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Policy Brief

Development of National Action Plans (NAPs) on Youth, Peace and Security (YPS): Reflections from Africa

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY





The Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda has made significant progress in Africa. The African Union (AU), Regional Economic Communities/Regional Mechanisms (RECs/RMs), their relevant organs and member states have also been responsive. The prospects of achieving the targets set in the Continental Framework for Youth Peace and Security (CFYPS) 10-year implementation plan, regarding the popularization and implementation of the framework and the development of National Action Plans (NAPs) on YPS by Member States, are encouraging. Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) developed their NAPs less than two years after the PSC pronounced itself on the NAP-YPS mandate, while several other AU member states have either commenced the process of developing their NAPs or committed to it. These member states require substantial support to navigate the complex processes leading to NAP. It was on this premise that the AU Youth for Peace (Y4P) Program hosted an experience-sharing workshop in Addis Ababa in April 2023. 10 AU Member States, including Nigeria, The DRC, Burundi, Cameroon, Kenya, Liberia, The Gambia, Tunisia, Uganda, Zimbabwe, and other key stakeholders attended. The key theme of these workshop discussions was how best to support the development and implementation of NAPs on YPS. Moreover, the workshop sought to initiate a community of practice to encourage the pooling and sharing of resources (intellectual, financial, logistical, etc.) required to initiate and support NAP development processes. This brief presents key takeaways from the workshop for advancing NAPs-YPS Agenda in Member States, as well as recommendations for key stakeholders regarding the development of NAPs.

Key Points

- The African Union (AU), particularly the Peace and Security Council (PSC), has been consistent in drawing attention to, and mobilizing concerted efforts in, promoting the implementation of the Continental Framework for Youth Peace and Security (CFYPS) by Member States through the adoption of National Action Plans (NAPs) on youth, peace and security (YPS).
- The African Union Commission (AUC), in collaboration with RECs/RMs and development partners, has heeded the call of the PSC to assist Member States to support their YPS programming, particularly the development of NAPs on YPS.
- In addition to Nigeria and The DRC, which are implementing NAPs, there has been growing enthusiasm and efforts made among AU Member States to adopt and implement NAPs on YPS.
- Given that there are different variables and internal dynamics at stake among countries, the process of adoption and implementation of NAPs on YPS must account for national specificities and priorities.
- Experience-sharing conversations are important to enable stakeholders to recognize the best-practices to adopt while developing NAPs on YPS.



Introduction

The African Union Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda has gained considerable momentum since the inauguration of the Youth for Peace Africa Program (Y4P) in September 2018 in Lagos, Nigeria. Before the formal launch of the flagship Program, most of Africa's inter-governmental institutions at the continental and regional levels focused on broader youth and development issues, occasionally drawing inspiration from the African Youth Charter adopted by the 7th Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly in Banjul, The Gambia, in July 2006. Five years since the launch of the Y4P, however, the youth-peace-security nexus has gained critical importance in the deliberations and decisions of major institutions, notably at the level of the Assembly and the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union (AU). Today, several of the key priorities set by the Y4P agenda at its inception have been met. Significantly, following a robust and continent-wide process that included a wide range of stakeholders including youth peacebuilders, representatives of RECs/RMs, CSOs, Committee of Experts of the PSC as well as development partners, the AU PSC adopted the Continental Framework on YPS (CFYPS) in August 2020. The Framework, among others,

aims at recognising and promoting the meaningful participation of youth in the continent's peace and security agenda, in line with the AU Agenda 2063.

The 10-year Implementation Plan for the CFYPS (2020-2029) identifies five major outcomes that directly derive from the five pillars of YPS, namely: (1) participation; (2) prevention; (3) protection; (4) partnership and coordination, and (5) disengagement and reintegration. The plan acknowledges the urgent need to develop the YPS agenda at the regional, national and sub-national levels, through the adoption and implementation of National Action Plans (NAPs) on YPS. Simultaneously, the PSC requested the AU Commission, through the Youth for Peace (Y4P), to support Member States in the development and implementation of their NAPs on YPS. Less than two years after the PSC pronounced itself on the NAP-YPS mandate, two Member States, Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), have developed, and are implementing, their NAPs on YPS. Nigeria has since made significant progress in developing sub-national action plans that take cognisance of the more salient peace

and security dynamics at its states' levels. Several other Member States have either commenced the process of developing their NAPs on YPS or have committed to doing so. This has contributed to a positive outlook towards achieving the targets set in the CFYPS' 10-Year implementation plan, with regards to the popularization and implementation of the framework as well as the development of NAPs on YPS by Member States.¹

