



Report

The Role of African Youth in Promoting Peace and Security

June 2025



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1. Executive Summary

On May 7, 2025, the YouthConnekt Africa Hub hosted an important panel discussion, commemorating the 31st remembrance of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi. The central theme explored the indispensable role of African youth in peacebuilding, emphasizing the transformative power of education, reflection, and dialogue. The discussion showcased youth, not merely as beneficiaries of peace initiatives, but as dynamic agents of change. Their innovative approaches, digital fluency, and deep community engagement were highlighted as critical assets, particularly given that young people are disproportionately affected by insecurity and conflict across the continent. While the panel acknowledged significant hurdles, such as resource scarcity and political marginalization, it ultimately underscored the immense potential of youth to cultivate lasting peace through dedicated educational efforts, constructive dialogue, and impactful grassroots initiatives.

2. Introduction and Background

Engaging youth in fostering peace and stability across Africa is central to YouthConnekt Africa's mission of empowering young people as catalysts for positive change and sustainable development. This commitment gained even greater urgency within the moving context of the 31st international commemoration of the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi. This tragic history undeniably underscores the devastating consequences of division and hate, reinforcing the urgent need for active youth participation in building peaceful, stable, and resilient societies.

During the discussion, the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi served as a compelling case study. It allowed for an exploration of the root causes and consequences of conflicts, the multifaceted involvement of youth in such conflicts, and their critical role in preventing violence and fostering lasting peace.

The insightful panel featured two young leaders from the YouthConnekt Africa network: Basiru Jaye, a youth civil society leader from YouthConnekt Gambia, and Ornella Assimini, a young activist from YouthConnekt Madagascar. They were joined by Sandra Shenge, Director of Programmes at Aegis Trust, an international NGO dedicated to preventing genocide worldwide, a Genocide survivor and researcher. This discussion marked the launch of YouthConnekt Africa's X Space series, introduced as a key pre-summit engagement ahead of the 2025 YouthConnekt Africa Summit. It delved into the root causes of young Africans' participation in hostilities and the profound consequences of wars and strife on the



continent's youth. A diverse audience of listeners from across Africa also enriched the conversation with their valuable contributions.

3. Key Discussion Points and Findings

The panel discussion highlighted several crucial aspects concerning African youth and peacebuilding:

Youth as Agents of Change:

A growing number of young Africans are asserting their agency in shaping peace in their countries by taking the lead in peacebuilding by confronting injustice, fact-checking misinformation, and demanding accountability from institutions. Rather than remaining passive, they are stepping forward as bold, responsible actors who recognize that peace requires not only the absence of conflict but the presence of justice, inclusivity, and truth.

During the X Space discussion, Sandra Shenge offered a poignant reflection on the deep-rooted discrimination that once permeated schools in Rwanda. She recounted how students were forced to identify themselves according to ethnic categories, fostering an environment of division and exclusion from a very young age.

A striking example of how young people pushed back against this culture of division is the inspiring story of the Nyange secondary school students. In March 1997, when Interahamwe militia broke into their school, they entered a classroom and ordered students to separate themselves into Tutsi and Hutu groups. The students bravely refused, declaring, "We are all Rwandans." Their collective defiance stands as a powerful testament to the unwavering role of youth as agents of change in promoting unity and peace.

Innovation and Digital Literacy:

African youth are increasingly leveraging technology, social media, and digital platforms as powerful tools for peacebuilding. They are actively engaged in peace advocacy, establishing early warning systems, and developing counter-narratives against extremism. Ornella Assimini emphasized that these digital spaces "must transcend mere communication tools to become safe and inclusive platforms where youth can confidently raise their voices against division and injustice".

Youth-led grassroots Mobilization:

Young people are not only active in formal peacebuilding efforts but increasingly play a vital role at the grassroots level, responding to everyday injustices and social exclusion within their communities. This includes taking a stand against discriminatory



practices and advocating for equality and dignity. Ornella Assimini recounted an instance where a Malagasy university attempted to impose a discriminatory policy harming students. This move sparked a strong backlash from the broader Malagasy youth community, who strictly mobilized against it. Petitions were launched, and discussions were organized across universities to inform and rally students. This sustained, yet constructive, response ultimately led to the abolition of the rule, powerfully reinforcing the capacity of youth to challenge and change unfair systems through peaceful means.

