Good Governance Africa

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Ministry of Women and Social Affairs

# GOOD GOVERNANCE AFRICA

# SECOND ANNUAL LECTURE



GGA
Good Governance Africa

# VISION AND MISSION

**Vision:**
An Africa where citizens are empowered, governments are effective, businesses thrive, poverty is eradicated, and Good Governance Africa is the pre-eminent partner for advancing good governance.

**Mission:**
To improve the quality of citizens' lives through:

- Rigorous policy research,
- Advocacy for effective governance,
- Promotion of ethical investment,
- Building institutional capacity, and
- Forging strategic partnerships.

# GOOD GOVERNANCE AFRICA

# SECOND ANNUAL LECTURE

Addis Ababa , Ethiopia
October 2025

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# EMPOWERING THE YOUTH FOR A PROSPEROUS AFRICA

***Good Governance Africa*** (***GGA***) is a pan-African research and advocacy organisation committed to advancing evidence-based policymaking and strengthening governance institutions across the continent. With regional offices in Southern, Western and Eastern Africa, including the Horn of Africa office headquartered in Addis Ababa, GGA serves as a hub for policy dialogue, knowledge dissemination and partnership building. Its mission is to enhance good governance and civic participation in Africa through innovative research, policy advocacy and fostering dialogue among diverse stakeholders.

At the heart of GGA's vision lies the institutionalisation of good governance across Africa: a future where public institutions are accountable, inclusive and responsive to citizens' needs. To achieve this, the organisation pursues rigorous policy research, produces impactful publications, builds institutional partnerships and invests in youth empowerment initiatives. The Horn of Africa office plays a particularly strategic role, engaging youth, civil society, state institutions and regional bodies to address complex governance challenges with Africa-led solutions.

Among GGA's flagship initiatives, the Annual Lecture Series stands out as a premier platform for critical thought, public engagement and policy dialogue. Conceived as a recurring event, the series convenes distinguished thought leaders, practitioners, youth leaders, policymakers and civil society actors to deliberate on pressing governance and development issues shaping Africa's trajectory.

More than a ceremonial gathering, the lecture is designed to stimulate reflection, provoke debate and mobilise multi-stakeholder engagement on urgent continental challenges.

GGA Horn of Africa, in collaboration with the African Governance Architecture – Peace and Security Architecture (AGA-PSA) and the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, successfully hosted the Annual Lecture under the theme ***Empowering the Youth for a Prosperous Africa*** On October 30, 2025. The theme reflects Africa's demographic reality: with more than 60% of its population under the age of 25, the continent's prosperity and stability hinge on how its young people are educated, engaged and empowered. The lecture sought to place youth empowerment at the centre of Africa's governance and development agenda, exploring how institutions and policy frameworks can be recalibrated to enable youth to become active agents of change. The event was commenced with a welcoming speech from Dr Zerihun Mohammed, Executive Director of GGA Horn of Africa, who highlighted the strategic importance of youth engagement in shaping Africa's future. It was followed by a remarks from Mr Robert Rose, Founder and Global Chairman of GGA, who underscored the organisation's commitment to fostering accountable leadership and inclusive governance. Two distinguished keynote addresses framed the day's discussions. Ambassador Mohammed Salah Hammad, Head of the Africa Governance Architecture Secretariat at the African Union Commission, presented a keynote speech entitled "Empowering Africa's Youth for a Prosperous Future," delivering a continental perspective that combined empirical insight and strategic vision on the governance reforms and institutional investments required to unlock the youth dividend. He was followed by Professor Bahru

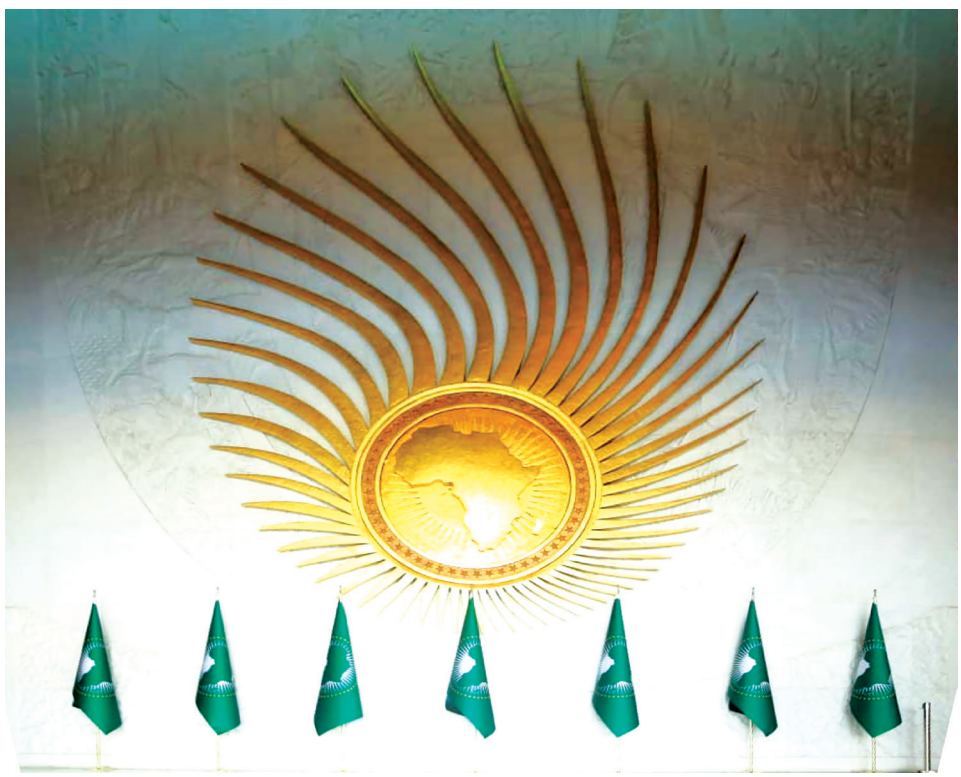
Zewde, eminent historian and public intellectual, whose address, "Echoes of the Past, Visions for the Future: the Youth and Africa's Development Journey," situated youth empowerment within broader historical and institutional contexts and traced how past trajectories can inform bold, actionable pathways for youth-led transformation in Africa.

