operating across all sixteen regions of Ghana, the Authority serves as the central coordinating body for youth engagement, empowerment, and leadership development. Its work is guided by the National Youth Policy and aligned with continental and global youth development frameworks.

Mr Donkor structured his presentation around six strategic pillars: youth economic and financial empowerment; youth participation in democratic governance; youth leadership development and civic engagement; volunteerism and active citizenship; youth health and well-being; and social inclusion and protection.

Addressing youth unemployment, which currently stands at approximately 21 percent, he highlighted the National Apprenticeship Programme, a demand-driven initiative providing free technical and vocational training, particularly targeting women, persons with disabilities, and economically vulnerable youth. The programme is currently in its pilot phase, serving 10,000 beneficiaries, with an ambition to scale up to 100,000 annually. He emphasised that the initiative prioritises alignment between skills training and local economic opportunities to ensure sustainable livelihood transitions.

In the area of youth leadership development, he cited the Ghana Youth Leadership Fellowship, a structured year-long programme designed to cultivate ethical, solution-oriented leaders. Presently, 261 youth leaders, representing each metropolitan, municipal, and district assembly, are enrolled in the fellowship.

Institutionalised youth representation was also highlighted through the establishment of Youth Parliaments. Currently, 248

district youth parliaments and 11 regional youth parliaments are operational, with long-term plans to establish a National Youth Parliament. These structures aim to sustain meaningful and structured youth engagement in governance processes.

On coordinated youth representation, Mr Donkor discussed establishing the Ghana Youth Federation as the umbrella body for youth-led and youth-focused organisations. The Federation operates at the district, regional, and national levels and participates in youth committees that oversee local policy implementation. A pilot phase was completed, with a nationwide scale-up currently underway.

He further underscored the Authority's efforts to institutionalise youth dialogue platforms. During the 2025 Africa Youth Day celebrations, a Ministerial Youth Dialogue was organised to enable direct engagement between young people and sector ministers. Additionally, the National Youth Authority annually convenes a National Youth Conference, as mandated by Act 939. The 2025 conference convened approximately 5,000 young people from across Ghana, facilitating engagement with senior government officials, parliamentarians, and agency heads.

In the area of peace and social cohesion, he noted that the Authority is leading the development of Ghana's National Action Plan on Youth, Peace and Security in alignment with United Nations Security Council Resolution. A youth-led technical working group has been established, and multi-stakeholder consultations are being conducted nationwide to institutionalise youth participation in peacebuilding and conflict prevention efforts.

Concluding his remarks, he emphasised the importance of building enduring institutions that amplify youth voices, promote structured participation, and ensure inclusion and peace remain central to national development. He reaffirmed Ghana's commitment to peer learning, continental collaboration, and strengthening coordinated youth governance mechanisms.

ADDRESSES FROM SPECIAL GUESTS OF HONOUR

3.11 SPECIAL GUEST OF HONOUR ADDRESS

PROF. P. K. RICHARDSON
United Kingdom

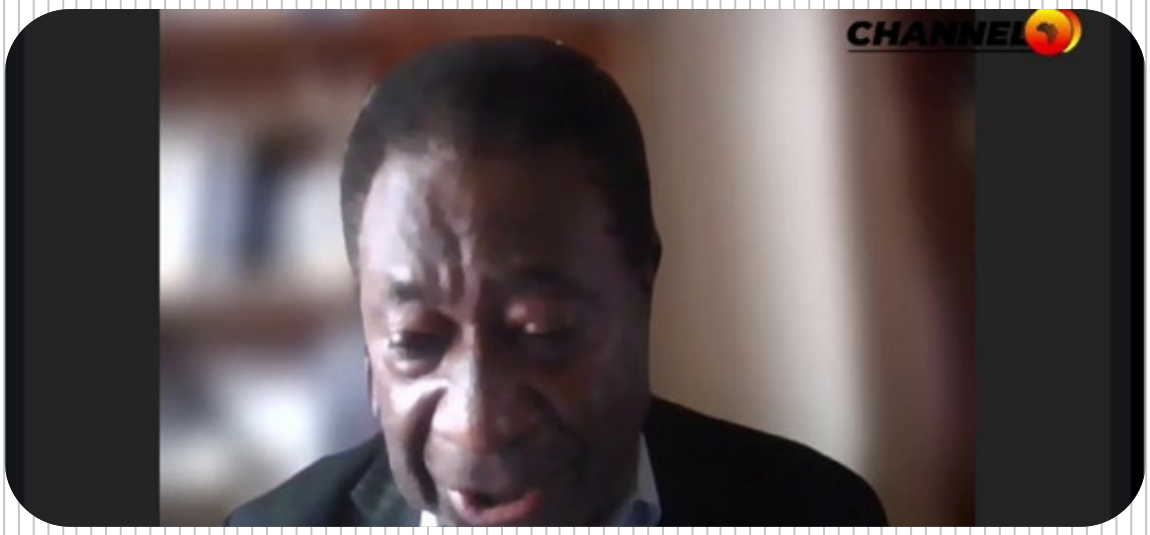
The Special Guest of Honour Address was delivered by Prof. P.K. Richardson from the United Kingdom, who reflected on youth leadership in the context of an emerging, rapidly shifting global order. Framing his remarks with both humour and candour, he emphasised the urgency and complexity of the subject, describing contemporary society as operating within what he termed a "BANI world", one that is brittle, anxious, nonlinear, and incomprehensible.

Prof. Richardson observed that today's youth are inheriting a world marked by technological disruption, geopolitical realignments, ethical debates, and accelerating social change. However, rather than portraying young people as passive inheritors of instability, he characterised them as uniquely equipped to shape this transformation. He identified three principal "superpowers" of the current generation: digital fluency, global interconnectedness, and values-driven engagement.

According to him, youth leadership manifests not only in formal political office but also in grassroots activism, digital innovation, and entrepreneurial experimentation. He noted that young people increasingly demonstrate resilience, adaptability, and collaborative capacity, qualities essential for navigating the unpredictability of the contemporary global landscape.

Addressing structural barriers, he acknowledged that young leaders often confront exclusion from decision-making spaces, underestimation, and delayed recognition of their contributions. Yet he emphasised that youth leadership persists despite these constraints, fuelled by what he described as "stubborn hope."