Demographic Dividend:

Africa's large youth population represents a significant resource for peace and development if adequately empowered, engaged, and recognized not as passive actors but as central partners in progress. As Basiru Jaye powerfully stated, *"If the youth are not adding to peace and stability, then the peace won't last."*

Barriers to Youth Participating in Peacebuilding

Limited Political Inclusion:

Young leaders in the panel argued that youth across the continent continue to face significant barriers to meaningful participation in political processes and decision-making spaces. Despite their resolve, ideas, and persistent efforts to contribute, they are often excluded, overlooked, or silenced. This marginalization fuels frustration and a deep sense of disempowerment, limiting their potential to contribute to sustainable peace and governance. As Basiru Jaye emphasized, *"We have the will, we have ideas, but we are told to keep quiet, so our voices are silenced. Young people don't lack capacity; we lack opportunities, we lack meaningful recognition, and sometimes safety. But once we are given space, we don't just participate, we lead. Young people must be at the forefront and the center, not just beneficiaries of peace."*

Lack of Resources and Capacity Building:

The discussion brought to the forefront that Youth-led initiatives across Africa frequently face significant challenges due to limited funding, inadequate training, and a lack of institutional support. These barriers hinder their ability to scale impactful peacebuilding and development efforts.

Misinformation:

Misinformation has been highlighted as a factor that erases the reality of young Africans who are actively leading reconciliation efforts, promoting social cohesion, and challenging divisive narratives. Although youth today have greater access to information and the internet, Sandra Shenge highlighted that this also increases the risk of misinformation spreading rapidly.

The absence of truthful representation in media, education, and policy conversations contributes to a cycle of exclusion, undermining the role of youth as legitimate and capable agents of peace.

Recommendations

Education and Skill Development:

Investing in transformative education and skill development is fundamental to equipping African youth to be active architects of peace. This includes a strategic overhaul of educational curricula, beginning at the high school level, to integrate comprehensive courses on peace and security, conflict resolution, and Pan-Africanism. Such an approach ensures young people gain a profound understanding of historical truths, foster critical thinking, and cultivate an appreciation for the continent's diversity.

Furthermore, it is important to promote and significantly increase student exchange programs among African high schools and universities. These exchanges are critical for fostering mutual understanding, building cross-cultural empathy, and encouraging an appreciation for diverse perspectives among young Africans.

Ultimately, these educational efforts, combined with practical skill development, aim to build and nurture a robust network of young African leaders dedicated to upholding and championing peace and stability across the continent. By investing in their intellectual and social capital, we empower them with the tools needed to understand, navigate, and actively contribute to sustainable peacebuilding.

Policy Reform:

Participants stressed the urgency of moving beyond symbolic gestures to meaningful and institutionalized youth inclusion in policy and governance. Policy reform should therefore strategically focus on empowering youth in decision-making processes, advancing national unity and social cohesion, and peace processes, thereby ensuring their voices demonstrably influence outcomes and promote lasting peace and stability.

Key policy reforms could include:

Strengthening Youth Advisory Councils: Enhancing the capacity and influence of well-resourced youth advisory councils at national and local levels, directly linked to parliamentary bodies and executive offices, to provide direct input on policy formulation, especially concerning peace, security, and development.

Quota Systems for Youth Representation: Implementing youth quotas or reserved seats in legislative bodies, peace commissions, and other governance structures to guarantee their presence and active participation in decision-making forums.

Youth-Led Peace Commissions: Supporting the establishment and resourcing of youth-led peace commissions and mediation teams, providing them with formal recognition and mandates to engage in conflict prevention, resolution, and post-conflict reconstruction.

Funding for Youth Peace Initiatives: Allocating dedicated national budgets and facilitating access to funding for youth-led peacebuilding initiatives, advocacy groups, and social enterprises that contribute to stability and social cohesion.

Youth-Led Spaces and Collaboration:

The creation of safe, inclusive spaces like those provided by YouthConnekt Africa was highlighted as a critical opportunity. These platforms enable youth from across the continent to connect, collaborate, exchange experiences, and lead joint actions toward peace and development.

4. Conclusion

The panel discussion conclusively affirmed that African youth are indispensable partners in achieving sustainable peace and security. Their innovation, resilience, and access to digital tools uniquely position them to address today's complex challenges. However, unlocking this immense potential demands removing systemic barriers such as limited access to economic opportunities, political participation, and institutional support.

Panelists emphasized that youth empowerment is not only a moral imperative but a strategic priority. Remembrance, particularly of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, must serve as both a profound tribute to the past and an unwavering commitment to act. It stands as a powerful reminder that rejecting division, misinformation, and silence is a shared responsibility.

By equipping youth with essential tools for fact-checking, critical thinking, and thoughtful action, and by involving them meaningfully in all peacebuilding processes, Africa can forge a future where "Never Again" transcends a mere slogan to become a living reality, driven by the continent's dynamic young leaders.

