

UNFPA West & Central Africa YouthPulse



2024 REVIEW & 2025 OUTLOOK

Connecting Youth, Partners, and Progress in West & Central Africa (WCA)



5,423,866 Youth were reached:
64% = 3,464,193 were girls and young women
36% = 1,959,673 boys and young men.

THE NUMBERS



3,313,292

Young People benefited from Comprehensive Education and Information Programmes.



1,754,772

Young People benefited from Youth-Responsive Services Delivery, including GBV Response and Family Planning Services.



211,144

Young People in Humanitarian Settings.



49,716

Young People benefited from Youth Leadership and Participation Programmes.



43,893

Young People benefited from Youth Peace and Security Programmes.



31,796

Youth Living with HIV.



19,253

Young People With Disabilities.

NEWS UPDATE

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A Youth Peer Educator Shares HIV Information at the 2024 World AIDS Day Event @UNFPA Ghana/Gladys Obil

2024 was a Year of Progress and Promise

In 2024, the UNFPA West and Central Africa Regional Office (WCARO) continued in its dedication to empowering adolescents and youth across West and Central Africa. UNFPA expanded its reach and deepened its impact by forging stronger partnerships with governments and collaborating with civil society partners and youth to equip young people with essential leadership skills and inspire them to actively engage in their communities to drive meaningful change.

As a result, 2024 was marked by transformative and multifaceted successes that underscored the power of collaboration and youth-driven initiatives.

With **170 million** young people aged 10 to 24, representing **33%** of the region's population, youth are a dynamic and influential force in West and Central Africa. Recognising this, the UNFPA West and Central Africa Regional Office launched various interventions across all 23 countries in the region.

These programs were designed to position Youth at the Heart of Development, enhance their capacities, amplify their voices, and position them as catalysts for positive change in their communities, nations, and beyond.

This newsletter highlights the key achievements of our youth engagement efforts in 2024 and delineates our strategic priorities, building upon the foundational successes established in 2024 to create even greater opportunities for young people to thrive and lead.



Isatu Iye Tholley, one of the winners of Young Women's Leading Change Innovations Challenge presenting her Innovation -iDesigns @UNFPA Sierra Leone/Islander Kabia

Expanding Access to Comprehensive Sexuality Education

UNFPA WCARO made significant progress in expanding access to Comprehensive Sexuality Education and Information (CSE) for in-school and out-of-school adolescents and youth.

These efforts were aligned with the high-level political commitment to educated, healthy, and thriving adolescents and young people (the WCA Commitment), which prioritises comprehensive education and information (CEI) to nurture educated, healthy, and empowered young people in WCA.

Across 14 countries, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, The Gambia, and Togo, CEI programs reached 3,150,800 young people.

Key activities included tailored technical support, adapting curricula to meet national education standards and address the unique needs of different age groups, and creating accessible tools such as a CEI online platform in Nigeria.

Out-of-school clubs were also established, offering integrated education that addressed gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive health, and economic empowerment for both girls and boys, ensuring inclusivity.

To strengthen CEI efforts further, UNFPA WCARO, in collaboration with UNESCO, engaged all 23 country offices through quarterly regional webinars. These webinars facilitated knowledge exchange and best practices, helping to build a more connected regional network for CEI. Additionally, practical resources and guidelines for CEI implementation were developed and shared, with materials made available in French to enhance accessibility.

UNFPA WCARO continues to equip young people with the skills and knowledge they need to actively shape their futures and contribute to their communities by combining capacity-building, resource development, curriculum adaptation, and digital tools for CEI.

Strengthening Youth Voice and Participation through Global and Regional Platforms

The International Conference on Population and Development's (ICPD) 30th anniversary was commemorated in 2024.

As part of the 30-year review process, UNFPA organised a Global Youth Dialogue, which convened approximately 500 young people from around the globe in April 2024 in Cotonou, Benin.

Over 125 youth representatives from all 23 West and Central African countries engaged actively in the dialogue, influencing the agenda and contributing to the formulation of policy recommendations.

Through their participation in sessions and interactions with other guests and experts, these youth participants developed specific recommendations addressing pressing issues, such as climate action, gender equality, the need for comprehensive sexuality education, and youth-friendly healthcare, under the framework of the [Cotonou Youth Action Agenda](#).



