



Picture courtesy of @CGTN Africa

The state of political engagements **among young people** and the challenges they undergo.

Briefing Note

@ November, 2020

By **Matayo Kisali**,
Political communication consultant

And

Edwin Adoga Ottichilo,
Country programme Coordinator, Konrad
Adenauer Stiftung, Kenia office

Introduction of the youth and their basic involvement in the political process

Young people are not “citizens-in-training”, a role where they are often pushed back by education and political institutions. They are actors of today’s democracy. Young people have in many ways taken the leading role in initiatives and movements that proclaim the urgent need to deepen and expand democracy. Young people are not ‘victims’ or ‘problems’ as often claimed, but diverse and critical stakeholders in democracy.

Political engagement is an essential, if not the most important, principle for democracies. However, young people (ages 18-30) often find themselves marginalized from mainstream politics and decision making, of which illustrates the ambits of political engagement. They struggle to gain the respect of public officials and are seen as lacking the skills and experience to engage in political activity and lead positive change in their communities. This exclusion, combined with limited educational and economic opportunities, can leave young people both idle and frustrated with the status quo.

According to the National Democratic Institute, they argue that ‘today’s youth need real opportunities to participate in political processes and contribute to practical solutions that advance development. When given an opportunity to organize, voice their opinions and play a meaningful role in political decision making, young people consistently demonstrate their willingness and ability to foster positive, lasting change. They also become more likely to demand and defend democracy, and gain a greater sense of belonging’.

Worldwide and based on overwhelming testimonies from young people, they have based on various inward and outward factors, endured considerable reluctance to engage in conventional democratic politics. At the same time, new forms of social and political involvement appear to emerge among some of them. Nevertheless, any room for development of the youth on matters political participation, may well be a fundamental indicator of a gradually transforming contemporary democracy over the years to come.

Steps and back steps among the young in driving or setting new political agenda

In Egypt, young activists have been instrumental in ushering in political change, even though this has gradually been reversed. In West Africa, Senegalese activists from Y'en a Marre (Fed Up) and Burkina Faso's Le Balai Citoyen (Citizen Broom) have been successful in mobilizing against constitutional changes in their respective countries.

In other countries, such as Burundi, Central African Republic and Gabon, as pointed out in several literatures, young people have been active in voicing their discontent over a variety of issues, including free and fair elections.

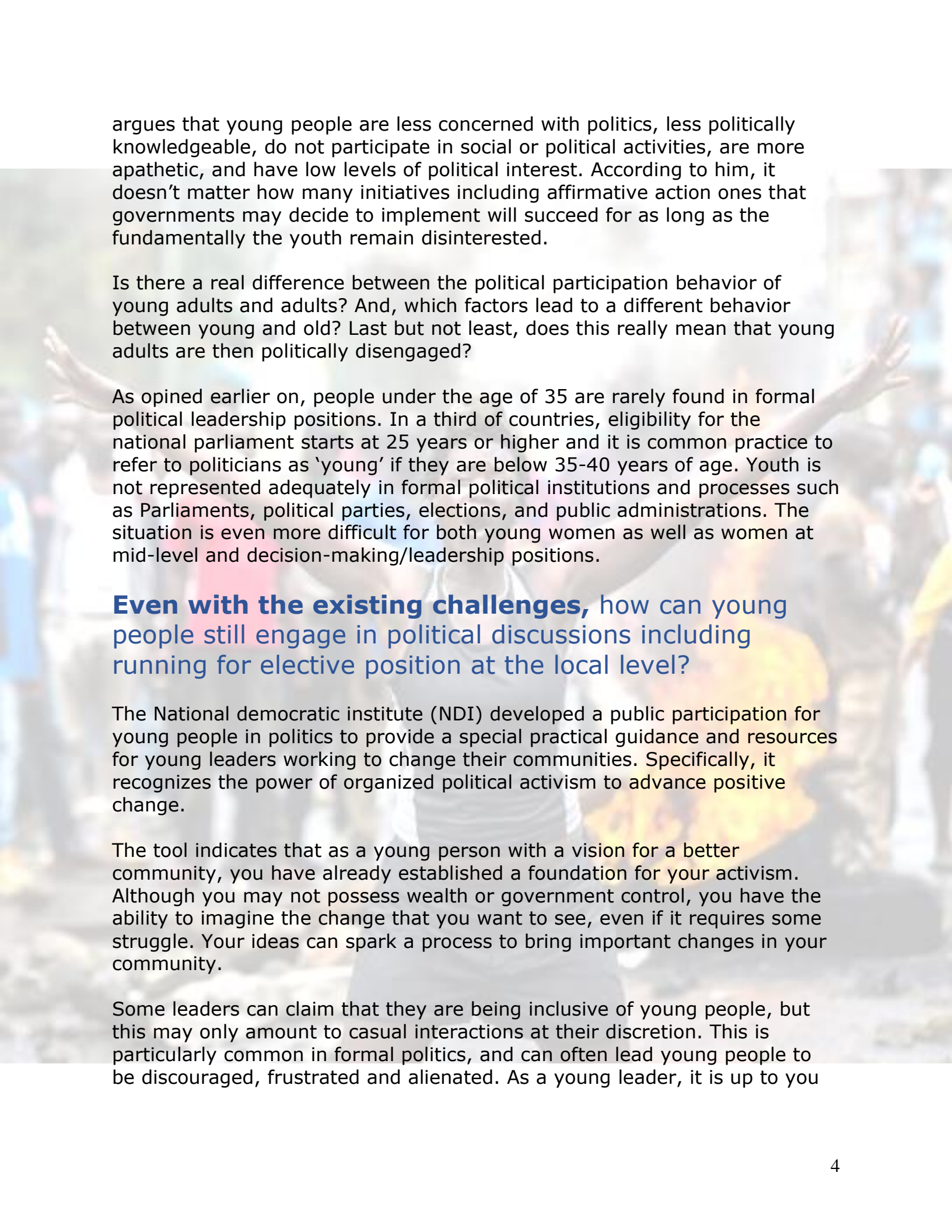
While these efforts are highly appreciated, on the flip side, African youth are still less likely to vote in national elections, engage in civic activities or join others in raising an issue, compared to their elders. The Afro barometer, an independent Pan-African research network that conducts public opinion surveys highlights that from the 36 countries across the continent, only 65% of young people were eligible to vote cast a vote in their country's last national election, compared to almost 80% of older people.