Regardless of the stage they are currently at, however, it has become blatantly clear that AU Member States require considerable support in order to successfully navigate the complex processes leading to NAP adoption. It is within this context that the Y4P held an Experience Sharing Workshop in Addis Ababa in April 2023, with critical

stakeholders in attendance.² A total of 10 AU Member States - including Nigeria, The DRC³, Burundi, Cameroon, Kenya, Liberia, The Gambia, Tunisia, Uganda, and Zimbabwe - attended the experience-sharing workshop.⁴ Several RECs/RMs, development partners and youth-led and/or centred CSOs,⁵ experts on YPS as well as Finland, the first country to have adopted its NAP on YPS, also participated in the workshop. The workshop convened these key YPS actors/stakeholders to deliberate on how Member States can successfully develop their NAPs on YPS. Moreover, the workshop intended to stimulate the creation of a community of practice that encourages the pooling and sharing of resources (intellectual, financial, logistical, etc.) required to initiate and support NAP development processes.

Five Key Takeaways for advancing NAPs-YPS Agenda in Member States

Five key takeaways from these conversations are shared in the following sections, with the aim of highlighting the essential elements involved in developing NAPs on YPS.

1. NAPs should be aligned to the Normative Frameworks, particularly the CFYPS.

The first major takeaway is the need to ensure that the NAP complements the relevant YPS normative frameworks, to ensure that the values and aims of the two programs are aligned. To this end, the CFYPS seeks to integrate the norms inscribed in such as the Constitutive Act, AU Peace and Security Council (PSC), the African Youth Charter, Silencing the Guns initiative, regional and national initiatives, as well as global policy initiatives which include the various UNSCRs on YPS, among others. Furthermore, the 10-Year Implementation Plan of the CFYPS has specified targets to be met across the framework's five priority areas, which Member States should emulate as they develop their NAPs. It is crucial that achievable targets are set - preferably in incremental steps - to promote gradual and sustainable progress over a set period of time.

Indeed, Outcome 1 of the 10-Year Implementation Plan on Participation specified the imperative for youth to "participate equally in decision-making processes and the implementation

of peace and security interventions at national, regional and continental levels." Under this pillar, the major activities include:

- a. popularization and advocacy for the domestication and implementation of CFYPS at the national and regional levels;
- b. development of National Actions Plans (NAPs) on YPS in line with continental framework and national youth policies, involving the organization of national youth dialogues/consultations on modalities to develop NAPs and key contents; and
- c. advocacy for the implementation of NAPs, including youth participation in decision-making process such as AU/RECs/RMs Summit, National Security Councils etc., appointment/election of youth into key as well as statutory positions to enable them to contribute to the advancement of peace and security on the continent.

While (a) above refers to the responsibility of the AUC and the RECs/RMs to advocate for the development of NAPs by their Member States, (b) expressly enjoins the Member States to develop their NAPs in accordance with the CFYPS, while accounting for their extant policies on youth. In other words,

NAPs on YPS should ideally be premised on the CFYPS which itself is underpinned by “foundations for YPS in Africa”⁶, including normative frameworks, initiatives, and programmes relevant to YPS. More relevant to our discussion is the need for active youth participation in NAPs development processes from early on, including in determining the modalities that the NAPs process will adopt, and the outcome document. This is fundamentally important to the development and implementation of NAPs, since it highlights the centrality of youth throughout the entire process. Furthermore, the participation of youth in decision-making at all levels of policymaking and governance is essential to their promotion of continent-wide peace and security, which is the key aim of YPS.