He concluded by urging institutions and governments to invest intentionally in youth leadership development, not as symbolic gestures but as strategic necessities. For young participants, he offered a challenge: leadership is not defined by age or title but by courage, resilience, and commitment to solving meaningful problems. The future, he asserted, is not something to enter but something to create.



3.12 SPECIAL REMARKS

DR AYODELE ODUSOLA

Resident Representative – United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Zimbabwe

Special remarks were delivered by Dr Ayodele Odusola, Resident Representative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Zimbabwe, who provided a strategic analysis of Africa's positioning within the emerging global order and the implications for youth leadership and development.

Dr Odusola began by outlining three defining features of the evolving global system: the shift from unipolarity to multipolarity, the fragmentation of multilateralism, and the decentralisation of power driven by technology, private sector actors, and youth movements. He emphasised that the new world order is not merely geopolitical, but technological, economic, and demographic, requiring Africa to reposition itself strategically rather than reactively.

Focusing on implications for Africa, he highlighted four critical priorities. First, policy autonomy and strategic positioning: African countries must diversify partnerships, strengthen regional bargaining power, and deepen smart diplomacy to avoid dependency traps. He stressed the importance of operationalising

continental instruments such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) to enhance regional integration and economic leverage.

Second, economic transformation: Dr Odusola warned against continued reliance on commodity exports and raw material exports, arguing that Africa must prioritise value chain development and economic diversification. Referencing his publication, Africa's Agricultural Renaissance: From Paradise to Powerhouse, he noted that leveraging backwards and forward integration in agriculture alone could generate trillions in economic activity. He further emphasised youth-driven entrepreneurship and digital innovation as essential to structural transformation, while cautioning against treating all youth as entrepreneurs. UNDP research, he explained, suggests that only 5–10 percent of youth are natural entrepreneurs, while others require employability skills or pathways to self-employment.

Third, climate justice and equitable financing: He observed that Africa remains disproportionately affected by climate change despite limited access to climate finance. He called on youth to advocate for equity within global climate frameworks while developing innovative adaptation and mitigation solutions.

Fourth, governance and human security: Dr Odusola underscored ethical leadership, transparency, and accountability as foundational to building trust and institutional credibility. He stressed that integrity must become a strategic asset for youth leaders.

He further encouraged African youth to champion evidence-based policymaking, develop Africa-centred narratives, and move beyond advocacy toward policy formulation and monitoring. He called for cross-border youth collaboration, continental policy briefs on priority issues, and the establishment of monitoring mechanisms to track the implementation of youth policies at national and regional levels.

Highlighting UNDP's initiatives, including Youth Connect, Youth Entrepreneurship Action Hubs, Uniport platforms across African universities, and entrepreneurship training linked to AfCFTA, he reaffirmed UNDP's commitment to scaling youth-led solutions.

In closing, Dr Odusola urged young leaders to transition from dialogue to concrete action, reminding participants that meetings alone do not generate development. He encouraged youth to harness technology responsibly, position Africa as a producer of digital and AI solutions rather than a consumer, and view global shifts not as threats but as opportunities for strategic advancement.

Quoting the late Kofi Annan, he concluded: "You are never too young to lead, and you should never doubt your capacity to triumph where others have not," reinforcing his call for youth to become architects of Africa's transformation within the emerging global order.

CHANNEL

4.0

KEY THEMES AND INSIGHTS

The deliberations and presentations at the NEXTGEN Africa Talk 2026 coalesced around several recurring thematic areas that collectively illuminate the opportunities and constraints shaping youth leadership and development across the African continent. These themes reflect the structural, institutional, and psychosocial dimensions of youth empowerment within contemporary African governance and economic systems.

4.1 YOUTH AS A STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT ASSET

A dominant theme emerging from the presentations was the recognition of Africa's youthful population as a strategic development asset rather than a demographic burden. Speakers consistently emphasised that young people represent a renewable reservoir of human capital capable of driving innovation, entrepreneurship, governance reform, and socio-economic transformation across sectors.

However, the discussions also highlighted that the demographic dividend is not automatic; it requires deliberate investment in education, skills development, institutional inclusion, and economic empowerment. Without such investments, Africa's youth bulge risks becoming a demographic disruption characterised by unemployment, social instability, and underutilised productivity.

Implications for Practice/Policy:
Governments and development partners must transition from welfare-oriented youth programming toward productivity-focused

investments that prioritise skills development, technological competence, and youth enterprise support. National development plans should explicitly integrate youth development indicators into macroeconomic planning frameworks to ensure that demographic growth translates into measurable socio-economic gains.

4.2 INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING AND GOVERNANCE INCLUSION

Another key insight relates to the importance of robust youth institutions in facilitating meaningful participation in governance processes. Presentations underscored that youth engagement often remains confined to advocacy and activism rather than policy formulation and implementation. Strengthening national youth councils and federations was therefore identified as critical for enhancing representation within legislative, executive, and decentralised governance structures.

Institutional credibility, resource mobilisation, and administrative transparency were also highlighted as essential factors influencing the effectiveness of youth-led organisations in engaging state actors and influencing national policy agendas.

Implications for Practice/Policy:
Policy frameworks should support the legal and financial empowerment of youth institutions through statutory mandates, budgetary allocations, and structured dialogue platforms. Institutionalised consultation mechanisms between youth organisations and government agencies can facilitate the integration of youth perspectives into national policy design and implementation processes.

4.3 YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION

The role of youth entrepreneurship in addressing unemployment and stimulating economic diversification emerged as a central theme. Participants emphasised the potential of youth-led enterprises to contribute to industrialisation, digital innovation, and regional trade under frameworks such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

Nevertheless, structural barriers, including limited access to finance, inadequate mentorship, and regulatory constraints, continue to impede the scalability of enterprises and market competitiveness among young entrepreneurs.

Implications for Practice/Policy:
Governments should develop integrated enterprise support ecosystems that provide access to startup financing, technical assistance, incubation services, and market linkages. Regulatory reforms aimed at simplifying business registration and tax compliance processes can further enhance youth participation in formal economic sectors and cross-border trade.

4.4 MENTAL HEALTH AND HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT

Mental health was identified as a critical but frequently overlooked component of youth empowerment and productivity. Presentations highlighted the interrelationship between

psychological well-being, educational attainment, workforce participation, and innovation capacity.

Limited healthcare infrastructure, social stigma, and insufficient funding for mental health services were cited as significant barriers to accessing professional support, thereby undermining the developmental potential of young people.

