



YOUTH LEADERSHIP FOR A SAFER AND HEALTHIER **AFRICA**

2023 AFRICA CDC YOUTH PRE-CONFERENCE (#YPC2023)



Background

Africa is experiencing a demographic dividend that presents an opportunity to harness the potential of young people across the continent. Presently, it is the youngest continent in terms of population, with approximately 60% of Africans being under the age of 25 and 40% of the population reportedly being aged 15 years and younger as of 2022. By 2030, up to 42% of the world's youth are projected to be African. As this population of young Africans grows, more and more of them are redefining their engagement with various systems of governance, including public health.

In fact, across the continent, young Africans from different backgrounds are already putting duty bearers to task and are increasingly calling upon them to create an enabling environment for young people to be active players in shaping their future

They are advocating for an environment that creates room to redefine the role of the youth in Africa's public health governance architecture. An environment that will complement and elevate the innovative ideas that African youth, in all their diversities, are already implementing to address pressing public health issues in their immediate environments and communities.



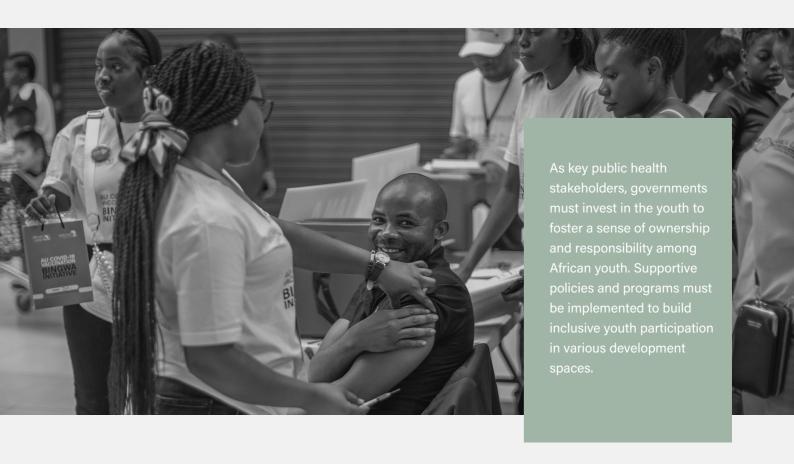
The advocacy for increased meaningful youth engagement does not exist in a vacuum. It exists in a context where many young people are already taking up leadership roles in addressing the continent's public health challenges. In Nigeria, for example, <u>Teniola Adedeji and Funmilola Aderemi</u> are, through Pharmarun, addressing challenges related to the accessibility of medicine by delivering them to the users' doorsteps. Pharmarun, which won the Africa Young Innovators for Health Award, is an online platform designed to deliver medication nationwide in less than 120 minutes.

<u>MyBelle</u>, co-founded by Abdulhammed Opeyemi Babatunde, is another digital intervention and community-based initiative in Nigeria working to save about 2400 lives yearly from preventable maternal and childhood mortality by 2028. It provides free quality perinatal information and services in English and native languages through a mobile application and WhatsApp messenger.

In Uganda, <u>Izath Nura,</u> has developed Autothermo, a wearable bracelet with a temperature sensor that continuously measures body temperature and transmits the readings to a display board that monitors neonatal temperatures during and after admissions. Autothermo seeks to eliminate hypothermia in newborns in Uganda and was the runner-up at the Africa Young Innovators for Health Award.

On a regional level, <u>Speak Up Africa</u>, a policy and advocacy youth-led action tank based in Senegal, supports a network of youth-led organisations committed to ending neglected tropical diseases within their communities and countries. Through this partnership, at least ten youth-led entities in Senegal and Niger receive funding, mentorship, and resources to support them engage effectively in decision and policy-making spaces.

While these are just a few examples, evidence shows that many young Africans already play a pivotal role in promoting public health initiatives. However, more needs to be encouraged, and systems should be developed to support and harness the youth's energy, creativity, and innovative thinking to tackle complex public health issues intentionally and sustainably.



