



EXECUTIVE CHAIRPERSON PANEL DISCUSSION NOTES ON OCCASSION OF PAN AFRICAN YOUTH FORUM

4 October 2024

Plenary Session:

Theme: African Youth Charter @20: National Youth Councils Dialogue on the Consultative Review & Campaign Roadmap

Time: 09:30 – 11: 30

Session Moderator: Pempho Chabvuta, Member States Engagement Officer, AUC

Focus Questions:

1. What has been your experience translating the Charter into national policy or youth strategies?
 2. How can NYCs and local movements be better engaged in continental policy processes?
 3. What structural challenges exist in implementing the Charter's provisions?
-

Background

(As reflected in the session plan document)

The African Youth Charter (AYC) marked a significant milestone in youth development policy on the continent. As we approach 20 years since its adoption, the AYC@20 Campaign—launched at the 2024 PAYF in Oran—seeks to reflect on progress, challenges, and opportunities for stronger youth empowerment.

Guided by the STC-YCS4 decision, the African Union Commission has initiated a consultative process for a potential review of the Charter. This session at the 2025 PAYF serves to share progress, collect feedback from youth stakeholders, and prepare for the Youth Session at STC-YCS5, where triggering Article 31 for the formal review will be proposed.

Strategic Speaking Notes for focus question from NYDA Perspective:

Question 1: What has been your experience translating the Charter into national policy or youth strategies?



Thank you, Moderator. First let me express our gratitude as young people of South Africa to be part of this powerful platform. As South Africa has assumed the G20 Presidency it has marked a pivotal time in our history where Africa can ensure that our agenda is on the global stage.

Now, onto the question being asked. From the NYDA's perspective, the African Youth Charter has been more than a continental declaration, it's a living framework that has shaped how we approach youth development nationally. In South Africa, its principles are reflected in the National Youth Policy (2020 – 2030), which aligns directly with the Charters empathies on empowerment, participation, and inclusion.

Through the NYDA's mandate, we have worked to mainstream youth development, not as a side issue but as a cross-cutting government priority. This includes:

- **Coordinating youth mainstreaming across government departments** (Chair can highlight our recent MOU with StatsSA)
- **Strengthening local youth structures** (Chair can lean into the Youth Consultation and why it was important to consult youth leadership across political lines and civil society.)
- **Empowerment initiatives and National Pathway Management Network.**

The lesson for us has been the Charters real power lies in local translations, ensuring its commitments are visible in everyday governance, budgeting, and programming. That's how we move from aspiration to tangible impact.

Most recently, the agency took significant step forward as it prepares to launch the NYDA Disability Inclusion and Accessibility Strategy (2024), which will operationalise a new clause in the amended NYDA Act. This clause mandates the Agency to “promote the interest of youth particularly young people with disabilities.”

This strategy transforms the legislative/policy commitments into lived reality for the 2.4% of South African youth living with disabilities. It is anchored in three operational pillars: Skills Development, Economic Transformation, and Investment and Partnerships, and represents a decisive move from welfare-based approach to a rights -based inclusive development model.

Through this framework, the NYDA is ensuring that disability inclusion is not a side programmes, but an integrated mandate reflected in all our work, from grant making and entrepreneurship support to national service and skills development. It is a practical example of how the Charters ideals can be domesticated into national strategies that advance economic justice and equal participation for all young people.

Question 2: How can National Youth Councils (NYCs) and local movements be better engaged in continental policy process?



Well, firstly, we believe NYC's as local movements are engines of youth participation, they bring legitimacy, energy and accountability to continental process.

At the NYDA, we have learned that meaningful enagement begins where young people are, not from where we expect them to be. Recently, we were in Nkandla, one of South Africa's deeply rural areas, where some might say, "on the margins of South Africa" where we took NYDA services directly to young people who are often left out of mainstream opportunities. Through that outreach, we learned something critical: **If you do not go to the areas that are hard to reach you risk leaving an entire generation behind.**

This experience reinforces an important lesson about localisation, that youth participation cannot only happen in capital cities or conference halls. It must be rooted in communities, townships, and villages. We need to decentralise engagement and break down national programmes into clear and accessible service that young people can see understand, and benefit from.

At the same time, we must leverage digital technology to close the participation gap. Digital tools can connect young people in remote areas to continental processes such as the AYC@20 Consultations, and allow them to contribute ideas, data, and feedback in real time. Platforms such as the National Pathway Management Network, already demonstrate how technology can expand access to opportunity, the same principle can apply to policy participation.

For National Youth Councils and local movements to be better engaged we need three things:

- **Proximity: Take the conversation to where young people live and work.**
- **Accessibility: Simplify policy process so young people can understand and influence them**
- **Connectivity: Harness digital platforms, ensure all young people have access to digital platforms, to ensure that every voice counts, whether they're in Nkandla, Nairobi or Niamey.**

Question 3: What structural challenges exist in implementing the Charter's provisions?

While we have made notable progress over the past two decade, the implementation of the African Youth Charter continues to look different cross member states, because Africa's youth realities are not homogeneous. This is a critical aspect if we want to ensure meaningful impact.

Our demographic landscape is complex. We have youth in stable economies with access to education and technology, and others in conflict zones who face daily insecurity and



displacement. In some regions, young people struggle to access basic healthcare or medication because there are no nearby hospitals or functioning clinics. In others, they confront unemployment and limited economic mobility despite strong infrastructure.

This diversity means that a one-size fits all approach cannot work. Implementation must be context specific responsive to the varying social, economic and political realities of young people across the continent. The charter must therefore evolve to address both structural inequalities and situational vulnerabilities ensuring that no young person is excluded because of where they live or the conditions they face. As stated previously our social ills are structural in nature but when we look closely when we address accessibility and take it a step further and look at policy and legislative mandates where relevant, notwithstanding data driven programs we might be successful in addressing structural challenges.