2. Member States’ Institutions are Fundamental Stakeholders.

Stakeholders in the YPS space must acknowledge the pivotal role and responsibility of national governments in advancing and bringing NAPs-YPS to fruition within the shortest possible timeframe. This observation is crucial, not least because the relationship

between youth (peacebuilders) and governments in many Member States is often discordant, impeding the collaboration necessary to deliver joint initiatives or priorities. This is amplified by the fact that the subject of YPS remains misunderstood by many state officials. Indeed, in some Member States, peace and security issues are still considered the exclusive domain of the state; a domain that cannot be shared with non-state constituencies.

However, with sensitization and advocacy campaigns, high-level state officials are beginning to understand the added value of engaging critical groups in society - particularly youth and women - in policymaking processes. This is especially important to gain public trust and secure the buy-in of different social groups in policy implementation. While contexts and circumstances may differ among Member States, the respective ministries in charge of youth affairs are expected to be (one of) the lead institution(s) to convene relevant stakeholders to deliberate on NAPs-YPS. In some instances, state security agencies may play pivotal roles, while the parliament may be a major player in other processes. While the inclusion of state security agencies is crucial, especially to create a healthier relationship with youth groups

and constituencies, it is important to recognise that the peace and security aims of YPS go beyond state security to include human security, broadly defined. In countries where the national parliament is involved in the process of developing NAPs-YPS, it becomes easier to domesticate them in national laws.

3. The Role of Youth Peacebuilders in advancing NAPs.

Youths represent major stakeholders in the development, implementation and outcomes of NAPs on YPS. In accordance with the first pillar of YPS on “participation”, young people should be the primary drivers of NAPs on YPS from start to finish. Since NAPs intend to recognise and promote youth roles and contributions to peace and security, the views, concerns, and recommendations of young people themselves must be acknowledged and mainstreamed, from the initial conceptualization stages to implementation, as well as in the monitoring and evaluation processes. Youth centrality may take different shapes depending on the specific contexts of Member States. In some, there may be one (or a few) youth peacebuilding network(s) that work closely with the state authorities and are considered the

“go to” for YPS issues. Here, the youth network(s) may leverage its relationship with relevant government agencies, for example, by helping to build the capacities of government institutions and interfacing with multilateral institutions and development partners.

In other contexts, where there is a plethora of youth peacebuilding networks, it may be more efficient to consider creating an umbrella coalition on YPS that brings together young peacebuilders, networks, organizations and possibly representation from the National Youth Councils. Through such a coalition, youths can articulate and collate their perspectives, aspirations, and expectations, from early on. Having a common understanding of the process (including the various options available) would be helpful in building awareness of the opportunities and limits of their roles and responsibilities, in order to maintain a strong and collaborative working relationship from start to finish in the adoption of NAPs-YPS.

Understanding and leveraging the comparative advantages of different youth organizations and networks is important to galvanising the development of NAPs. For example, while youth peacebuilders’ networks

are more likely to have technical competencies in the normative and practical YPS imperatives, the NYCs have a greater understanding of outreach structures (including the 'grassroots') that can promote inclusivity beyond the reach of existing peacebuilding networks. The African Youth Ambassadors for Peace (AYAPs) are a useful resource to assist their peers in the process of developing NAPs. The AYAPs not only have unfettered access to the AU Y4P; they also have considerable technical capacities to implement YPS, which they can share with their peers in different regions. Moreover, they are able to play the role of credible interlocutors; to speak directly to top government functionaries, development partners, and senior officials of key RECs/RMs to garner the prerequisite support to initiate and develop YPS.

It is important to note, however, that youth constituencies are neither homogenous nor monolithic. Thus, the key players, individuals, and institutions within the YPS space may not share the same vision(s) about how the process should flow; what they should contribute in terms of time, expertise, and resources; and what different groups should realistically bring to the table. In many countries, youth peacebuilders are locked in unhealthy competitions

that distract them from pursuing common goals. In others, rivalries are fuelled or exploited by state institutions and development partners in ways that sometimes do not take a panoramic view of the possible outcomes of their actions. Such situations impede the efforts of youth (networks) to press for positive change and effectively advance YPS and the development of NAPs.