Yet by failure either of choice or instigated by design; to hold political office, young people appear to be denying themselves opportunities to participate in policy making and changing the laws.

To address any of the challenges that may be occasioned by culture and structural issues, some countries have resorted to affirmative action especially in a bid to increase youth and women representation in parliament. According to the UNDP, Uganda reserves five seats in its parliament for youth representatives. In Kenya, 12 parliamentary seats are reserved for representatives to be nominated by political parties to represent special interests, including youth, people with disabilities and workers. In Rwanda, the National Youth Council elects two members to the chamber of deputies. In Morocco, the election law includes 30 seats reserved for candidates under the age of 40.

According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), there is still strong evidence that the participation of young people in formal, institutional political processes is relatively low when compared to older citizens across the globe.

Even with these efforts, the likes of Quintelier (2007), in his journal titled 'Differences in political participation between young and old people' he



argues that young people are less concerned with politics, less politically knowledgeable, do not participate in social or political activities, are more apathetic, and have low levels of political interest. According to him, it doesn't matter how many initiatives including affirmative action ones that governments may decide to implement will succeed for as long as the fundamentally the youth remain disinterested.

Is there a real difference between the political participation behavior of young adults and adults? And, which factors lead to a different behavior between young and old? Last but not least, does this really mean that young adults are then politically disengaged?

As opined earlier on, people under the age of 35 are rarely found in formal political leadership positions. In a third of countries, eligibility for the national parliament starts at 25 years or higher and it is common practice to refer to politicians as 'young' if they are below 35-40 years of age. Youth is not represented adequately in formal political institutions and processes such as Parliaments, political parties, elections, and public administrations. The situation is even more difficult for both young women as well as women at mid-level and decision-making/leadership positions.

Even with the existing challenges, how can young people still engage in political discussions including running for elective position at the local level?

The National democratic institute (NDI) developed a public participation for young people in politics to provide a special practical guidance and resources for young leaders working to change their communities. Specifically, it recognizes the power of organized political activism to advance positive change.

The tool indicates that as a young person with a vision for a better community, you have already established a foundation for your activism. Although you may not possess wealth or government control, you have the ability to imagine the change that you want to see, even if it requires some struggle. Your ideas can spark a process to bring important changes in your community.

Some leaders can claim that they are being inclusive of young people, but this may only amount to casual interactions at their discretion. This is particularly common in formal politics, and can often lead young people to be discouraged, frustrated and alienated. As a young leader, it is up to you

to help others combat feelings of apathy or disengagement with a sense of urgency, hope, solidarity and the feeling that they can make a difference.

To address your challenges and be able to start separately its important especially during an electioneering period to be able to:

Naming the issue or problem is key. The youth ought to be able to identify, clearly describe and analyze the problem that needs to be address and the change to be seen. A poorly defined problem – or a problem whose nuances as a youth, you don't completely understand – is much more difficult to solve than a problem you have clearly defined and analyzed. The way a problem is worded and understood has significant implications when it comes to defining the problem in terms of a preferred solution. In other words, defining the problem as an "issue" deserving public attention.

Documenting the problem/gathering evidence is another key issue. Once you have named the issue you want to address, the next step is to gather evidence to show others that the problem exists. You can make a stronger case for your position when you have supporting evidence, rather than just your word. Conducting research and gathering evidence can take many forms, including surveying your community, requesting data from local government, collecting testimony from people affected, and documenting an issue with photos or video. The links below can help you understand how to document the problem you want to address.

Framing the issue is key. In addition to naming the issue, it is critical to determine how it should be framed for your campaign. Framing is a way of structuring or presenting an issue within a context that will help you gain the most support from a particular audience. Your audience is key to framing. The way a problem is framed should reflect the attitudes and interests of your audience.