The programme also featured a panel discussion that brought together youth representatives, experts from the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs and civil society actors. This multi-sectoral dialogue enriched the proceedings by highlighting both structural barriers and innovative solutions to youth empowerment. The panel underscored the need to bridge the gap between policy intentions and real-world practices, while amplifying the voices of young Africans who are already driving change through activism, entrepreneurship and innovation.

The lecture was attended by high-level government officials, including Ms Simegn Wube and Dr Yeneneh Simegn, Chief and Deputy Chief Ombudsman of Ethiopia, Mr Issaka Garba Abdou, Head of Governance and Human Right Division at AU, representatives of IGAD and UNDP whose presence reflected the importance of institutional accountability and leadership in advancing youth-centred governance.

The day was concluded with closing remarks by Mr Deji Haastrup, GGA Global Vice Chairman, who reiterated GGA's commitment to sustaining dialogue and translating ideas into actionable strategies. His reflections captured the spirit of the event: a collective determination to empower Africa's youth as architects of the continent's future.

Ultimately, the 2025 Annual Lecture embodied GGA's broader mission to promote evidence-informed governance solutions that foster accountable leadership, participatory development and inclusive growth. By convening diverse voices and centring youth empowerment, the lecture reinforced the idea that Africa's future depends on the strength of its institutions, the vision of its leaders and the engagement of its citizens. It was both a call for action and a reminder that Africa's prosperity will be secured when its youth are empowered to shape the continent's destiny.





**Welcoming Note**
**Dr Zerihun Mohammed**
**Executive Director, GGA-HARO**

Her Excellency Ms Simegne Wube, Chief Ombudsman of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia; His Excellency Dr Yeneneh Simegn, Deputy Chief Ombudsman of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia; His Excellency Ambassador Mohammed Salaha Hammad, Head of African Governance Architecture at the AU Commission; Mr Robert Rose, Founder and Global Chairman of Good Governance Africa; Mr Deji Haastrup, Chairman of GGA-Southern Africa regional Office and Global Vice Chairman of Good Governance Africa; Professor Bahru Zewde, Chairman of the Good Governance Africa Horn of Africa Regional Office; Representatives of civil society organisations, academia, and international organisations; Above all, the young people from various grassroots organisations and higher education institutions!.

***Ladies and gentlemen, all protocols observed.***

On behalf of Good Governance Africa (GGA), GGA Horn of Africa, the Board of the regional office and myself, I would like to extend a warm welcome to you all in Addis Ababa for the 2nd annual lecture of Good Governance Africa.

Good Governance Africa (GGA) is a continental non-governmental, not-for-profit civil society organisation (think-tank). It was established with the mission of enhancing the quality of life of Africans by improving governance at all levels through citizens' empowerment, advocacy, and lobbying for better policies that enhance government accountability and transparency to citizens.

The establishment of GGA is based on two fundamental principles. The first is the strong belief that many of Africa's social, economic, and political problems are rooted, either directly or indirectly, in a lack or deficiency of good governance at various levels. Therefore, addressing these root causes is of paramount importance.

**GOOD GOVERNANCE AFRICA FIRMLY BELIEVES THAT AFRICA'S DEVELOPMENT AND THE SUCCESS OF AGENDA 2063 CANNOT BE ACHIEVED WITHOUT THE ACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF THE YOUTH."**

we Africans - both governments and citizens - hold an irreplaceable position in initiating and driving changes. This is why the word "Africa" holds a central place in the name of our organisation: Good Governance Africa.

It is on the basis of these principles that GGA was established 13 years ago and began full operations 11 years ago. Over the past decade, GGA has successfully established four regional offices across Southern, Western, and Eastern Africa. The Southern Africa regional office, located in Johannesburg, South Africa, is the oldest, while the GGA Horn of Africa Regional Office (GGA-HARO), here in Addis Ababa, is the youngest, having been established in 2020. The other two regional offices are GGA West Africa, located in Accra, Ghana, and GGA Nigeria, in Lagos, Nigeria, whose Executive Directors are with us today.

In its ten-year strategic plan, which I am sure our Global Chairman and Vice Chairman will elaborate on, GGA aims to expand its regional offices and operations to other regions of the continent, including the Sahel region.

Our regional office, GGA-HARO, was initially established in 2020 as GGA Eastern Africa, covering nine countries in East and the Horn of Africa. In 2024, as part of our new growth and expansion strategy, the office was reorganised as GGA Horn of Africa, focusing on six countries: Ethiopia, Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, Djibouti and Eritrea.

***Ladies and Gentmen!***

The Annual Lecture Series is one of the organisation's flagship programmes, designed to highlight pressing issues affecting Africa's development and promote critical dialogue among policymakers, scholars, civil society actors, and other stakeholders.

The inaugural GGA Annual Lecture took place last year in Johannesburg, South Africa, under the theme "10 Years Advancing Governance," which focused on combating corruption in Africa. In conjunction with the Annual Lecture, GGA celebrated its 10th anniversary in vibrant manner.