Implications for Practice/Policy: *Mental health services should be integrated into primary healthcare systems and educational institutions to facilitate early intervention and community-based support. Increased budgetary allocations for mental health programming, alongside culturally responsive awareness campaigns, can enhance resilience and productivity among youth populations.*

4.5 ETHICAL LEADERSHIP AND INTERGENERATIONAL COLLABORATION

Speakers emphasised the importance of values-driven leadership rooted in accountability, transparency, and service. Ethical governance was identified as a prerequisite for sustainable development, particularly in contexts where corruption and institutional inefficiencies undermine public trust. Intergenerational collaboration was also highlighted as essential for fostering mentorship, knowledge transfer, and inclusive decision-making processes that address complex socio-economic challenges.

Implications for Practice/Policy: *Leadership development programmes should incorporate ethical governance training and mentorship initiatives that facilitate collaboration between experienced professionals and emerging youth leaders. Institutional reforms aimed at promoting transparency and accountability can further strengthen public confidence in youth leadership initiatives.*

4.6 REGIONAL INTEGRATION AND CONTINENTAL COLLABORATION

Finally, discussions underscored the importance of regional cooperation in advancing youth empowerment through trade, innovation, and policy harmonisation. Frameworks such as the AfCFTA were identified as instrumental in facilitating cross-border enterprise development and market access for youth-led businesses.

However, realising these opportunities requires improved infrastructure, harmonised regulatory standards, and digital payment systems capable of supporting intra-African commerce.

Implications for Practice/Policy: Regional bodies and national governments should prioritise infrastructure development, regulatory alignment, and digital trade facilitation mechanisms to support youth participation in regional value chains. Cross-border partnerships among youth institutions can further enhance knowledge exchange and collaborative enterprise development.

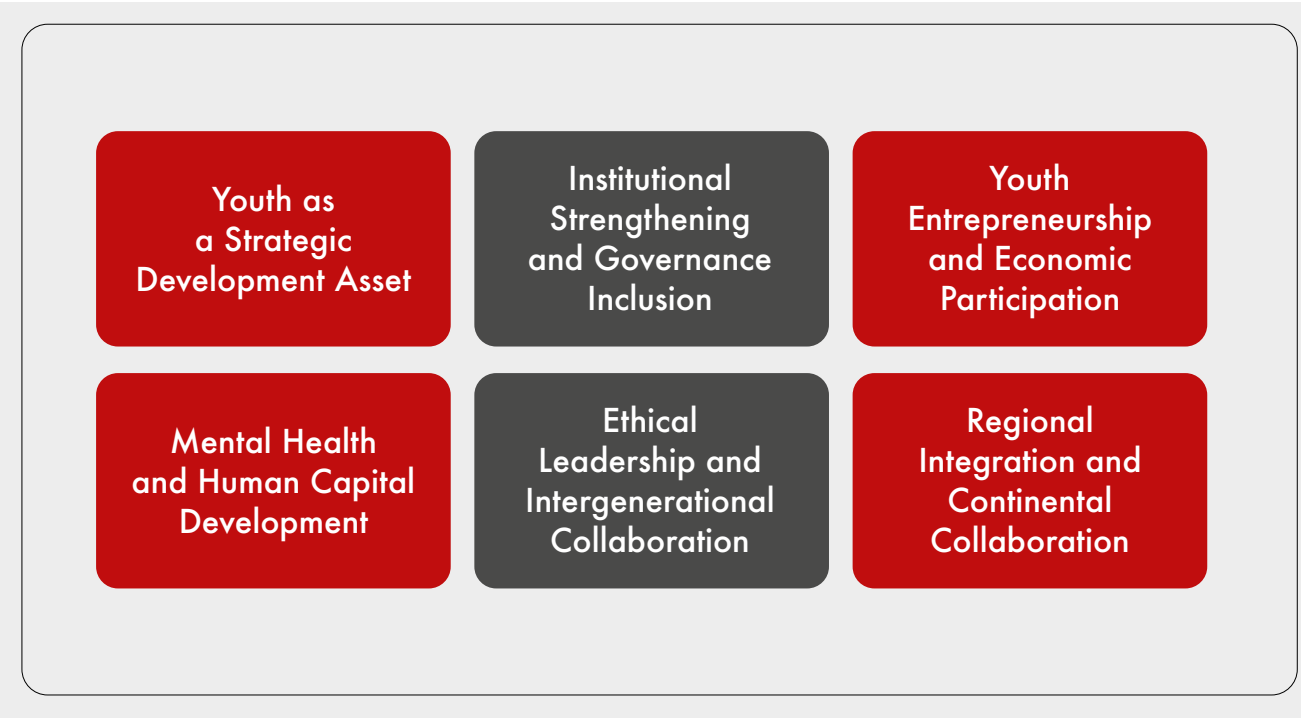


Figure 2: Key Themes and Insights

5.0

IMPLICATIONS OF STRUCTURED YOUTH LEADERSHIP ENGAGEMENT FOR AFRICA

The inaugural NextGen Africa Talk 2026 highlighted that youth leadership is not merely a demographic reality but a strategic pillar for Africa's governance, socio-economic transformation, and long-term stability. Africa remains the youngest continent in the world, with approximately 60% of its population under the age of 25 (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UN DESA], 2019). By 2030, young Africans are projected to constitute nearly 42% of the world's youth population, underscoring the continent's growing influence on global demographic and economic trends (World Economic Forum, 2022). This demographic advantage, often described as Africa's demographic dividend, presents significant opportunities for innovation, economic expansion, and institutional renewal if effectively harnessed.