In the spirit of investing in African youth, in 2022, the Africa Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH Office to the African Union (GIZ-AU) convened a Youth Pre-Conference (YPC 2022) on the margins of the Second International Conference on Public Health in Africa (CPHIA 2022). This conference, amongst other things, officially launched the process of incorporating meaningful youth engagement in Africa's public health architecture. The convening, a first of its kind, brought together African youth from the continent and the diaspora under the theme 'Meaningful youth engagement for advancing sustainable health security in Africa'. The conference was ground-breaking, and as a result, this year, in the same spirit, the Africa CDC, in partnership with GIZ, is convening the second Africa CDC Youth Pre-Conference. Under the theme 'Youth Leadership for A Safer and Healthier Africa', young Africans shall gather in Lusaka, Zambia, from the 25th to 26th of November to share their vision and aspirations regarding their role as leaders in public health.



Public health institutions must incorporate the youth's perspectives and novel approaches to addressing health disparities to realise The New Public Health Order.

The New Public Health Order for Africa, as defined by the Africa CDC, is a roadmap to sustainable health outcomes and health security. It has five pillars that include 1) strong African public health institutions that represent African priorities in global health governance and that drive progress on key health indicators; 2) expanded manufacturing of vaccines, diagnostics, and therapeutics to democratise access to life-saving medicines and equipment; 3) investment in public health workforce and leadership programs to ensure Africa has the workforce it needs to address health threats; 4) increased domestic investment in health, including the domestic mobilisation of financial resources, human capital, technical resources, and networks; and 5) respectful, action-oriented partnerships to advance vaccine manufacturing, health workforce development, and strong public health institutions.

The New Public Health Order, through its comprehensive approach to public health issues, provides an enabling environment to leverage Africa's demographic dividend for a healthier and safer Africa.





YPC 2022: A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

At the 2022 YPC, young people voiced their concerns about access to policy spaces, capacity development, research opportunities, and resources to contribute meaningfully to the local vaccine manufacturing ecosystem. They highlighted the need for more investments into strengthening the capacity of young people to engage in policy and decision-making platforms, participate in ground-breaking public health research, and contribute to digital health innovation and local manufacturing of vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics.

They made it clear that it was time to shift the narrative from the traditional tokenisation of young people in Africa to actual investments in meaningful youth participation. They reiterated the importance of investments that will strengthen their capacity to participate in health policy development and, in particular, highlighted issues such as training opportunities, mentorship programs, and platforms for engagement with policymakers.

The pivotal role of youth-led organisations, networks, and platforms in driving change and advocating for young people's voices to be prioritised was also highlighted. Participants called for greater support for these organisations, both technically and financially, to strengthen meaningful youth engagement, organise consultations, conduct research, and develop evidence-based policy proposals. They specifically called for targeted investments for youth-led initiatives by governments, philanthropic organisations, and international donors as a show of commitment to co-creation, co-leadership and co-ownership in public health development.



Concerns about the availability and accessibility of training programs, workshops, and educational opportunities that enhance young people's understanding of health policy issues, governance structures, and advocacy strategies at all levels were also raised. Participants called for more programs like the African Union COVID-19 Vaccination Bingwa Initiative, which targeted African youth to be champions in community mobilisations during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Launched in 2022, the AU Bingwa Initiative mobilised volunteers between the ages of 18 and 35 to advocate for increased uptake of COVID-19 vaccinations to cover at least 100 million individuals. The Bingwas, as they are popularly referred to, are young people with experience in community and youth engagement or have professional experience in public health. These youth champions were selected via a competitive process and went through capacity-building programs to strengthen their skills in community mobilisation.

Following a successful Youth Pre-Conference, Africa CDC established the Youth Advisory Team for Health (YAT4H) as one of the steps towards fostering co-creation and co-ownership with young people on issues concerning public health in Africa. YAT4H represents African youth within the Africa CDC and is envisioned as an institutional mechanism for including young people's voices in Africa CDC's strategies and initiatives.

The establishment of this team is meant to move youth participation in public health governance beyond tokenism and hopefully result in the institutionalisation of youth engagement within the Africa CDC on matters of public health in Africa. With the YAT4H in place, young people hope this is the first step in creating a forum for inter-generational dialogue. A space that will facilitate the mainstreaming of African youth voices in decision-making spaces within Africa CDC and solidify their role in realising the New Public Health Order for Africa.



Lastly, it must be emphasised that beyond participation at the continental level, pre-existing evidence demonstrates that young people are already leaders in their communities. This is evident in the work of initiatives such as the <u>African Youth for Local Access to Health Products (AYLAHP)</u>, which was established to create a network of African youth interested in local manufacturing of health products. The initiative provides young people a platform to participate in strategic discussions that will shape the future of local manufacturing of health products on the African continent.

