Topic- "Empowering African Youths Within The Public Sector As A Means Of Enhancing The Efficiency Of Its Systems: African Union Digital and Innovation Fellowship As A Case Study

Joshua Omena, Nanko Madu and Woka Philips-Anyinu, AfriLabs

1. Executive Summary

In a rapidly changing world, it has become increasingly important to empower African youths within the public sector as a means of enhancing the efficiency of its systems. African youths possess immense talent and potential for expanding the innovation and tech landscape in Africa, and by equipping them with the necessary skills and resources, we can tap into their creativity and drive innovation.

Young people are the future leaders and change-makers of any society, and Africa is no exception. By investing in their development and providing them with opportunities to contribute to the public sector, we can ensure a brighter and more prosperous future. Empowering African youths within the public sector not only benefits the young individuals themselves but also the overall efficiency and effectiveness of government systems.

According to the United Nations, Africa has the youngest population in the world, with 70% of sub-Saharan Africa under the age of 30[7] . While this demographic presents an incredible resource for the continent, it also poses challenges in terms of education, employment, and political stability. At the same time, many African countries struggle with inefficiencies within their public sector systems, hampering their ability to provide essential services to their citizens.

This whitepaper discusses how empowering African youths within the public sector can be a win-win strategy. Not only does it provide opportunities for the continent's young population, but it also enhances the efficiency of government institutions, leading to better governance, improved services, and ultimately, sustainable development.

3. Challenges Faced by African Youths in participating in Governance

African youths face numerous challenges when it comes to their participation in the public sector. The following are some of the primary obstacles:

- Limited access to the public sector: Limited access to opportunities in the public sector hinders African youths from influencing systemic change, fostering a competitive work environment, and enhancing government efficiency[126].
- Limited mentorship and leadership support: African youths often lack guidance and support from experienced professionals, which can hinder their growth and potential. Without proper mentorship, young individuals may struggle to navigate the complexities of the public sector and face difficulties in making a meaningful impact[12].

- Lack of employment: The lack of jobs makes it very difficult for youths to become employed within the public sector.

  According to the International Labor Organisation (ILO), Africa has the highest unemployment rate in the world for the year 2022 at 7.1%.

  These obstacles not only hamper the development of African youths but also prevent the impacts in economic development of many countries[1245].

Addressing the needs of African youths is crucial to solving economic, political, and social challenges in the continent[1]. Governments and donors must focus on creating decent jobs for the youth, providing quality education and training, and increasing mentorship and leadership development programs[245]. Additionally, African youths need to be part of policy discussions that seek to find solutions to the challenge of employment[1]. By investing in the youth, African countries can benefit from their unique perspectives and ideas, and the youth can become the backbone of every economy[6].

4. Enhancing Efficiency in the Public Sector Through Youth Empowerment

Empowering African youths within the public sector is not just about providing them with opportunities, but also about creating an environment that fosters their growth and development. By tapping into the potential of young individuals, we can drive innovation within the public sector and improve efficiency of its systems and decision-making processes.

- Incorporating technology and digital solutions: African youths are often more tech-savvy and adaptable to new technologies, making them valuable assets in implementing digital transformation initiatives within the public sector. By empowering them with the necessary skills and resources, we can harness the power of technology to streamline processes, improve service delivery, and enhance overall efficiency[14] .
- Building leadership skills and promoting a culture of innovation and creativity: By encouraging young individuals to think critically, take initiative, and propose fresh ideas, we can foster a more dynamic and efficient public sector. Empowering African youths to become leaders and decision-makers will not only contribute to their personal growth but also create a more inclusive and effective government system[14] .

Furthermore, youth empowerment programs should focus on building leadership skills and promoting a culture of innovation and creativity. By encouraging young individuals to think critically, take initiative, and propose fresh ideas, we can foster a more dynamic and efficient public sector. Empowering African youths to become leaders and decision-makers will not only contribute to their personal growth but also create a more inclusive and effective government system.

5. Strategies for Empowering African Youths Within the Public Sector

To effectively empower African youths within the public sector, it is essential to implement strategies that address the challenges they face. One strategy is to invest in quality education and training programs. By providing access to affordable and relevant education, young individuals can acquire the skills and

knowledge needed to excel in the public sector. This includes both technical skills and soft skills such as leadership, communication, and problem-solving[126] .

Another strategy is to establish mentorship and internship programs. These initiatives can provide guidance and support to African youths, helping them navigate the complexities of the public sector and develop their professional skills. Mentorship programs can also help young individuals build networks and connections, opening doors for future career opportunities[12] .