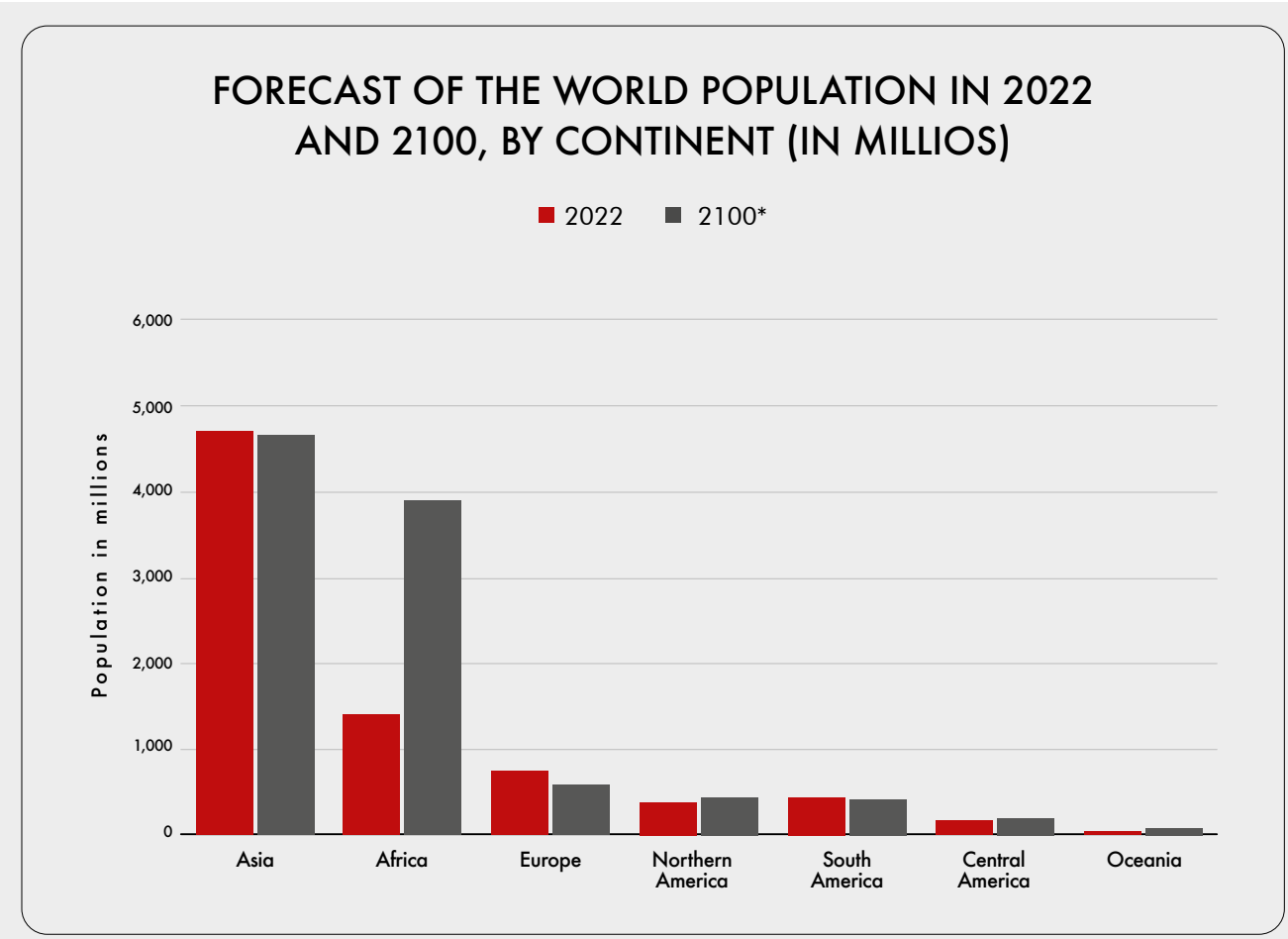


Figure 3: By 2030, young Africans are expected to constitute 42% of the global youth population. (Source: Statista)

Despite this demographic strength, youth representation in formal governance structures remains disproportionately low. Globally, less than 3% of parliamentarians are under the age of 30, reflecting persistent structural barriers to youth participation in political decision-making (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2023). Across many African countries, young people remain underrepresented in national legislatures, executive leadership positions, and senior public administration roles. This gap highlights a critical paradox: a continent largely composed of young people, yet governed predominantly by older leadership cohorts.

Evidence also suggests that young Africans are less likely than older citizens to participate in conventional political processes such as party membership, public consultations, or direct engagement with elected officials (Afrobarometer, 2023). This pattern reflects both institutional barriers and declining trust in political systems that often fail to respond to youth priorities such as employment, education reform, and economic inclusion. Without deliberate efforts to strengthen youth institutional engagement, the disconnect between demographic reality and political representation risks undermining the legitimacy of governance and long-term policy responsiveness.