Another example is <u>Youth In Action For Disability Inclusion Zambia (YADIZ)</u>, led by Ian Banda, whose mission is to empower individuals with disabilities by reducing poverty and increasing income through fundraising, advocacy, education, skills development, and entrepreneurship. YADIZ mobilises communities, provides training, and advocates for financial inclusion for vulnerable groups. It aims for expanded support, job creation, poverty reduction, self-reliance, and improved access to mainstream financial resources for persons with disabilities in Zambia.

Africa CDC, including

designing and

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One other example is <u>Solace for Somaliland Girls (SSG)</u> co-founded by Kawsar Muuse. A non-profit youth-led organisation committed to eradicating all forms of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM/C) across Somaliland through education and empowerment. They conduct public panel discussions, inviting religious leaders, government officials, legal professionals, activists, civil society organisations, and youth. These examples demonstrate the value that young people already bring in terms of leadership in public health. They must be nurtured and supported to ensure their impact continues to expand.



Duty bearers, including governments, must, therefore, move beyond rhetoric and invest in the participation of young people in health policy development and implementation. In light of this, this year's YPC shall once again bring together young Africans from Africa and the diaspora to collectively discuss 'Youth Leadership for A Safer and Healthier Africa'.

This year's theme provides an opportunity for young people to shape the ongoing conversation around public health governance on the continent due to the renewed efforts to increase youth involvement in public health initiatives. Having young people share their vision of what public health leadership and governance in Africa look like is a crucial step in developing effective policies and programmes that will catalyse the realisation of the New Public Health Order and AU Agenda 2063.



YPC 2023: A MELTING POT OF INNOVATION AND CREATIVITY

At YPC 2022, young people called for more concerted efforts to mainstream youth participation in decision-making processes and accountability mechanisms. They also emphasised the need to foster meaningful youth engagement in public health discourse, programme design and implementation, and the importance of investing in leadership training and capacity building.

This year, the conversation continues in <u>fulfilment of the promise</u> that African youth shall no longer be bystanders as decisions about them are made for them. With the support of the <u>German Cooperation project on Strengthening Crisis and Pandemic Response in Africa</u>, young people will have an opportunity to strengthen youth engagement and leadership in Africa by contributing to developing a youth engagement strategy that will integrate youth participation within Africa CDC.

Young people are the backbone of Africa's future, holding immense potential to drive positive change and transform their communities.

With the discourse on <u>harnessing Africa's</u> demographic dividend due to the increased youth population preoccupying many governments, it is clear that development exclusive of youth voices is impossible. Moving forward, working collaboratively to harness diverse stakeholders' ideas, skills, and resources shall be critical in ensuring the development of policies that transform public health in Africa.

There must be a mindset shift in how public institutions have traditionally engaged people, particularly the youth and other marginalised groups, in policy development and implementation processes.

Gears must shift to viewing young people as experts whose resource pool is diverse and multifaceted. This requires the development of favourable policy and legislative environments for young people to thrive. The co-creation of the Africa CDC youth engagement strategy demonstrates the commitment of the Africa CDC to inclusive policy-making processes.

COVID-19 has taught us how fragile our public health systems are and how <u>vital a multidisciplinary and multi-stakeholder</u> approach to public health leadership is. With many of our public institutions facing complex challenges in building inclusive and resilient societies, governments alone cannot effectively realise the new public health order. A multi-stakeholder partnership that includes the private sector, experts, civil society organisations, grassroots organisations, local communities and, most importantly, young Africans is critical.

Therefore, as young people gather for what is envisioned to be another robust interaction for youth engagement in public health leadership in Africa, there is hope that this will be another opportunity to develop unique and innovative strategies that will expand the scope of youth contribution to the public health sector and scale up their interventions to improve public health outcomes on the continent. It will be an opportunity to assess the current status quo of public health on the continent as people exchange ideas on strengthening public health systems in Africa through meaningful youth engagement. Moreover, with Africa CDC's Youth Engagement Strategy being an area of focus for the conference, it is envisioned that young people will come ready to discuss strategies for mainstreaming African youth voices within Africa CDC's public health governance architecture in addition to discussing the role of the youth in realising the New Public Health Order.

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Strengthening Crisis and Pandemic Response in Africa