In order to pursue a seamless NAPs on YPS, the YPS space must not just serve as a rallying point for different opinions, but also develop inclusive practices whereby every segment of society (including gender, age, geographic, health variations) can contribute towards advancing the NAPs YPS agenda in the short and long run. That is the only way in which youth peacebuilders can ensure ownership of the process, by taking the front-row in pursuing its key priorities, and forging constructive strategic partnerships and alliances to deliver on NAPs-YPS ambitions.

4. NAPS is a process not an endgame.

Developing a NAP on YPS should not be considered an endgame. Rather, it should be recognized as a holistic process that seeks to achieve several outcomes which together contribute

to the active engagement of youth in the peace and security agenda. While the eventual NAP document may be a visible output from this process, it represents but one of several anticipated outcomes. Other key outcomes include building the capacities of youth peacebuilders and other key stakeholders, to create and nurture a wider community of practice on YPS. For young people to actively participate in the process, for instance, they must not only be knowledgeable in the subject-matter of YPS, but also be able to identify where the important resources and opportunities for advancing them are located. Convening different YPS stakeholders - including the government, development partners, international and local NGOs, youth (networks), and multilateral institutions – can enable the development of a community of YPS actors. In turn, this community is able to leverage on diverse technical and financial capacities to promote the YPS agenda, including the implementation of the NAP.

The development of NAPs should ideally begin with the robust sensitization and advocacy on key YPS pillars, including normative frameworks, the role of stakeholders, the essence of the NAP, conflict dynamics in the region/country, the role of youth in conflict prevention,

and management and resolution, among others. The convening of stakeholders will enable them to gain a common understanding of YPS, while providing the space to engage in conversations that promote collaboration. These ideas are well captured in Section III of the CFYPS which lists the “Objectives of the Framework”, including to “enhance partnerships and collaboration among target audiences and stakeholders” and “facilitate the development of youth-led and youth-centred strategic plans, initiatives and programmes by AUC, RECs/RMs, Member States, and other stakeholders.”⁷

It is unsurprising that the Member States which have made the most progress in YPS are also the ones where the key stakeholders, particularly youth peacebuilders, have gained considerable knowledge and exposure on broader governance, peace, and security issues. These are the same states where the youth constituency is widespread, robust and vibrant enough to take advantage of global, continental and regional norms and frameworks, driving ambitious national agendas in YPS. In short, the value of NAPs-YPS does not only reside in the adoption of a national framework. Rather, it requires building diverse process-based

capacities in YPS that are necessary to implement the contents of the NAP.

5. Each NAP is Context-Specific.

While there is broad acknowledgment that the adoption and implementation of NAPs on YPS represents a major step in the right direction, national blueprints are by no means a one-size-fits-all process that is uniformly applicable to/in all countries. Empirical evidence has shown that the process of developing NAPs on YPS will vary depending on multiple factors that depend on the specificities of individual Member States. These typically include factors such as the size of a country, the system of government, the configuration of the state institutions and security apparatus, the level of awareness and recognition of the pivotal roles and contributions of youth, the availability or dearth of resources, and the enthusiasm of government and/or development partners to invest in YPS agenda, to name but a few. Together, these factors can make significant difference in shaping the processes and outcomes of NAP.

It is highly unlikely that any two NAPs processes, including the document, will be the same from

start to finish. As the number of Member States that develop the NAPs on YPS increases, so would the opportunities to distil best practices on the NAPs development process. This would contribute to enriching the continental “guidelines”⁸ being developed by the AU through its Y4P Program. The draft guideline document identifies key steps towards promoting a robust and stakeholder-driven process. However, there should be no assumptions that deviation from the suggested process would necessarily result in failed outcomes. Indeed, provided the process responds to the peculiar requirements of a Member State and that it results from a broad-based stakeholders’ consensus, it cannot be deemed less appropriate than the official guidelines provided by the letter. A NAP document can be legitimised through a range of approaches, including legislation or the governmental adoption of a policy document, as evidenced by the countries that have fully adopted or are in the pipeline to adopt NAPs.