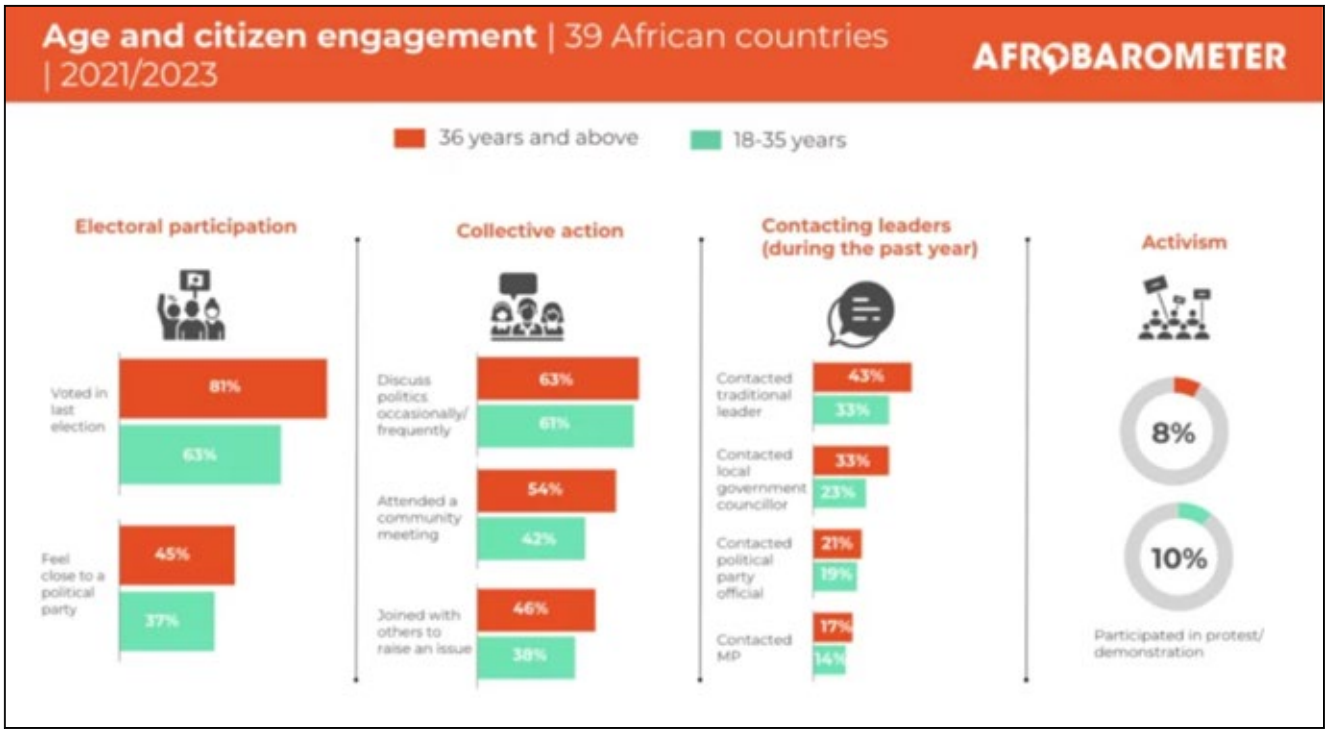


Figure 4: Age and Citizen Engagement (Source: Afrobarometer)

From a development perspective, structured youth leadership engagement is essential for advancing inclusive governance and sustainable development frameworks. Increased youth participation strengthens accountability, encourages innovation in policy formulation, and ensures that development strategies respond to emerging societal needs. In particular, youth engagement directly contributes to the objectives of Sustainable Development Goal 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) by promoting inclusive decision-making processes and strengthening democratic participation.

The NextGen Africa Talk 2026 demonstrated the value of creating structured platforms for youth engagement and cross-national dialogue. By convening representatives of National Youth Councils and emerging leaders from 21 countries, the event facilitated the exchange of institutional experiences, governance strategies, and policy advocacy approaches. Such peer-learning platforms strengthen continental collaboration while encouraging youth institutions to transition from symbolic representation toward measurable policy influence.

Ultimately, empowering young Africans with opportunities for leadership development, institutional participation, and strategic decision-making is both a democratic necessity and a development imperative. Harnessing Africa's demographic dividend requires deliberate investments in youth capacity, leadership development, and inclusive governance. As highlighted during the Talk, youth leadership is not a distant future prospect but an immediate requirement for strengthening democratic institutions, driving economic transformation, and shaping Africa's trajectory in an increasingly complex global landscape.

6.0

BROADER CONTINENTAL IMPACT

The inaugural NextGen Africa Talk recorded participation from 21 countries across West, East, Southern, and Central Africa, as well as from Europe and North America. This breadth of engagement reflects AFLIGA's emerging continental footprint and its growing capacity to convene cross-border institutional dialogue.

The presence of multiple National Youth Councils strengthened the event's institutional relevance, transforming the platform from a general youth conversation into a structured benchmarking forum. By facilitating the exchange of governance models, institutional strategies, and youth engagement frameworks, the Talk contributed to the gradual harmonisation of youth participation approaches across diverse African contexts.

Beyond dialogue, the continental composition of participants positions AFLIGA as an emerging convener of youth policy discourse. The cross-national networks formed during the event create pathways for collaborative initiatives in employment advocacy, education reform, governance participation, and innovation ecosystems. As these networks mature, they hold potential to influence regional youth strategies aligned with continental priorities.

Incorporating future visual representations, such as a continental map highlighting participating countries and institutional affiliations, would further demonstrate AFLIGA's reach and reinforce its credibility as a growing Pan-African leadership development platform.

7.0

FUTURE-ORIENTED PERSPECTIVES AND STRATEGIC LINKAGES

NextGen Africa Talk 2026 established a forward-looking leadership agenda aligned with continental and global development frameworks. By strengthening youth institutional capacity and structured governance participation, the initiative directly contributes to the aspirations of the African Union's Agenda 2063, particularly the goal of building capable, accountable, and development-oriented leadership across Africa. It similarly advances the objectives of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, notably SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

BUILDING FORWARD-LOOKING YOUTH LEADERSHIP

Discussions during the Talk highlighted the need to equip young Africans with policy literacy, strategic thinking skills, and ethical grounding. Leadership formation must extend beyond motivational discourse to encompass institutional competence, exposure to governance, and measurable accountability frameworks. Through annual convenings and sustained engagement, AFLIGA seeks to cultivate leaders capable of navigating multipolar geopolitics, digital transformation, and economic restructuring.

Alignment with Continental and Global Agendas

The Talk demonstrated that youth engagement can be locally grounded yet globally informed. By connecting National Youth Councils and institutional actors across borders, AFLIGA reinforces continental cohesion while aligning dialogue with Agenda 2063 milestones and global development benchmarks.

LOOKING AHEAD – 2027 EDITION

The planned 2027 edition of NextGen Africa Talk will deepen institutional collaboration, expand country representation, and integrate outcome-based tracking mechanisms to measure progress in youth governance participation. Future editions are expected to incorporate policy briefs, structured mentorship clusters, and measurable action commitments from participating institutions.

SUSTAINING MOMENTUM

By institutionalising the Talk as an annual platform under the Africa Shapers Initiative, AFLIGA ensures continuity beyond dialogue. Recorded sessions, follow-up engagements, and cross-border collaboration mechanisms will transform the event from a one-day convening into a sustained continental youth leadership movement. Through structured engagement, research-informed dialogue, and strategic partnerships, AFLIGA continues to position itself as a catalyst for ethical, competent, and future-ready African leadership.

8.0

CLOSING REMARKS AND WAY FORWARD

Dr Emmanuel Dei-Tumi
Founder & Executive Director – Africa
Future Leaders Institute of Global Affairs

The session concluded with closing remarks delivered by Dr Emmanuel Dei-Tumi, Founder and Executive Director of the Africa Future Leaders Institute of Global Affairs (AFLIGA), who reflected on the key outcomes of the day's deliberations and articulated a way forward for collective action on youth development in Africa.

Dr Dei-Tumi first thanked all presenters, National Youth Council representatives, panellists, resource persons, and participants for their insightful contributions and sustained engagement throughout the session. He affirmed that the objective of the forum, to share lessons learned from national experiences such as those of Eswatini and Zambia and to glean practical insights for peer learning, had been achieved, and that the dialogue had provided rich comparative perspectives on youth leadership, institutional strengthening, and socio-economic empowerment.