Ms. Awa Diassy from Senegal passionately addresses youth aspirations during the Global Youth Dialogue in Cotonou, Benin (April 2024). @UNFPA WCARO/Emmanuelle Landais

“The ICPD30 Global Youth Dialogue in Cotonou transcended a simple listening exercise—youth truly led the conversation.”

– Esenam Amuzu, a Ghanaian contributor to the Family Planning News Network & Member of the WCA Regional Youth Engagement Reference Group

The UNFPA West and Central Africa Regional Youth Engagement Reference Group:

Reinforcing Foundations for Meaningful Youth Engagement

The significant and continued active participation of young people from the sub-region necessitated a dedicated platform for sustained engagement and communication, aligning with UNFPA's long-term commitment to youth engagement.

Following the Global Youth Dialogue, the West and Central Africa Regional Office established the Regional Youth Engagement Reference Group in May 2024, designated to serve a two-year term, which comprises a diverse group of youth leaders representing all 23 countries within the West and Central Africa region.

This group represents a wide spectrum of backgrounds, experiences, and expertise, leveraging the energy and hope generated from the Global Youth Dialogue.

Throughout 2024, the Youth Engagement Reference Group facilitated ongoing dialogue with UNFPA country offices, ensuring that youth perspectives informed programme design, implementation, and evaluation and contributed to the UNFPA regional youth agenda.

The Reference Group plays an important role in:

- * **Sustained Dialogue:** Providing a consistent platform for ongoing meaningful youth engagement between UNFPA and youth leaders across the sub-region, ensuring their perspectives inform program design, implementation, and evaluation at country offices.
- * **Strategic Guidance:** Offering strategic guidance and recommendations on UNFPA's youth engagement strategies to ensure programs remain relevant, effective, and impactful.
- * **Capacity Building:** Facilitating and cascading capacity-building opportunities for youth leaders at national levels, equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge to become effective advocates and change agents.
- * **Program Monitoring and Evaluation:** Participating in the monitoring and evaluating UNFPA's youth-focused initiatives, providing critical feedback to improve program quality and effectiveness.
- * **Network Building:** Fostering networking and collaboration among youth leaders across the region, strengthening their collective voice and influence.

Establishing this Reference Group signifies UNFPA WCARO's long-term commitment to enhancing youth engagement. Members' insights and guidance contribute to more effective and relevant youth programming. Noteworthy examples of UNFPA and Reference Group Members' participation in policy processes include contributions to the Africa Common Position for the Beijing +30 Review negotiation, participation in the Pan Africa Youth Forum, and involvement in policy dialogues during the Youth Connekt Africa Summit.

Building on the success of the Regional Youth Engagement Reference Group, the Sahel Women's Empowerment and Demographic Dividend ([SWEDD](#)) regional initiative has developed the SWEDD Youth Engagement Framework. The framework offers a structured model for youth co-creation in program design, implementation, and monitoring and for effectively mobilising youth community leaders, ensuring that their influence extends beyond advocacy decision-making spaces.

Perspectives from Regional Youth Engagement Reference Group Members on Working with UNFPA



Elizabeth Talatu Williams, **Nigeria**

As a dedicated UNFPA WCARO Youth Engagement Reference Group member, I actively championed meaningful youth engagement in West and Central Africa decision-making processes.

I led the virtual regional youth consultation for the AADPD@10 and ICPD@30 review, mobilising over 50 youth-led organisations from Nigeria and engaging with 300+ representatives across Sub-Saharan Africa. I co-presented outcomes at high-level meetings, including the Youth, CSO, and Major Groups Pre-Conference in Zambia.

My negotiation efforts contributed to integrating five critical youth priorities into the ICPD30 outcome document in New York. Additionally, representing the region on the Beijing+30 steering committee, I co-developed the agenda for the Africa Youth Consultation on Beijing+30 and mobilised 150+ participants, shaping the Africa Youth Position Paper presented at the African Union Ministerial Meeting. These engagements exemplify my commitment to amplifying youth voices in regional and global policymaking.'

Abou Maimouna Diallo, **Guinea**

Through our organisation, Réseau des Jeunes Ambassadeurs pour la Santé de la Reproduction, we are significantly improving young people's access to youth-friendly health services in Guinea.

