

Youth in Governance: Considerations for the Africa-EU Parliamentary Assembly

On the occasion of the Plenary Session of the Africa-EU Parliamentary Assembly held in May in Eswatini, the Bahá'í International Community's Addis Ababa Office offers the following considerations on youth and governance, drawing on the experiences of the global Bahá'í community as it strives to apply moral principles into action for the wellbeing of all.

Nurturing the agency of youth

The African Union's Agenda 2063 rightly places youth at the centre of the continent's progress—a vision that must also serve as the cornerstone of the AU-EU Partnership. To fully realize this vision, youth must be afforded the opportunity to actively shape the governance frameworks and institutional processes that underpin the partnership across both continents. This evolution in governance requires a posture of openness and humility toward the insights youth offer, as well as a commitment to addressing any contradictions between how young people are perceived and the important role they play in society. Ultimately, joint AU-EU strategies need to be actively shaped by the agency and aspirations of the generation that will ultimately inherit and sustain this partnership.

Strengthening capacity for constructive change across the rural-urban divide

Significant steps have been taken that reflect a growing commitment to institutionalizing youth participation, ranging from structural advances, such as the AU Office of the Youth Envoy and the AU-EU Youth Lab, to the conceptual advances within policy frameworks that increasingly recognizes the agency of youth. Yet, these advances must be matched by a more profound rethinking of the attitudes and assumptions related to the period of youth. While youth possess a unique capacity to bridge diverse populations, their engagement is often siloed—limiting their role to youth issues rather than recognizing them as essential drivers of broader social and structural transformation.

The goal moving forward is to channel and strengthen the capacity of all young people—from urban to rural settings—to consistently apply scientific, practical, and moral knowledge to collective wellbeing. Acknowledging the importance of capacity-building is not to suggest that youth are lacking; rather, it recognizes that while youth benefit from opportunities to develop their innate talents, governance systems increasingly rely on the energy and vision of youth to function. Youth are one of the primary groups navigating the rural-urban divide, which positions them well to act as the essential connection between fragmented local economies and global policy frameworks. Recognizing this role requires a shift from viewing youth as a problem to be solved to seeing them as essential partners in the transformation of intercontinental cooperation.

Participation in the generation and application of knowledge

Present-day conditions cannot be addressed by simply introducing young voices into current systems. Youth have the capacity to develop new models of governance—both independently and through intergenerational collaboration—that are robust, adaptive, and inclusive. One defining feature of such a model could be a cross-continental system for knowledge sharing. As insights are generated by all generations and groups in their efforts to advance the progress of humanity, helpful methods and approaches could emerge that can be adapted and applied across diverse settings by both Africans and

Europeans. For the work at hand is not to assert the importance of one group over another, but rather to cultivate enduring models of cooperation that recognize the generation and application of knowledge as a collective responsibility.