Building on reflections from panel discussions and keynote addresses, including contributions from the special guest of honour and representatives of the United Nations and the African Union Commission, Dr Dei-Tumi emphasised that the youth agenda must extend beyond rhetoric to structured and coordinated action. While noting that representatives from the Pan-African Youth Union were unable to join the session, he expressed confidence that continued collaboration would reinforce continental youth governance frameworks.

Dr Dei-Tumi informed participants that recordings of the session would be made available to all registrants, and he encouraged heads of National Youth Councils to review peer presentations, extract actionable lessons, and apply these in their national contexts. He reiterated the importance of rigorous evidence-based approaches to youth policy and institutional programming.

Looking ahead, he announced upcoming engagements, including a high-level discussion on the implications of the fading multilateral order for Africa's global positioning, followed by the launch of the second cohort of the African Women in Global Leadership Programme , a five-weekend initiative designed to equip emerging leaders with the skills and strategic insight needed for impactful global leadership.

Dr Dei-Tumi closed the session with a call to sustained action and collaboration, urging youth leaders to translate the rich dialogues of the day into practical institutional reforms, cross-border partnerships, and concrete implementation strategies. He also invited participants to bring the insights and relationships forged at the forum back into their home countries as catalysts for sustained youth-centred development efforts.

9.0

RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

In light of the deliberations and thematic insights emerging from the NEXTGEN Africa Talk 2026, the following strategic recommendations are proposed to guide implementation, institutional strengthening, and sustained youth engagement across national and continental development frameworks.

9.1 INSTITUTIONALISE STRUCTURED YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNANCE

There is a need to formalise youth engagement in public policy processes through legally mandated consultation platforms that facilitate representation within national and sub-national decision-making structures. This will enable young people to transition from advocacy roles to substantive policy influence in areas such as budgeting, legislative reform, and programme implementation.

Owner(s): National Governments in collaboration with National Youth Authorities, Youth Councils, and AFLIGA International Secretariat

Timeline: Medium-term (1–3 years)

9.2 ESTABLISH YOUTH ENTERPRISE SUPPORT ECOSYSTEMS

Integrated support systems should be developed to enhance youth entrepreneurship through access to startup financing, mentorship, incubation services, and market linkages. These ecosystems should align with regional trade frameworks to facilitate youth participation in cross-border enterprise development under emerging continental markets.

Owner(s): Ministries of Trade and Industry, Private Sector Associations, Development Finance Institutions, AFLIGA Enterprise and Innovation Desk

Timeline: Short- to Medium-term (within 12–24 months)

9.3 INTEGRATE MENTAL HEALTH INTO YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMING

Given the critical relationship between psychological well-being and productivity, mental health support services should be embedded within youth development initiatives, educational institutions, and community-based programmes. This includes awareness campaigns, counselling services, and early intervention systems.

Owner(s): Ministries of Health and Education, National Youth Authorities, Civil Society Organisations, AFLIGA Health and Well-being Working Group

Timeline: Short-term (within 12 months)

9.4 DEVELOP ETHICAL LEADERSHIP AND MENTORSHIP PROGRAMMES

Structured leadership development initiatives should be established to cultivate competencies in ethical governance, accountability, and strategic decision-making among emerging youth leaders. Intergenerational mentorship frameworks can further facilitate knowledge transfer and leadership continuity.

Owner(s): AFLIGA International Secretariat in collaboration with Academic Institutions, Professional Associations, and Regional Youth Networks

Timeline: Short- to Medium-term (within 12–18 months)

9.5 STRENGTHEN REGIONAL COLLABORATION AMONG YOUTH INSTITUTIONS

Cross-border partnerships should be promoted among national youth councils and federations to enhance knowledge exchange, policy harmonisation, and collaborative enterprise development. Regional dialogues and exchange programmes can facilitate shared learning and innovation across contexts.

Owner(s): AFLIGA Regional Coordinators, National Youth Councils, African Union Youth Division

Timeline: Medium-term (1–3 years)

9.6 SUPPORT DIGITAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND INNOVATION

Targeted investments should focus on digital literacy, technical training, and innovation-driven enterprise development to equip youth with the competencies needed to participate in emerging sectors such as artificial intelligence, fintech, and green technologies.

Owner(s): Ministries of ICT, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)

Institutions, Private Sector Technology Firms, AFLIGA Skills Development Unit

Timeline: Medium-term (1–3 years)

9.7 ESTABLISH MONITORING AND EVALUATION (M&E) FRAMEWORKS

A comprehensive Monitoring and Evaluation framework should be developed to track progress in youth empowerment initiatives and ensure alignment with national development strategies and continental aspirations such as Agenda 2063.

Owner(s): AFLIGA Monitoring and Evaluation Unit in collaboration with National Coordinators and Development Partners

Timeline: Short-term (within 12 months)