As a member of the UNFPA Youth Engagement Reference Group and one who benefitted from UNFPA's training for youth advocates, I have taken an active role in promoting the inclusion of youth in health policies, broadening access to family planning services, and advocating for free contraceptives in Guinea.

Alongside the 37 youth in our organisation, we have harnessed our skills to challenge harmful taboos through community outreach efforts. Additionally, we have empowered 60 more peer educators with training in advocacy and communication while collaborating closely with government authorities to promote sexual and reproductive health and rights for young people across Guinea.



Abou Maimouna Diallo,
A member of the UNFPA Youth Engagement Reference Group.



Muhammed Yakubu Sharif, Ghana

Muhammed Yakubu Sharif, Ghana

The Youth Leadership training had a profound impact on me, enhancing not only my confidence and communication skills but also deepening my understanding of the intricate relationship between SRHR and gender equality.

Following the training, I had the opportunity to train and collaborate with 63 youth from Youth Parliaments and Youth Networks in the Northern and North East Region of Ghana. Together, we launched a series of positive masculinity campaigns, successfully engaging with local markets, communities, and radio stations. These initiatives were made possible through partnerships with Local Chiefs, the Regional Coordinating Council, and the National Youth Authority.

Throughout 2024, the Youth Engagement Reference Group facilitated ongoing dialogue with UNFPA country offices, ensuring that youth perspectives informed programme design, implementation, and evaluation and contributed to the UNFPA regional youth agenda.

Shaping the Future at the Summit of the Future

The “Summit of the Future” held during the UN General Assembly in September 2024 offered a valuable opportunity for youth participation facilitated by UNFPA’s support for young people from West and Central Africa.

With the technical support and mentorship provided by UNFPA, young people from West and Central Africa engaged in preparatory forums at regional and continental levels and crafted a ‘Continental Youth Pact’—a collective manifesto that voiced their demands and aspirations for sustainable development and good governance.

The youth contributions fed into the #YouthLead thematic sessions of the Summit of the Future Action Days, which focused on gender equality, digital inclusion, and humanitarian innovation.

The resulting recommendations in the [Outcome Document](#) of the #YouthLead thematic sessions were successfully integrated into the final “*Pact for the Future*,” adopted at the Summit, showcasing the effectiveness of youth-led advocacy in influencing global policy outcomes.



Florence (centre) raises snails, and Virginie (right) rears rabbits. Both are from Houin, Benin, and, thanks to the SWEDD project, are attending a six-month business course on managing their income-generating activities (September 2024). @ UNFPA WCARO/Emmanuelle Landais

Capacity Building for Francophone Youth in Africa

In September 2024, UNFPA, in partnership with the *Network of Youth Organizations in Francophone Africa for Reproductive Health and Family Planning*, successfully strengthened the capacity of over **250** young leaders across Africa through their *Youth Reproductive Health Capacity Building Program*.

Held in September 2024, the program focused on empowering youth to actively advance the *International Conference on Population and Development* agenda in Francophone Africa.

Participants gained a deeper understanding of the ICPD agenda and its alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals, strongly emphasising sexual and reproductive health, gender equality, and youth empowerment as pillars of sustainable development.

The workshop equipped youth with essential advocacy and leadership skills, enabling them to champion sexual and reproductive health rights, gender equality, and youth inclusion in policymaking. Participants explored their roles in implementing the ICPD Program of Action, focusing on advocacy, community engagement, peer education, and monitoring progress.

They also developed actionable roadmaps to address critical issues in their communities, such as comprehensive sexuality education, access to safe abortion, and combating gender-based violence.

A key highlight of the program was its focus on Francophone Africa's unique challenges, including high rates of adolescent pregnancies, limited access to SRH services, and gender disparities in education and employment. Youth leaders were empowered to tackle these issues through innovative, youth-led solutions.

In addition to that, as it's recognised that economic empowerment is a crucial component of youth leadership, the [SWEDD](#) project trained over **359,000** young women in vocational skills, financial literacy, and micro-entrepreneurship across Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and The Gambia. In Guinea and Senegal, Savings and Credit Groups were integrated into health and economic empowerment programs, ensuring young women have the tools to advocate for their rights while building sustainable livelihoods.