Regardless as to who your audience is, when framing an issue, you should be specific about:

- ✚ Why should the audience care about the issue?
- ✚ How does the issue affect them?
- ✚ What will be different if the issue is solved?
- ✚ How can the audience contribute to the solution?

Issue can be framed in different ways. For example, when framed in financial terms, you might highlight the prudent use of public resources. When done in social terms, you might highlight a reduction in crime. In human terms, you might highlight an increase in high school graduation.

Different audiences respond differently to these ways of describing why the issue should matter to them.

Developing a Campaign Strategy is key. After naming and framing the issue or problem, it is time to develop a strategy to resolve it. A strategy describes how the desired change can best be achieved. It is less specific than an campaign plan (which tells the who-what-when); instead, it tries to broadly answer the question, "How do we get there from here?" The strategy guides the development of a campaign plan, which lays out the specific steps you will take to reach your objective.

A good strategy will take into account existing barriers and resources (people, money, power, materials, etc.). Developing strategies is really a way to focus your efforts and figure out the best approach to advance your issue. Critical to developing a strategy is understanding the power dynamics surrounding your issue.


Bearing in mind who has power in your given context, you need to identify your key targets, or those decision makers who have authority over the issue you wish to address. These are the people whom you will need to influence in order to resolve the issue. Write down a list of the targets for your initiative.

After identifying these individuals, it is time to develop your strategy of how you are going to influence change. The following list of questions can be a guide for deciding on the most beneficial strategies for your group:

What resources and assets exist that can be used to help solve your problem or achieve your intended change? How can they be used best? What obstacles or resistance exist that could make it difficult to achieve your goals? How can you minimize or get around them?

What are potential agents of change willing to do to serve the mission? How will your potential strategies decrease the risk for experiencing the problem? How will the strategies increase protective factors against the problem?

What potential strategies will affect the whole population and problem? For example, connecting youth with caring adults might be good for virtually all youth, regardless of income or past experience with the problem. Also, just one strategy, affecting just one part of the community such as schools or youth organizations, often isn't enough to improve the situation. Make sure that your strategies affect the problem or issue as a whole.



What potential strategies reach those at particular risk for the problem? For example, early screenings might help focus on those at higher risk for heart disease or cancer; past academic failure or history of drug use, for identifying with whom support and other intervention efforts might be focused.

It is also helpful at this stage to identify your allies (people with the same interests as you, or who may be able to help you in reaching your goals) and your opponents (people with interests that interfere with or oppose your ability to reach our goals), and to identify their relative levels of power and influence in the context where you are working. Refer to the following pages on the Community Tool Box on identifying and gauging allies and opponents. Accounting for allies and opponents can be a critical component of your strategy.

For more information about developing a campaign strategy, refer to this page on the Community Tool Box.

Developing a campaign plan is a key. Once you have developed a strategy; it is important to develop a campaign plan for your initiative. The plan sets out the specific steps you will take and tactics you will use in order to achieve your goals, as encapsulated in your strategy. Your strategy should be the guiding light for your campaign plan.

The Community Tool Box by NDI describes the steps in designing a campaign plan for local action here. For more detailed guidance on this page, see specifically the sections on Planning Strategies and Tactics.

Ability to start of financing your campaign is key. As part of planning your initiative, it is important to consider any costs you may incur. If your effort is relatively short term and your tactics are mostly individual meetings and conversations with individuals with influence over the issue you are trying to address, you may have little to no costs that can be covered by you and those directly involved in your effort. However, depending on the scale of your campaign and the types of activities outlined in your campaign plan, you may need to raise funds, apply for grants or develop a budget for your campaign. You may also refer to this page on identifying non-monetary assets and resources in your community.

As you develop your campaign plan, write down any financial costs you would incur at each step. Once you have determined if you will need money, and how much, you can move forward with budgeting and fundraising as necessary.

But what are the challenges facing young people in the political front in Uasin Gishu as well as Western Kenya?

Young Kenyans between the age of 18 and 34 comprise more than half of the electorate. They also constitute 75% of the country's population. While their involvement in politics is affirmed by the various experiences of young people around the world, all the participating young politicians in a focus group discussions held on the sidelines of the Inter Party Youth Forum training in Eldoret by KAS on the 26th and 28th of November 2020, argued that they had not participated in the activities of their political parties for the last one year.

"Most times, they will involve those that are in Nairobi and not us" said one of the participants. However, it was noted that with the forthcoming politics of the Building Bridges Initiatives and likely referendum, a lot of the young politicians will be crafted a role to play mostly, a role that will entail tactful field political activities. The idea of being involved in a political party is one that is shaped by the narrow interests of a few at the helm of whom are not youth or youthful.

There is a likely scenario of extreme levels of party hopping especially the youth and to some extent, during the 2020 election, there was a signal given by the young people that if their parties provided no room for political competition, but favoritism, then they could consider running as independent candidates. This therefore calls for political parties to formulate approaches and strategies that will make them more youth friendly