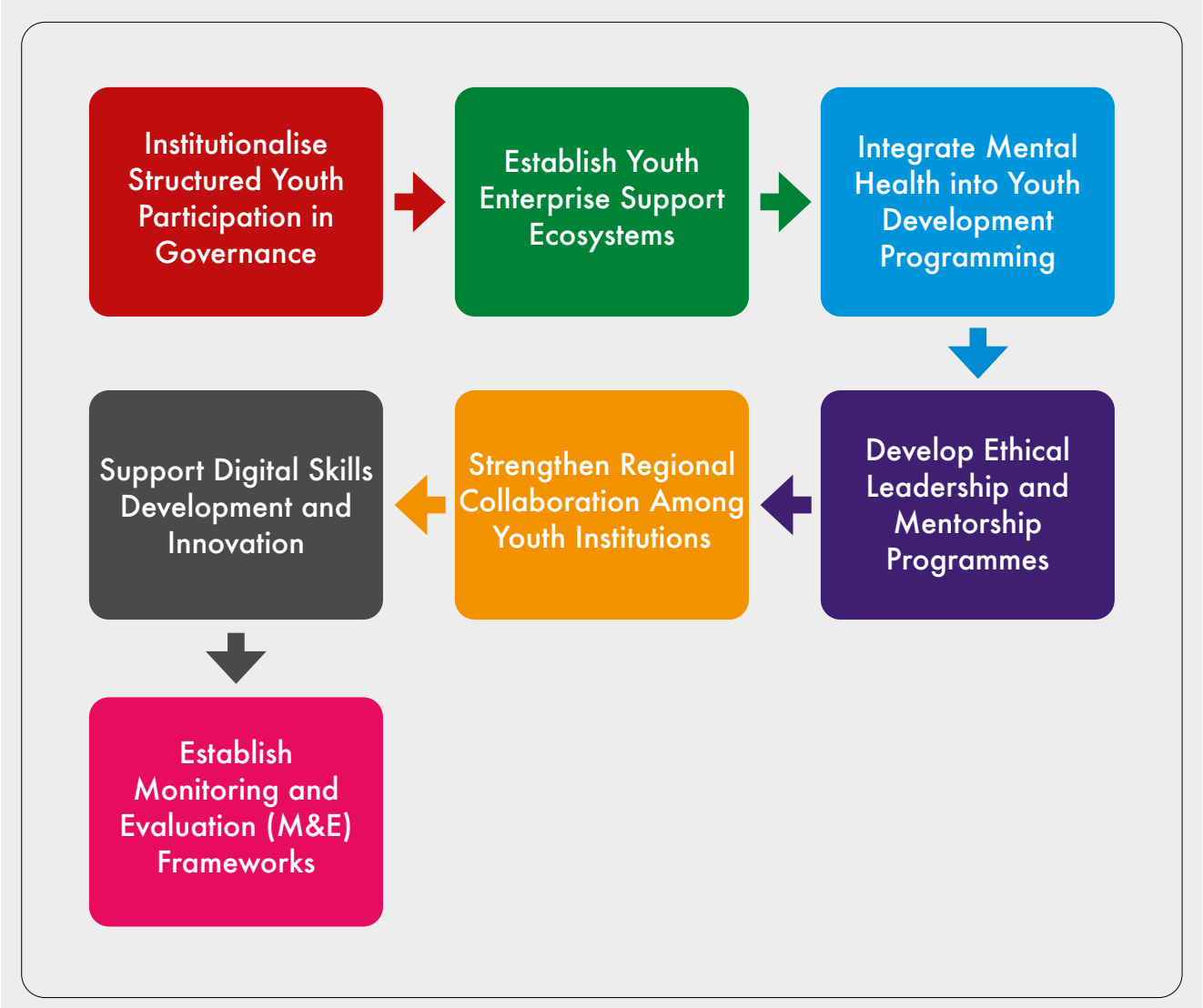


Figure 5: Flowchart for Proffered Recommendations

10.0

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The successful convening of the NEXTGEN Africa Talk 2026 was made possible through the dedicated contributions of multiple stakeholders across Africa and internationally. The organisers wish to acknowledge the AFLIGA International Secretariat for providing strategic oversight and coordination, as well as the Regional and National Youth Coordinators who ensured broad participation from diverse African contexts..

Special appreciation is extended to the moderators, speakers, and panellists, whose expertise, insights, and thought leadership shaped the dialogue and enriched the thematic outcomes of the event. Recognition is also given to the media and communications teams, whose efforts ensured the dissemination of proceedings and enhanced engagement across virtual and physical platforms.

Finally, the organisers thank the partner institutions, development agencies, and private sector collaborators for their technical and financial support, without which the convening, discussions, and follow-up engagements would not have been possible. Their commitment reflects a shared dedication to empowering Africa's youth and fostering sustainable development across the continent.

11.0

ETHICS AND PERMISSIONS

All presentations, speeches, and discussions included in this report were conducted with strict adherence to ethical standards for research, reporting, and youth engagement. Participation in the NEXTGEN Africa Talk 2026 was voluntary, with informed consent obtained from all speakers, panellists, and moderators for the use and dissemination of their contributions in written, digital, and public reporting formats.

The organisers ensured that intellectual property rights, privacy, and confidentiality were respected in transcribing and publishing presentations. Photographs, recordings, and supporting materials were used solely for documentation and reporting purposes with the permission of all relevant contributors.

Furthermore, the report complies with institutional guidelines for ethical reporting and inclusive representation, ensuring that the voices of youth leaders, facilitators, and partner institutions are accurately and responsibly documented for reference, policy formulation, and future programming.

12.0

OVERVIEW OF AFLIGA

The Africa Future Leaders Institute of Global Affairs (AFLIGA) is a Pan-African civic empowerment and leadership development institute headquartered in Ghana, committed to nurturing a generation of ethical, civic-minded, and globally competent leaders. Founded on the conviction that Africa's transformation depends fundamentally on the quality of its leadership, AFLIGA equips young professionals and emerging changemakers with the intellectual grounding, strategic skills, and moral clarity required to contribute meaningfully to national and continental development.

AFLIGA recognises that sustainable development is not driven by economic growth alone, but by the cultivation of leaders who uphold ethical governance, social cohesion, accountability, and inclusive participation. Its programmes are therefore designed to combine civic education, policy dialogue, leadership formation, and continental networking within a coherent framework of values-based development.

While maintaining a Pan-African outlook, appreciating the shared historical experiences and contemporary challenges across the continent, AFLIGA adopts a locally grounded approach. Ghana serves as the initial anchor for piloting civic engagement models and leadership interventions, addressing pressing issues such as youth disengagement from governance processes, weak institutional trust, and the need for stronger ethical foundations in public life.

The NextGen Africa Talk 2026, convened under AFLIGA's Africa Shapers Initiative, exemplifies the institute's growing continental reach. With participation from 21 countries across Africa, Europe, and North America, the inaugural edition demonstrated AFLIGA's capacity to convene diverse stakeholders in structured dialogue. The event further reinforced the institute's role as an emerging platform for intergenerational engagement, cross-border collaboration, and policy-oriented youth discourse aligned with continental frameworks such as the African Union Agenda 2063 and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

12.1 STRATEGIC APPROACHES AND PLATFORMS

AFLIGA advances its mission through multiple structured platforms, with the NextGen Africa Talk serving as a core pillar of the Africa Shapers Initiative. These platforms are designed to move beyond symbolic engagement, creating measurable pathways for youth empowerment and leadership formation.

Inspiring Ethical and Inclusive Leadership

AFLIGA places strong emphasis on moral integrity, transparency, accountability, and service-oriented leadership. Through events such as NextGen Africa Talk 2026, participants are challenged to view leadership not as positional authority but as ethical stewardship. The initiative promotes inclusive participation across gender, nationality, and socio-economic background, encouraging collaborative rather than competitive leadership cultures across the continent.