In addition, collaboration and partnerships between the public sector, private sector, and civil society organizations play a crucial role in empowering African youths. By working together, these stakeholders can pool resources, share expertise, and create comprehensive youth empowerment programs. Collaboration can also help bridge the gap between education and employment, ensuring that young individuals have access to job opportunities and career progression prospects.

Empowering African youths within the public sector yields several benefits:

- **Innovation:** Young minds bring fresh perspectives and innovative solutions to longstanding problems.
- **Efficiency:** Youthful energy and a willingness to embrace technology can streamline bureaucratic processes.
- **Transparency:** Young people are more likely to demand and uphold transparency and accountability in public institutions.
- **Representation:** Youth involvement in governance ensures their voices and concerns are heard and addressed.
- **Job Creation:** The public sector can provide stable employment opportunities for young Africans.
- **Capacity Building:** Training and mentorship programs develop future leaders with the skills to address complex challenges.
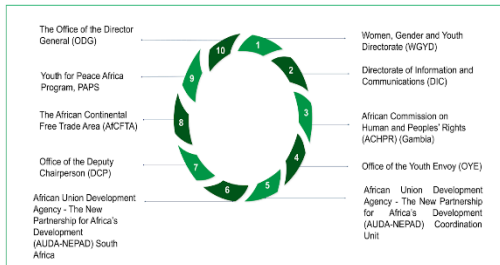
6. Case Study: African Union Digital and Innovation Fellowship Program

Several successful youth empowerment initiatives have been implemented in various African countries/governments, showcasing the positive impact of empowering African youths within the public sector. One such example is the African Union Digital and Innovation Fellowship Program**.**

The African Union Digital and Innovation Fellowship Program is a 12-month program which aims to identify and deploy highly competent tech innovators from the African continent to units and organs within the African Union headquarters as resident fellows to understand the system within those units, identify data management challenges within the systems and solve the challenges identified by co-creating and building innovative tailor-made products and processes that improve data management processes and the overall work of the AU, while ensuring the sustainability of the developed products and processes post the fellowship timeline, by strengthening the internal capacity of the AU staff within those units.

Since its inception in 2021, 13 fellows have been deployed to 10 units and organs of the African union and these fellows have since deployed tech-enabled solutions that improved processes within their assigned units.


Key outcomes of the program include the development of 13+ products to solve various challenges in the targeted AU units/organs, retention of 6 fellows, increase in the number of tech fellows from 10 to 13, surpassing the 50/50 gender parity by having 8:5 female-male ratio, a 6-month contract extension for 6 fellows based on demands by their units, and the launch of the African union digital portal on requesting services from the Information and Communication Directorate (ICD). The recorded impact of the project includes:

1. Enhanced internal capacity of the AU: Internal capacity of AU staff to adopt tech and innovative solutions enhanced.

2. Closer Ecosystem engagement: A closer relationship between the African Union Commission (AUC) and the African Innovation Ecosystem, with at least three programs/partnerships established.

3. Enhanced processes: At least one policy and/or participation process enhanced within the context of good governance.

4. Developed tech products: New products co-created and (at least 3) built to enhance the work of the African Union and its organs with the engagement of citizens.

5. Groomed and exposed 13 young Africans to be better positioned as leaders.

6. 13 fellows employed for one year with better chances of securing high-impact jobs.
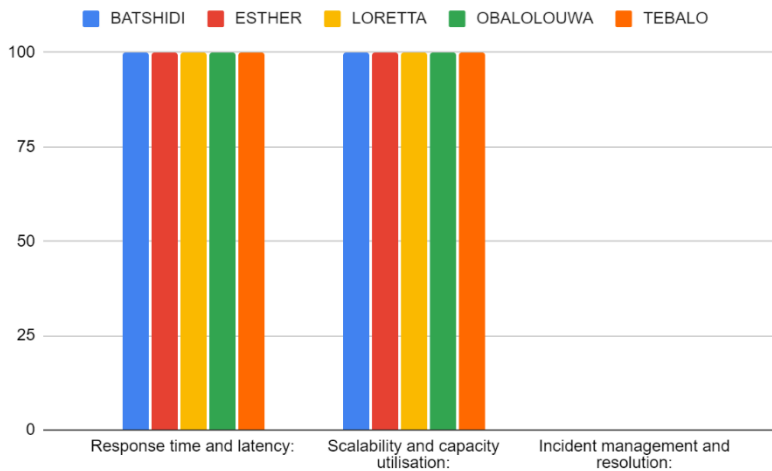
A usage report collated from the units/organs indicates that