GGA-HARO is honoured to host this year's Annual Lecture, themed Empowering the Youth for a Prosperous Africa. This theme is selected for its relevance and urgency. With approximately 70% of its population under the age of 30, Africa's future is widely believed to be in the hands of its young people. However, the youth of Africa continue to face significant challenges, including lack of job opportunities, inadequate social services, and exclusions. Despite efforts at both continental and national levels, these challenges largely remain unresolved. GGA firmly believes that Africa's development and the success of Agenda 2063 cannot be achieved without the active participation of the youth. For the continent to progress, it must provide job opportunities for its substantial young workforce, curb the often dangerous youth migration, and improve education, healthcare, and other social services for young people. At the same time, the youth must take responsibility for driving change initiatives. Overall, the continent needs to create a conducive policy environment that encourages young people to become active agents and leaders of change.

It is in recognition of this fact that the youth, alongside gender, is deliberately positioned at the core of all thematic programmes across GGA's regional offices. The Young Advocates of Good Governance (YAGG) in the SARO and GGA Nigeria, Youth and Migration in HARO, and Natural Resource Governance and Climate Change in West Africa all emphasise youth engagement. The Youth in Politics project in Ethiopia, which we completed a year ago, exemplifies GGA's commitment to positioning youth as drivers of change. In this public dialogue project, we examined the factors shaping the attitudes, expectations and actions of youth in politics within Ethiopia's dynamic political and socio-economic landscape and developed strong recommendations across various areas.

Today, we do not expect to exhaustively discuss this vital and complex topic. Instead, we aim to spark interest among stakeholders and responsible entities to further advance the conversation. Only through continuous and persistent engagement and deliberation can we refine our policies and reach our desired goals.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all our partners who have worked tirelessly to make this event a reality. Special thanks go to the African Union Commission and Ambassador Mohammed Salah Hammda, Head of the African Governance Architecture, and his team, the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, the panellists and moderators, the executive directors of all GGA regional offices and their staff, and especially to you, the participants.

Now, please join me in welcoming the Founder and Global Chairman of GGA, Mr Robert Rose, to deliver an opening remark.

Thank you.



## Opening Remark

### Mr Robert Rose, Founder and Group Chairman, Good Governance Africa (GGA)

Honoured guests, dignitaries, and friends, welcome from Good Governance Africa, and from all our regional offices across the continent. It is a privilege to join you for this second edition of the Good Governance Africa Annual Lecture, hosted by our Horn of Africa Regional Office here in Addis Ababa, in partnership with the African Union Commission and the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia's Ministry of Women and Social Affairs.

Before I begin my formal remarks, I would like to extend our deepest gratitude to the African Union for the generous use of their wonderful facilities. It is both symbolic and significant that we gather here today, in the heart of Africa's premier institution for continental unity and progress.

Good Governance Africa intends to grow across all of Africa, much like the African Union itself. Our vision is that GGA will one day be present in every African country, welcomed by every government and embraced by every community. We are expanding our footprint, guided by a mission that aligns strongly with the AU's own. To serve the people of Africa and to help shape a continent defined by fairness, accountability, and shared prosperity.

a partnership we consider vital for the continent's progress.

We look forward to a long, happy, and productive collaboration with the AU and its organs. GGA is here for the rest of this century and beyond, committed to helping shape Africa's governance future for generations to come.

**FOR AFRICA'S YOUTH, THE DEMAND FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE IS NOT A POLITICAL LUXURY. IT IS A MATTER OF SURVIVAL. THEY ARE NOT SPECTATORS OF PROGRESS, BUT ITS ARCHITECTS,**

The outcome of our collective work is the Africa of the future, a continent that develops its wonderful resources for the benefit of all its people. A continent that recognises that its greatest resource is its people. We envision a happy and prosperous Africa that has ended its wars, overcome its many challenges, and achieved a standard of living comparable to the most successful regions of the world. It must become the most successful continent. And as the most populous continent, we must all work together, governments, civil society, business, and citizens alike, to ensure that everyone can prosper and live in dignity. That is what Good Governance Africa is all about.

I would also like to commend Dr Zerihun Mohammed and his team for their exceptional work in convening this important gathering under the theme, *Empowering the Youth for a Prosperous Africa*. This theme lies at the heart of our mission at Good Governance Africa. To strengthen governance across the continent through evidence-based research, inclusive dialogue, and advocacy that informs policy and practice. This event is not simply an academic exercise. It is a call to action to ensure that Africa's youth are not spectators of progress, but its architects.

Africa is home to the world's youngest population, a demographic dividend that holds immense potential for transforming governance, economies, and societies. Yet this potential will only be realised if our youth are empowered with the tools and opportunities they need to shape their own destinies. Generation Z or Gen Z, globally connected, socially conscious, and fearless, is redefining what it means to be a citizen in the 21st century. They are not waiting to be invited into leadership. They are claiming their space in it.

Across the continent, we are witnessing this new energy at work. In Madagascar, youth-led civic movements are demanding transparency and fair representation. In Kenya, young activists and digital influencers have turned social media into a platform for accountability, challenging corruption and driving civic participation. In Uganda, Gen Z youth have used digital activism to expose injustice and defend freedom of expression, often at great personal risk.

Their creativity, from online campaigns to community mobilisation, demonstrates how deeply civic consciousness runs in this generation. Even further afield in Peru, young people inspired by African movements are joining global calls for fairness and accountability. These are not reckless voices of rebellion. They are responsible voices of renewal, voices calling for dignity, inclusion, and fairness. Together, they help us create societies where trust is rebuilt, investment can flourish, and jobs can be created. This is what good governance delivers. Prosperity, opportunity, and happiness.