Facilitating Cross-National and Interdisciplinary Dialogue

By convening National Youth Councils, institutional leaders, policymakers, scholars, and emerging professionals, AFLIGA fosters conversations that transcend national and disciplinary boundaries. The 2026 Talk created space for benchmarking youth institutional practices, exchanging strategies for governance participation, and identifying innovative approaches to employment, education reform, and enterprise development. Such dialogue strengthens continental coherence while respecting contextual diversity.

Fostering Intergenerational Engagement and Mentorship

AFLIGA recognises mentorship as a critical bridge between aspiration and practical leadership readiness. Its platforms intentionally connect experienced leaders and institutional actors with emerging youth voices. Through structured Q&A sessions and interactive exchanges during the 2026 event, young participants gained exposure to strategic thinking, institutional realities, and pathways for influence within governance systems.

Promoting Structured Youth Participation in Governance

AFLIGA encourages youth institutions to transition from advocacy-centred engagement toward strategic policy influence. The NextGen Africa Talk emphasised embedding youth voices within national development plans and continental frameworks. By strengthening institutional capacity among National Youth Councils and related bodies,

AFLIGA contributes to more effective youth representation within governance and development processes.

Integrating African Perspectives into Contemporary Leadership Frameworks

AFLIGA champions the view that Africa's cultural and historical foundations remain relevant to modern governance and innovation. Its dialogues encourage participants to draw upon African experiences, communal values, and indigenous governance insights while engaging confidently with global systems shaped by technological advancement and multipolar geopolitics.

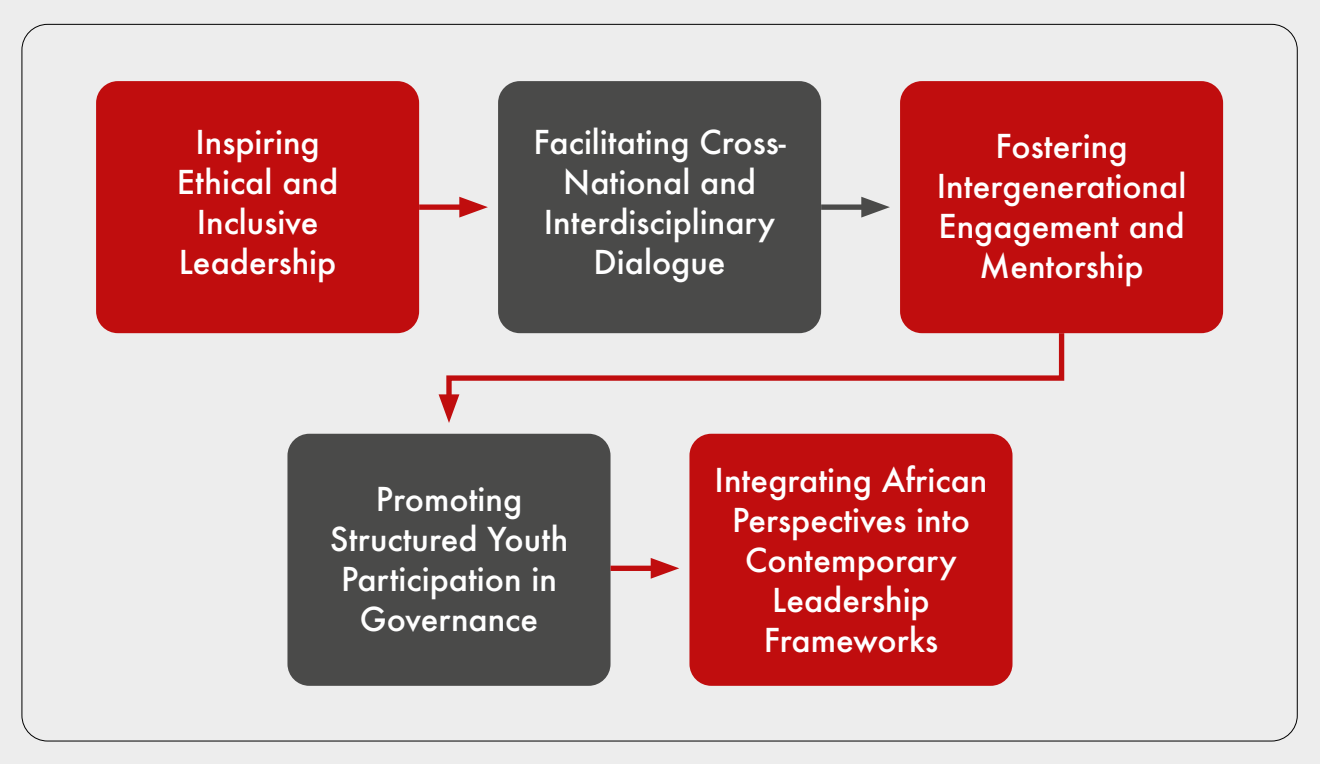


Figure 6: A diagrammatic representation of the Strategic Approaches and Platforms

12.2 VISION AND LONG-TERM GOALS

At its core, AFLIGA envisions an Africa led by ethically grounded, visionary leaders capable of navigating complex local and global challenges with competence and integrity. The NextGen Africa Talk 2026 represents a foundational step toward institutionalising an annual continental youth leadership dialogue.

Over the long term, AFLIGA seeks to:

- Reduce civic apathy by fostering active and informed citizen participation, particularly among young Africans.
- Strengthen youth institutional capacity to ensure meaningful representation within governance systems.
- Promote sustainable leadership models that combine African values with contemporary global competencies.

- Advance inclusive leadership frameworks that broaden participation across gender, geography, and socio-economic status.
- Build a Pan-African network of ethical leaders who collaborate across borders to influence policy, governance reform, and socio-economic transformation.

By blending tradition with innovation, moral purpose with practical action, and local grounding with continental ambition, AFLIGA positions itself as a catalyst for transformative leadership development. The successful execution of the inaugural NextGen Africa Talk, attracting 250 participants from 21 countries, signals the institute's growing visibility and credibility as an emerging continental platform for youth-driven dialogue and policy engagement.

Future editions, including the planned 2027 convening, will further consolidate this momentum, deepen partnerships with National Youth Councils, and expand AFLIGA's role in shaping structured, values-based leadership discourse across Africa and beyond.

13.0
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