a. The units/organs have adopted the developed tech solution to the identified challenge within that unit
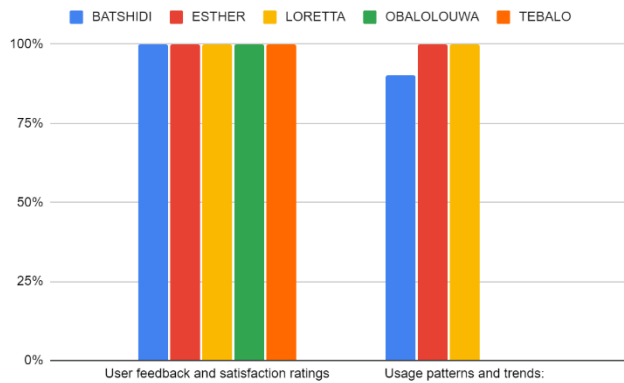
5 out of the 6 fellows recorded a 100% rating on user feedback and 100% usage pattern as majority of products deployed are used on daily basis

b. On the performance of the developed product

The product deployed by the 6 fellows is 100% scalable and reliable with zero incident management and resolution

This case study highlights the importance of targeted and comprehensive youth empowerment programs that address the specific needs and challenges faced by African youths. By learning from these successful initiatives, we can develop best practices for implementing similar programs in other African countries.

7. Challenges and Solutions

Challenges to youth empowerment in the public sector include resistance to change, lack of resources, and concerns about inexperience. To address these issues, governments can:

- Advocate for the value of youth inclusion and innovation.
- Allocate budgets for training and development.
- Establish programs to bridge the experience gap.

8. Measuring the Impact of Youth Empowerment in the Public Sector

Measuring the impact of youth empowerment programs in the public sector is crucial for continuous improvement and accountability. Various metrics can be used to assess the effectiveness of these initiatives, including employment rates, entrepreneurship rates, leadership positions held by young individuals, and feedback from program participants.

Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should be put in place to track key performance indicators and gather data on the outcomes of youth empowerment programs. Regular assessments and surveys can provide valuable insights into the strengths and weaknesses of these initiatives, allowing for adjustments and improvements to be made.

Additionally, qualitative measures such as success stories and case studies can showcase the positive impact of youth empowerment in the public sector. Sharing these stories can inspire other young individuals and encourage further investment in youth empowerment initiatives.

9. Conclusion and Future Prospects for Empowering African Youths Within the Public Sector

Empowering African youths within the public sector is not only a moral imperative but also an opportunity to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of government systems. By investing in their development, providing them with opportunities, and creating an enabling environment, we can tap into their immense talent and potential. African youths have the power to drive innovation, foster creativity, and lead positive change within the public sector.

The future prospects for empowering African youths within the public sector are promising. With increased collaboration and partnerships, targeted youth empowerment programs, and a commitment to monitoring and evaluation, we can create a more inclusive and efficient government system. Empowering African youths is an investment in the future, and by harnessing their energy, passion, and fresh perspectives, we can create a brighter and more prosperous Africa for generations to come.

10. References

1. United Nations. Young People's Potential, the Key to Africa's Sustainable Development.
   https://www.un.org/ohrlls/tags/fifth-united-nations-conference-least-developed-countries
2. Brookings. Landry Signé. 2019. Africa youth leadership: Building local leaders to solve global challenges:
   https://www.brookings.edu/articles/africa-youth-leadership-building-local-leaders-to-solve-global-challenges/
3. United Nations. Africa's youth and prospects for inclusive development:
   https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Youth/UNEconomicCommissionAfrica.pdf
4. United Nations Africa Renewal Magazine. Kingsley Ighobor. 2013. Africa's youth: a "ticking time bomb" or an opportunity:
   https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/may-2013/africa%E2%80%99s-youth-%E2%80%9Cticking-time-bomb%E2%80%9D-or-opportunity
5. Afro Barometer. Gildfred Boateng Asiamah, Ousmane Djiby Sambou and Sadhiska Bhoojedhur. 2021. AD486: Africans say governments aren't doing enough to help youth:
   https://www.afrobarometer.org/publication/ad486-africans-say-governments-arent-doing-enough-help-youth/
6. Foreign Policy. Audrey Donkor. 2021. Africa's Youth Unemployment Crisis Is a Global Problem:
   https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/10/19/africa-youth-unemployment-crisis-global-problem/
7. CDD-Ghana). 2020. What are the biggest problems that the youth of Africa face? Our WAYLead fellows share their thoughts:
   https://cddgh.org/what-are-the-biggest-problems-that-the-youth-of-africa-face-our-waylead-fellows-share-their-thoughts/

Note: This whitepaper is a starting point for discussing the importance of empowering African youths within the public sector to enhance the efficiency of systems. Further research and data would be needed to develop more detailed policy recommendations and implementation strategies.