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An Open Letter to African Governments and Heads of State Calling for Greater Youth Inclusion

Dear African Governments and Heads of State,

We, the undersigned, are a prominent community of respected and influential pan-African leaders and youth associations and organisations representing a broad spectrum of stakeholders united in making the call for the urgent prioritisation of youth inclusion in African governance.

It has been 15 years since the African Youth Charter was adopted by the 7th Summit of African Union Heads of State and Government in Banjul, the Gambia, in July 2006. On a continent that is disproportionately young, **young leaders are still conspicuously absent at decision making fora and remain structurally marginalized from governance across the African continent.** The question of measurable progress of this legal African framework to support national policies, programmes, and actions in favour of youth development, must be brought into question, 15 years after Banjul. It appears that implementation has been slow and inconsistent.

According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division, the average age on the continent is 19 years old, in contrast to the rest of the world whose average median age is between 30 and 40. Yet, even with only about 3% of the continent's population being over the age of 65, the average age of African Heads of State in 2018 was 64.5. What this widening governance age versus populace age represents is a Governance Gap, and the further it widens, the greater the political instability and volatility faced by the continent. This generational and governance gap makes the continent much more susceptible to power vacuums developing, political conflict and social unrest as young people demand representation.

Africa's youthful population is a significant resource. However, if this situation is not addressed soon, instead of benefitting from a demographic dividend, the continent will soon experience a demographic disaster. More than this, for Africa to reach its potential, it must harness the potential, energy and talents of young leaders. It is vital for political succession to develop a pipeline of professional and seasoned public servants, government officials and policymakers.

The global pandemic has demonstrated the urgency of consolidating representative, responsive and inclusive governance, which can harness and support dynamic and energetic young innovators and solution seekers. On International Youth Day, 12 August 2020, the African Leadership Institute's Project Pakoti, in partnership with the African Union's Office of the Youth Envoy, launched the **Greater Inclusion of African Youth in Public Service and Governance** report.

To give fresh impetus to the African Youth Charter and to fast-track reforms, this report recommends specific actions that can help reduce this Governance Gap. These range from low hanging policy reforms to more structural youth inclusion policies. This report opens up the conversation about how African governments can build this kind of robust capacity, through the greater inclusion of youth in politics, public service and government. In the spirit of Africans learning from fellow Africans, the report features four case studies.

The Four Case Studies

- 1 YIAGA Africa's #NotTooYoungToRun movement that championed the Age Reduction Bill in Nigeria and resulted in the reduction of age limits for running for office. The movement renewed young people's faith in democracy as a system that allows citizens to participate in shaping how society is governed.
- 2 Rwanda, which has a structured youth internship programme that institutionalises drawing on a pool of skilled young people and creating a pipeline of young public servants. At relatively low cost, this provides great exposure to young graduates to begin to understand how governance works. The internship programme serves as an entry point but Rwanda has gone on to mainstream youth with young people occupying senior positions in government and the public sector, broadly.
- 3 The cases of Special Advisory roles in Nigeria and Namibia illustrate how governments can develop a formal pathway to bring in independent, young technocrats into the policy realm, at the highest levels of governance.
- 4 Lastly, the case of Morocco, in which civic youth engagement has been institutionalised through a parallel youth government, which shadows the national government. This structure formalises youth participation in governance and policymaking and institutionalises intergenerational learning and co-leadership.

Following focused discussions with pertinent stakeholders, the below **key practical recommendations** for the greater inclusion of African youth in public service and governance are posited:

1. Institutionalise intergenerational co-leadership.
2. Lower age requirements for entry into government and electoral positions.
3. Remove economic barriers (high candidacy fees/ allow waivers for young electoral candidates).
4. Introduce and enforce youth quotas at every level of governance and public service.
5. Introduce youth internships in public service.
6. Appoint Young Technocrats, Special Advisors and Envoys.
7. Strengthen and democratise National Youth Councils and Youth Parliamentary Structures.
8. Ensure Accountability and Transparency in the Implementation of Reforms.

Africa's tragedy is this – having the world's most youthful and vibrant population but failing to harness the energy, talent and creativity that these young people possess. In a world that is exponentially changing and where new thinking and new solutions are required to solve existing challenges, Africa urgently needs to open up governance spaces and allow young people to contribute meaningfully at national, regional and continental levels. To continue to leave out young people undermines the very Africa that we all want and deserve. To bring them in to help co-create solutions is a win-win.

We are urging every African Head of State to consider, with greater urgency, implementing progressive youth inclusion policies in governance. Your Excellencies, there is a need for you to ensure that your legacies in respect of pan-African accomplishments and commitments, such as the AfCFTA and Agenda 2063, will continue to be realised and sustained over the long-term.

Sincerely, signed:

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