

Pre-Tana Forum Side-Event Concept Note

Theme: “Youth in Peace and Conflict: Does My Vote Count?”

The 3rd Pan African Youth Conference| Annual General Assembly Meeting of the African Youth Commission

23-26 March 2019 – Banjul, The Gambia

Background

In recent years, more protest movements across Africa have emerged, with thousands of young people protesting against political regimes in Ethiopia, Burundi, Senegal, South Africa and Zimbabwe among others. Young people remain at the forefront of democratic struggles on the continent. However, despite the rhetoric used by organizations such as the African Union regarding the importance of youth as ‘agents of change’ for socio-economic and political developments and the declaration of the African Youth Decade Plan of Action (DPoA) from 2009-2018, youth remain marginalized and excluded from important decision-making processes in most countries.

Indeed, youth tend to be disengaged from the democratic process, and studies show that young people vote less frequently, stand as candidates less often and remain underrepresented in electoral managerial functions. Yet, Africa is the youngest continent with a third of the population aged between 15 and 35; and with tremendously high rates of youth unemployment, youth engagement and participation in politics become key factors not only for democratic consolidation processes, but also for stability on the continent. More so, elections in many African countries have been marred by violence and although the popular stereotypes depict youth as both perpetrators and victims of conflict, African youth play a central role in the continent’s electoral processes. This trend poses a serious threat to peace and security on the continent. Hence, it is mandatory to develop an understanding of the structural dynamics which underlie their participation in electoral violence.

With 35 presidential and parliamentary elections held in and scheduled for 2018 and 2019 in Africa, it is time for African electoral bodies to rethink their strategies for increasing youth participation in political decision-making processes and to ensure that youth’s votes count. At the same time, the question needs to be asked whether young people in Africa believe their votes count at all or have completely lost trust in the political and electoral systems. Do youth feel that they are making a political statement by not voting?

Rationale

The overall rationale of the side event is to bring forth open and frank discussions pertaining to the critical issues surrounding youth engagement in political processes and how this is tied to peace and security on the continent. This corresponds with IPSS’ objective of creating outreach platforms for exchange and collaboration hosted in partnership with various stakeholders. The outcomes of these discussions will be brought forward to a greater audience at the 2019 Tana High-Level Forum on Security in Africa to be convened on May 4-5, 2019.

Format and Participants

The Institute for Peace and Security Studies (IPSS) will organize a side event on the topic “Youth in Peace and Conflict: Does my Vote Count?” This side event targets representatives of various African youth-led groups and individuals present at the 3rd Pan African Youth Conference. It will consist of an introductory roundtable discussion where representatives of youth groups will be briefed on the overall subject of the session and will be facilitated by guiding questions in line with the topic. The session then continues with smaller working groups where youth can share experiences and debate on their views. In the end, the results of the smaller working group discussions will be presented and shared amongst all participants of the side event.

The discussion will be guided by the Chatham House Rule to encourage a free exchange of thoughts. As part of the post-event activities, the proceedings of the event will contribute to the overall youth document presented to the participants of Tana High-level Forum in May 2019.

Objectives

The objectives of the pre-Tana Forum side event are:

1. To facilitate a frank and open dialogue among youth on their perception of the electoral processes in Africa and to document their perspectives.
2. To provide a platform for the sharing of experiences among youth on being part of a political process in their localities.
3. To encourage a discussion on whether or not youth believe their votes count and a critical questioning of the inter-linkages between voting and peace/conflict.

Expected Outcomes

1. Engagement of various youth groups working in the areas of peace and security on the continent.
2. Encouragement of youth organizations to draw upon the outcomes of their discussions and to share and circulate these insights among their wider networks.
3. Reporting of the outcomes of this event on the IPSS website and social media platforms.
4. Utilization of the recommendations resulting from the discussions in the upcoming 2019 Tana High-Level Forum on Security in Africa to be held in May 2019.