At Good Governance Africa, we see young leaders as partners in our shared journey toward accountable leadership and sustainable development. Through our Young Advocates for Good Governance (YAGG) initiative, we are nurturing a network of emerging change makers across the continent who champion transparency, ethical leadership, and civic participation in their communities. YAGG is proof that when we invest in the potential of Africa's youth, they in turn invest in the stability and progress of their nations.

For Africa's youth, the demand for good governance is not a political luxury. It is a matter of survival. Governance determines whether education translates into employment, whether innovation is rewarded or stifled, and whether voices are heard or silenced. When governance systems are transparent and inclusive, they unleash the full potential of youth to innovate, build businesses, and drive transformation. When governance fails, it suffocates that potential and fuels despair.

This is why Good Governance Africa exists. To bridge the gap between knowledge and action. Through our regional centres, we generate insights that guide leaders, empower citizens, and strengthen institutions. The Annual Lecture Series, which we are proud to host today, provides a platform for diverse voices, scholars, policymakers, business leaders, and civil society, to share solutions to Africa's most pressing governance challenges.

At GGA, we believe empowering Africa's youth means more than creating opportunities for education or jobs. It means enabling them to become architects of systems that reflect their values and aspirations. It also means dismantling the barriers that have long excluded young voices from decision-making and building a culture of mentorship that connects generations. We must move beyond rhetoric to institutionalise youth inclusion, embedding young voices in governance frameworks, boards, and councils across the continent.

If we are to realise *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want*, empowerment must be tangible, rooted in equitable access to resources, institutional reform, and investment in young people's creativity. Africa's youth are not only the leaders of tomorrow. They are the change-makers of today. Our role, as institutions and elders, is to create an environment where their ideas can flourish and their energy can drive the continent forward.

On behalf of the Good Governance Africa Board, I extend our gratitude to the African Union Commission, the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs, our partners, and every stakeholder here today for supporting this vital dialogue. Governance is not only about institutions and laws. It is about people, values, and shared responsibility. Let us continue to champion good governance with and for Africa's youth. Their empowerment is not just a moral duty. It is a strategic necessity. When our youth thrive, Africa thrives. When they are empowered, the continent's future is secure, for a prosperous Africa.

Thank you.



**"Empowering Africa's Youth for a Prosperous Future"**
**Ambassador Mohammed Salah Hammad**
**Head of Africa Governance Architecture Secretariat,**
**The African Union Commission**
***Excellences,***
***Ladies and Gentlemen***

I would like to acknowledge the presence of the Honourable Chief Ombudsman of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, as well as the Deputy Chief Ombudsman of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. I also recognise the founder and Global Chairman of Good Governance Africa.

Today's event, the second Annual Lecture of Good Governance Africa, is a unique occasion, marking the first of its kind to be held here at the African Union Commission. Coming together this afternoon in the House of Africa is a significant step in bringing the African Union closer to the African people and indeed in implementing the decision taken by our heads of state and government in 2002.

Since the organisation's transformation from the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) to the African Union (AU), it has been declared that the African Union shall be a people-centred organisation. This reaffirms that the AU is on the right path towards achieving that goal. On behalf of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission and my superior, the Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, I warmly welcome you all to the African Union Commission and wish you fruitful discussions.

I have been asked to speak on the topic "Empowering the Youth for a Prosperous Africa," and I have prepared a brief presentation with the assistance of the youth in the Secretariat, which I would like to share with you this afternoon.

I believe there is consensus among us today that empowering African youth is crucial. Empowering the youth is not merely a wish or a dream; it is a necessity and a vital step towards realising Agenda 2063. However, is it sufficient for us to merely discuss empowering the youth? What about actively engaging them? What about giving them the responsibilities they deserve so they can participate in implementing Agenda 2063 and in building the Africa we want and deserve?

***Excellences and Ladies and Gentlemen!***

My presentation will focus on four thematic areas. The first concerns the demographic dividends of African youth, who must be involved in shaping the Africa we aspire to, as they represent the majority


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NELSON MANDELA
PLENARY HALL



of the population on this continent. The African Union has been actively developing strategies, norms, standards, and treaties that promote the rights of youth, including the well-known Youth Charter. The youth are also referenced in the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance, as well as in the African Union Charter on the Values and Principles of Public Service and Administration, among others. However, in practice, the youth often lack the necessary space to contribute to policy development.

Is it because the youth are not invited to the table, or is it that there are no seats available for them in the policy formulation process? Why are the aspirations of the youth not considered by our local and national governments? Why are their ideas not promoted here in Africa? We have witnessed a significant number of African youth achieving their dreams abroad, becoming millionaires, gaining fame, and receiving recognition simply because they are outside of Africa. Why is it not the other way around? Why are our young girls, in particular, still seen as not contributing to our families, nations, and continental organisation? I believe we need to engage in a candid discussion today about how to turn the empowerment and engagement of youth into a reality.

**"WE MUST ALSO EMPOWER THE YOUTH TO DRIVE SOCIAL INNOVATIONS, COMBAT CLIMATE CHANGE, CHAMPION PEACE, AND ENHANCE AFRICA'S READINESS TO BECOME THE HEART AND CENTRE OF THE WORLD."**

Member states must seriously consider how to implement the norms and standards developed by the African Union at the national level. Implementation goes beyond merely adhering to the African Union's rules and procedures in treaty execution; it must also focus on fostering true empowerment at the national level. What would truly happen if we empowered and engaged our African youth?