Conclusion

The YPS agenda has made considerable progress since the inauguration of the Y4P program in 2018, including the adoption of the CFYPS and its 10-year Implementation Plan by the AU PSC in 2020. To promote the implementation of the CFYPS and imperatives of the YPS agenda, the AU PSC has repeatedly called for “continued collaboration between the AU Commission and the RECs/RMs on the implementation of the Continental Framework on Youth Peace and Security, and the support of AU Member States to develop NAPs as one of the best strategies to advance the youth, peace and security agenda on the continent.”⁹

The AUC, in collaboration with RECs/RMs and development partners, have engaged Member States to encourage the development of NAPs by implementing the CFYPS and the broader YPS agenda. As noted, Nigeria and The DRC have already completed the process of developing a NAP document. Through this process, they have attained other important milestones, including enhancing stakeholders’ capacities and collaboration on YPS.

As the number of Member States intending to develop their NAPs on YPS increases, it is important to plan for experience-sharing conversations that align country-specific and continental outcomes and best practices. The first of these AU-led conversations represents the foundation for this piece, which has identified five critical elements in the NAP development process, namely: (1) the necessity to align NAPs to the normative frameworks on YPS, particularly the CFYPS; (2) the recognition of Member States as critical stakeholders in the process; (3) the centrality of youth (peacebuilders) in the development of NAPs; (4) the reality of NAPs on YPS being a process rather than an endgame, and (5), that each NAP is context-specific and thus distinctive.

Recommendations

African Union

- Build on the progress made in promoting the YPS agenda, including through advocacy and sensitization programmes, experience-sharing workshops, and stakeholders' consultations.
- Mobilize resources to support the development of the NAPs on YPS in Member States.
- Take stock of the progress made, methodologies and processes adopted by Member States developing their NAPs on YPS towards building continental and global best practices.

RECs/RMs

- Collaborate with the AU to deliver the assistance required by Member States to develop NAPs on YPS.

Member States

- Conduct nationwide needs assessments to identify the specific challenges and opportunities for youth in relation to peace and security, in order to reflect the realities and needs of young people in the development of NAPs.

Civil Society and Development Partners

- Support multilateral institutions' advocacy and sensitization, and stakeholders' capacity building initiatives,
- Develop robust monitoring and accountability frameworks to track and report progress on the adoption and implementation of NAPs-YPS by Member States.

Youth

- Actively engage with the process of developing NAPs on YPS.
- Take advantage of the process to enhance their capacities on the YPS agenda.
- Promote cooperation and collaboration within and among youth networks to optimize their role and contributions to the development of NAPs on YPS.
- Develop collaborative initiatives with other stakeholders, particular the government, to build on youth contributions to peace and security in their countries.

Endnotes

1. AU, Continental Framework on Youth Peace and Security 10-Year Implementation Plan, https://papsrepository.africa-union.org/bitstream/handle/123456789/1609/implementation_plan_-_english.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y
2. These included development partners ACCORD, GIZ/AU, Horn of Africa Youth Network, and Save the Children. Also, embassies, RECs/RMs, CSOs.
3. These two Member States have already adopted their NAPs on YPS.
4. These eight other Member States have either begun the process or have indicated their strong willingness to do so.
5. These included Search for Common Ground (which played a critical role in the development of UNSCR 2250); the Horn of Africa Youth Network, ACCORD, Save the Children,
6. AU, Continental Framework on Youth Peace and Security (2020), p.6-11. <https://papsrepository.africa-union.org/handle/123456789/1609#:~:text=The%20Framework%20points%20to%20the,security%20initiatives%3B%20partner%20and%20support>
7. Ibid., p. 12.
8. Draft Guidelines for the Development and Implementation of National Action Plans (NAPs) for the AU Continental Framework on Youth, Peace and Security (CFYPS).
9. AU PSC Communiqué PSC/PR/COMM.1067 (2020) adopted by the Peace and Security Council of the African Union at its 1067th meeting held on 3 March 2022 on the theme: "Youth, Peace and Security in Africa". <https://www.peaceau.org/en/article/communique-of-the-1067th-meeting-of-the-psc-held-on-3-march-2022-on-the-theme-youth-peace-and-security-in-africa>

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