Currently, there is a generational gap of about 40 years between our African youth and the youngest head of state on the continent. Given this disparity, how can someone 40 years older than a young man or woman genuinely advocate for their interests? This is a reality we must confront. The only way to address this issue is to ensure that youth are represented not only in the development of policies but also in their implementation. This is why we need to see more youth ministers. We commend the government of Ethiopia for appointing a young prime minister and a significant number of young ministers. We need to witness more stories like this across Africa.

Before I conclude, I believe it is time for us as Africans to wake up and recognise that our continent cannot progress without the empowerment and engagement of youth at all levels. I express this from my experience at the AU Africa Governance Architecture Secretariat, where I oversee a team comprising young women and one man. Since assuming this role, I have been confident that all tasks will be completed on time.

If this can happen within a small secretariat, I am confident it can also take place in government institutions, councils of ministers, parliaments, and various other contexts. Why do we perceive youth only as soldiers carrying guns? Why can we not empower them and help them lead better lives for themselves and their families? The time has come for our governments to pay genuine attention to this issue. It is also time for our religious and traditional leaders to speak the truth: the youth must lead.

The youth are not just the leaders of tomorrow; they are the leaders of today and tomorrow. Therefore, they need the space to flourish, progress, and contribute to building the Africa we want and deserve. It is crucial for our academic institutions to conduct internal reviews and reforms to identify the necessary changes in our curriculum and systems, ensuring we produce youth equipped with the knowledge and skills that meet national demands.

There is an urgent call for our private sector and financial institutions. It is unjust for our banks to offer loans to youth at an interest rate of 40%. We need to consider interest rates that enable young people to start businesses and become successful entrepreneurs who contribute to the local economy.

We must also empower the youth to drive social innovations, combat climate change, champion peace, and enhance Africa's readiness to become the heart and centre of the world. It is essential for elders to engage regularly with the youth to prevent them from being lured away by terrorist groups, radical organisations, or traffickers who seek to exploit them.

Finally, the African Union will certainly extend its hand to any stakeholder or partner who is serious about empowering and engaging the youth at the national, regional, or continental levels. After all, Africa cherishes its youth population and takes pride in being the youngest continent in the world. With our African youth, we will achieve the united, prosperous, and peaceful Africa we envision.

Thank you very much.

**Echoes of the Past, Visions for the Future: the Youth and Africa's Development Journey**



Professor Bahru Zewde
Emeritus Professor of History,
Addis Ababa University

***Excellences,***
***Distinguished Guests,***
***Ladies and gentlemen,***
***All protocols observed.***

Before I begin my presentation, I would like to thank Ambassador Salah Hamad and his staff once again for the warm reception they have given us, and for their cooperation in making these facilities available.

The topic I have been assigned is entitled "Echoes of Past and Visions for the Future of Africa's Development". Ambassador Salah has competently addressed the second part of my topic, which concerns visions for the future. Therefore, I will focus primarily on the echoes of the past in my presentation. I will begin by giving the global perspective, then move to the continental context, and finally discuss the situation in Ethiopia.

The youth have always been agents of social and political transformation. This characteristic of youth has been both perennial and universal. We have witnessed this in many countries and regions around the world. In 19th century Europe, there was a powerful youth movement, notably the "Young Italy" movement led by the famous Giuseppe Mazzini, regarded as the prophet of Italian unification. The 1848 revolutions , which began in France and then swept across the continent, were essentially youth movements. Particularly in the 1960s, Europe was engulfed by a series of student protests, notably in Germany and France, marked by the emergence of iconic figures like Rudi Dutschke in Germany and Daniel Cohn-Bendit in France. Even in conservative England, the London School of Economics became a hotbed of student radicalism.

Similarly, in America, Berkeley emerged as the prominent centre of youthprotests . In Mexico, too, the hosting of the 1968 Olympic Games was greeted by a strong protest movement led by the youth. In sum, the youth in Latin America played a significant role in bringing about social and political transformation, with iconic figures like Fidel Castro and Che Guevara reshaping the political landscape of the Western Hemisphere.

In the Middle East, the Young Turks at the beginning of the 20th century were instrumental in transforming the Ottoman Empire into the Republic of Turkey that we know today, which came about through the agency of Kemal Ataturk. The Iranian student movement is perhaps one of the most powerful such movements of the 20th century, working closely with the Ethiopian Student Movement owing to similar contexts of autocratic regimes. The recent Arab Spring, which swept from Tunisia all the way to Syria, resulted in changes of government in a number of countries. However, one important point that must be underscored is that, although youth have been agents of change, they have never owned it. Changes resulting from such movements are most of the time hijacked by organized or Machiavellian forces.

**"YOUTH HAVE ALWAYS BEEN AGENTS OF TRANSFORMATION, BUT HISTORY REMINDS US THAT WHILE THEY IGNITE CHANGE, THEY RARELY OWN IT."**

In Africa, of course, the youth have played a very important role in different political transformations and revolutions. In Sudan, in 1964, students of the University of Khartoum spearheaded the revolution that overthrew the military dictatorship of General Ibrahim Abboud and introduced a civilian regime, even if the civilian government was short-lived. Similarly, in South Africa in 1976, young schoolchildren, not university students, came out in protest against the imposition of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction. This protest movement rocked South Africa for quite some time and produced the iconic figure Steve Biko, who was the leader of that movement. The youth also played a significant role in the overthrow of Moussa Traoré in Mali in 1991, ending a dictatorial rule that had lasted for more than two decades. The movement ushered in a new era in the country, with Alpha Oumar Konare assuming the presidency. His tenure was transformative in Malian politics. After serving two five-year terms as president, Alpha Omar Konare became the Chairperson of the African Union Commission.

A similar youth movement in Ethiopia that unfolded in the 1960s and 1970s was probably one of the most powerful student movements in the world, culminating as it did in the 1974 revolution.. The movement had political and economic roots It started in a somewhat innocuous fashion with protest poems and literary pieces, but later assumed a radical dimension, not only within Ethiopia but also abroad among the foreign branches of the movement. The two fundamental questions the students raised, which reverberate to this day, were land ownership and the rights of nationalities. The students first came out onto the streets in 1965 under the banner of "Land to the Tiller". Regarding the rights of nationalities, which the students identified as the second most serious problem in Ethiopia, they adopted the principle of self-determination upto and including secession. However, the solution they prescribed was not commensurate with the problem; it was akin to prescribing a lethal medicine for a benign illness.

The revolution changed Ethiopia in a very definitive way, and the consequences are still being felt. The legacy has been mixed, particularly as the country continues to grapple with the question of nationalities, thanks to the emphasis on the negative aspects of the issue, to the complete neglect of the positive ones. Differences rather than similarities were emphasized. The radical prescription of self-determination up to and including secession is bound to be one of the major agenda items in the deliberations of the Ethiopian National Dialogue Commission.

Ethiopia also witnessed another cycle of youth movements in the second decade of this century. Youth groups known as Fano in Amhara, Qerro in Oromiya, Zerma in Gurage, and Ejeto in Sidama were the primary actors that brought about the change of government in 2018. At the centre of the popular discontent was the ruling EPRDF's indirect control of the regions, despite the constitutional provisoin that they were entitled to autonomy . The widening and deepening of the protests ultimately forced the TPLF to give way to a new group from within the EPRDF coalition under the leadership of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed.

In comparison with the student movement of the 1970s, it is possible to draw both similarities and differences. To begin with, the student movement of the 1970s was highly organised. They operated like political parties, with branches guided by a political ideology, Marxism. They also held annual congresses, conducted political education, and

used exhortative songs for mobilization. All these elements are missing in the recent youth protest movement, which lacked a clear organisational structure. The movement was not guided by any known political ideology, and the means of communication was the social media rather than the written word. As a result, there is a lack of documentation about the course and trajectory of the recent protest movement.

In terms of acheivements, the student movement brought about a revolution whereas the recent youth protests resulted in a change of government. At the end of the day, both movements could not control the change they brought about. In the case of the student movement, they lost to the soldiers who were better organised and armed. The soldiers took over power, and the students who led the movement that caused the revolution eventually became victims of the military regime. Likewise, the protesters of 2014–17 were eventually sidelined; some were co-opted, while many others were excluded. In fact, one of the youth groups, the Fano, is currently engaged in deadly combat with the regime that it helped bring to power in 2018.

I now turn my attention to making sense of the road ahead. The future may hold opportunities for African youth, but it appears that the challenges outweigh the opportunities, given the prevailing state of affairs. It is therefore important to identify the challenges and indicate the ways and means of overcoming them. In this regard, unemployment is probably the most significant challenge facing African youth. According to a recent African Development Bank report, one-third of the African youth are unemployed. This requires prudent and effective policy intervention. Attempts, such as in Ethiopia, where a scheme was developed to train the youth in computer coding are commendable but remain insufficient.

The other major challenge that saps the energy and destroys the dreams of the youth is conflict, which, in the context of Africa, has remained cyclical and protracted. Examples abound. In Ethiopia, there was a major war between the federal government and the TPLF from 2020 to 2022, which ended with a precarious peace deal. However, the conflict changed its nature afterwards, as violence began to spread to other regions, involving armed groups and the federal government. The situation in Sudan is even more disheartening. The political transition initiated in 2019 through the agency of the youth was derailed. The transitional arrangement involving civilians and the military were undermined by the latter. More importantly, the bickering between the two armed groups, the Sudanese Army and the Rapid Support Force (RPF) has triggered a protracted and devastating civil war that has been raging since 2023. The war has recently taken a sinister turn with the mass killing of innocent civilians, as in Dar Fur.

The situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is no better. Conflict has gone on unabated for decades, despite occasional lulls, with warring groups recruiting and deploying the youth and even children. As a result, the youth, instead of engaging in socially useful activities, are forced to carry guns and kill each other, becoming both the primary actors and targets of violence.

A recent development is the spread of social media platforms. This technology has undoubted benefits and, therefore, can be considered a blessing. The tech savviness of the youth makes this new technology an important tool for connecting and exchanging ideas. Nonetheless, it has become evident that young people spend too much time on the internet, leading to potential addiction. Such a habit also has an antisocial dimension. Spending excessive time engaged with the new technology reduces opportunities for socialising and communicating with others face-to-face.

Social media platforms have also become a shortcut for acquiring knowledge. Instead of turning to books and other publications, young people prefer social media content as a source of information. However, social media content is sometimes half-baked, and relying on it as a source of ultimate wisdom could be damaging for the youth. Moreover, social media platforms have become agents of aggravating conflict situations. They do so by communicating sensationalized content without caring for accuracy and balance. It is therefore imperative to have a scheme for cautious and disciplined use of social media to protect the youth from falling prey particularly in conflict situations.























## Panel Discussion

***Key Takeaways***

Africa, the second most populous continent after Asia, is also the youngest content in the world. Witnessing high rate of population growth, its current population of about 1.4 billion is expected to rise to 2.5 billion in 2050 and 4.2 billion by 2070.

In terms of age structure, close to 70 % of Africa's population is under 30 years. This provides great opportunity for growth if the demographic dividend is harnessed optimally. It can therefore be argued that the future of Africa hangs in the shoulders of its youth. However, many African youth lack adequate access to education and the quality of education that is accessible remains questionable. Employable skills development is in short supply. Youth policies are either not sufficiently youth friendly or they remain on paper despite good intentions. In consequence, the youth do not have avenues to get their voices heard and influence public decision making. These are sources of concern.

In recognition of this anomalous situation, after a through deliberation, participants of the second annual lecture took note of and pledged their resolve to work in earnest collaboratively and advocate for the fulfillment of the following:

- Better access to education particularly in rural areas which will help narrow down the gap in opportunities for the service.
- Improved quality of education to make the African youth relevant to local contexts and competitive in the job market.
- Employable skills development as aligned to emerging trends such as entrepreneurship, digital literacy, innovation, creativity and adaptability.
- Creating and institutionalizing platforms whereby the voices of the youth are heard and their concerns are considered at various levels.
- Creating collaborative platforms and initiatives among stakeholders across sectors including regional organizations so as to create synergy and avoid duplication of efforts in addressing the concerns of the youth.
- Enhanced youth participation in public decision making processes particularly on matters affecting their lives.
- Mainstreaming the interests and concerns of the youth in public policy making processes
- Advocating for national policies friendly for youth empowerment which is expressed in the promotion of both the rights and responsibilities of the African youth.
- Advocating for the full implementation of existing regional youth policies like the African Youth Charter which is meant to protect the right of the youth and promote their participation in development.








## Closing Remarks



**Mr Deji Haastrup**

**Chairman, GGA–Southern Africa Regional Office and Group Vice Chairman, Good Governance Africa**

Honourable ministers, distinguished guests, respected panellists, colleagues, and dear friends. Good evening. As we draw this enriching Annual Lecture to a close, I would like to begin by expressing my heartfelt gratitude to everyone who has made this day not only possible, but profoundly meaningful. On behalf of Good Governance Africa and our entire Board, I extend sincere appreciation to the African Union Commission for graciously hosting us in these historic halls, and to the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia's Ministry of Women and Social Affairs for their continued partnership and support. I also wish to commend our Horn of Africa Regional Office, ably led by Dr Zerihun Mohammed, for the flawless organisation of this second edition of the GGA Annual Lecture Series.

> **"IMAGINE AN AFRICA WHERE EVERY YOUNG PERSON FEELS SEEN, HEARD, AND VALUED—THAT IS THE AFRICA WE MUST BUILD TOGETHER."**

Today we have listened, reflected, and been inspired. We have been reminded that the story of Africa's future is, above all, a story about her people, and especially her young people. The energy, intelligence, and creativity of Africa's youth are not potential resources waiting to be discovered. They are already active forces reshaping the continent. What we have heard today from our keynote speakers and panellists reinforces a truth that must guide us beyond this room. That empowering the youth for a prosperous Africa is not a slogan, but a development imperative.

Over the past four hours, we have journeyed through ideas and experiences that show us what this empowerment can look like in practice. From Ambassador Salah Hammad's insightful reflections on the African Governance Architecture and the role of the youth in peacebuilding, to Professor Bahru Zewde's sweeping historical perspective on how generations of Africans have imagined their future, to the vibrant and deeply practical insights from our panellists. Each contribution has emphasised a shared conviction. Africa's prosperity depends on how seriously we invest in her youth.

Yet, investment must go beyond rhetoric. The youth are not a demographic statistic. They are an active constituency of change. We have seen this truth play out vividly across our continent. The examples shared by Mr Robert Rose, GGA Group Chairman, of Madagascar, Kenya, Uganda and now further afield in Peru, affirm something essential. Governance is no longer confined to the chambers of government. It is being co-created in digital spaces, on campuses, and in communities. The challenge for us, as leaders, is to embrace this reality, to engage, not suppress. To listen, not lecture. And to see the dynamism of youth, not as a threat to authority but as a lifeline for legitimacy.

At Good Governance Africa, we understand this shift. Our mission is to translate research into reform, ideas into action, and knowledge into impact. Through our regional centres, in West, Southern, the Horn, Nigeria, and soon in other parts of Africa, we are cultivating a culture of governance grounded in evidence, accountability, and inclusion. Whether through data-driven publications like our flagship Africa in Fact, our governance indices, our policy dialogues, or our partnerships with governments, universities, and civil society, GGA continues to champion one central idea, that good governance is the foundation upon which sustainable development and youth empowerment rest.

Our Annual Lecture Series is designed to embody that belief. It is not simply a forum for discussion. It is a space for building bridges. Between generations, between regions, and between research, policy and reform. Each year, we select a theme that reflects the pulse of Africa's current moment. Last year, we focused on governance and leadership renewal. This year, our focus on empowering the youth has resonated deeply with audiences across our centres, because it speaks to the hopes, frustrations, and determination of millions of young Africans who are eager to contribute meaningfully to their societies.

Empowerment, however, is not an abstract concept. It is built on tangible pillars of education, employment, entrepreneurship, engagement, and ethics. Allow me to briefly reflect on each.

First, education. Africa's prosperity begins in classrooms, and increasingly, in online learning spaces. We must ensure that education systems produce not only graduates, but problem-solvers. Education must prepare young Africans to think critically, adapt creatively, and act ethically. The skills of tomorrow, data literacy, digital innovation, green technology, and governance, must be taught today.

Second, employment. The continent's most pressing challenge is not the growth of our youth population, but the reduction of youth unemployment. Empowerment without economic opportunity breeds frustration. Governments, private sector actors, and regional bodies must work together to build industries that absorb and reward young talent. From renewable energy to the creative economy, Africa's future jobs lie in sectors driven by innovation and sustainability. But youth unemployment will not reduce substantially unless the economy grows considerably, and this requires both foreign investments and investments from within the continent. One of the greatest risks to investment in Africa is corruption. Until and unless we are able to address this problem adequately, we may not be able to reduce youth unemployment significantly.

Third, entrepreneurship. Africa's youth are already showing us that they do not want to wait for opportunities, they are creating them. Across Nigeria, Rwanda, Ghana, Ethiopia, and South Africa, start-ups are redefining industries and proving that innovation can thrive even in the face of constraint. What they need is not charity, but an enabling environment, access to finance, supportive regulation, and mentorship.

Fourth, engagement. Youth must be included not as token representatives, but as partners in governance. This requires deliberate mechanisms. Youth councils that inform national policies, youth quotas in political parties, and structured dialogue between young citizens and public officials. Empowerment flourishes when participation is institutionalised.

And fifth, ethics. Good governance cannot exist without integrity. Empowering the youth also means nurturing the values of honesty, accountability, empathy, and respect for human dignity. We must lead by example and encourage our young leaders to resist the temptations of corruption and short-term gain. Only through ethical leadership will Africa achieve the transformation it seeks and deserves.

Distinguished guests, today's deliberations have given us reason for optimism. We have seen that the youth are not waiting for permission to lead. They are already leading in community projects, in local innovations, and in social movements. The question is whether we, as institutions, governments, and elders, are willing to create the structures that allow their leadership to flourish. Too often, we celebrate youth as "the future" while denying them a voice in the present. That must change. Empowerment must start now, and it must start with trust.

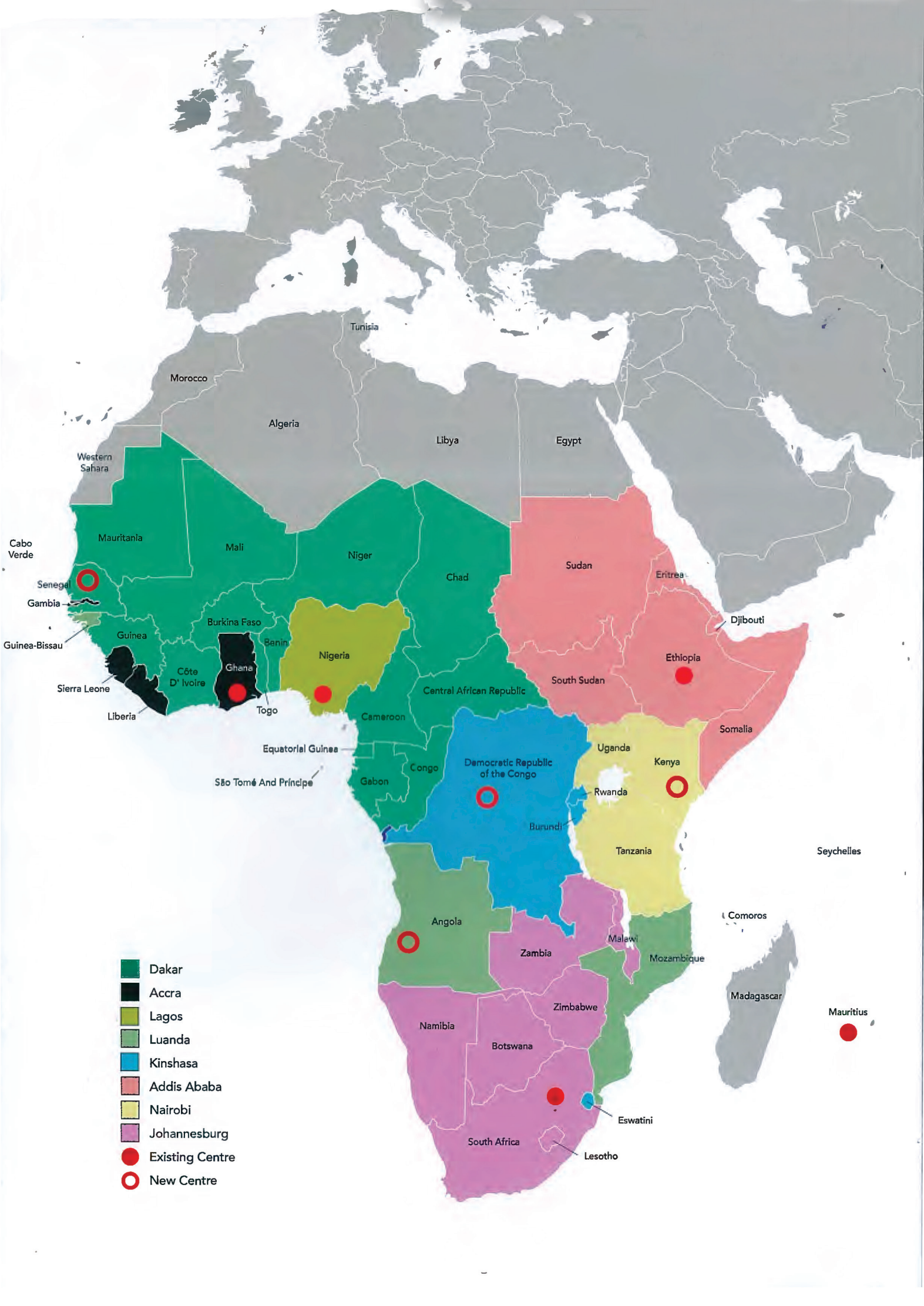











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# EMPOWERING THE YOUTH FOR A PROSPEROUS AFRICA


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