Celebrating International Day of Peace

INTERNATIONAL PEACE DAY WEBINAR

SAVE THE DATE

23rd SEPTEMBER | 12:00-1:30 pm GMT | ON ZOOM

TITLE: Rising Stars of Peace: How Young Leaders Are Transforming West and Central Africa

Moderator

Panelists

Ms. Fatuma Muhumed
Youth, Peace and Security Programme Specialist - UNFPA WCARO

Mrs. Simone Diouf
AU Youth Ambassador for Peace-West Africa

Mr. Abdullahi Bility
Vice president- Federation of Liberia youth

Mrs. Emilia Efeti Miki
Founder/CEO, Denis Miki Foundation

Mr. Rafiu Lawal
Executive Director Building Blocks for Peace and Regional Coordinator -GPPAC

Ms. Fanta DIAW
President of the Network of Community Engagement Groups of Mali

Mr. Bakary Sonko
Co-Founder and National Programmes Coordinator, Peace Hub The Gambia

As part of the International Day of Peace commemoration on September 23rd, 2024, the UNFPA West and Central Africa Regional Office organised two complementary events to celebrate and amplify the voices of young peace-builders in the region.

The first was the *Rising Stars of Peace* webinar, a dynamic virtual gathering that brought together young change-makers to share their transformative efforts and discuss their roles in fostering peace.

The second event was the release of a captivating Photo Essay, a visual narrative highlighting the inspiring stories of youth actively driving positive change within their communities. Explore the [Photo Essay](#) to witness their impactful journeys and learn more about their inspiring initiatives.

Partnering for Youth Advocacy:

A Regional Training for Sub-Saharan Africa

To cultivate stronger youth leadership in Sub-Saharan Africa, we launched a comprehensive regional training program in October 2024.

This four-module program, co-created with the Regional Youth Engagement Reference Group, UNFPA West and Central Africa Regional Office, UNFPA East and Southern Africa Regional Office Action Aid International, equipped 115 youth from East and Southern Africa, as well as West and Central Africa with enhanced communication and advocacy skills, empowering them to champion Adolescent and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (AYSRRH) and gender equality within humanitarian, peace, and development settings.

The Youth leaders receive ongoing mentorship and continue to engage in advocacy, raise awareness, and promote social norm change efforts through various media platforms, using the hashtag **#AfriCANYouth**.

Furthermore, we provided mentorship and logistical support to 14 of these leaders, enabling their participation in high-profile continental events such as the Beijing+30 Review and the Pan African Youth Forum.

We also supported over 30 participants in organizing impactful commemorations of key international days, including the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence and International AIDS Day.

This ensured that youth voices on SRHR and gender equality were integral to the outcome documents of these crucial policy platforms.

Furthermore, we provided mentorship and logistical support to 14 of these leaders, enabling their participation in high-profile continental events such as the Beijing+30 Review, Youth Connekt Africa Summit and the Pan African Youth Forum, which ensured that youth voices on SRHR and gender equality were integral to the outcome documents of these crucial policy platforms.



Idrissa Abdulai Kargbo,
Country Representative, Global Youth Consortium Against Female Genital Mutilation, Sierra Leone

Idrissa Abdulai Kargbo,

“UNFPA WCARO’s capacity-building workshops have provided a solid foundation for understanding SRHR, enabling us to advocate for policies prioritising the health and well-being of women and girls.”

We also supported youth leaders in organising commemorations of key international days at the national levels, including the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence and International AIDS Day.



Youth in Ghana Take Center Stage at the 2024 World AIDS Day Commemoration @UNFPA Ghana/Gladys Obil

Securing a Continent Free from Violence Against Women and Girls

Youth actively participated in the development of the African Union’s landmark Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls.

A virtual youth review workshop on October 17, 2024, brought together 25 young people from all African regions.

They provided crucial feedback and recommendations on the draft convention, ensuring their perspectives were integrated into the final document.

This process, supported throughout 2024 by partners including UNFPA, and the African Union Liaison Office, involved facilitating youth consultations and providing expert input to the drafting process.

The Convention, finalised in late 2024, is expected to receive endorsement from African Union Heads of State in February 2025, marking a significant step towards preventing and eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls across the continent.

The workshop was co-organized by the AU Commission’s Women, Gender, and Youth Directorate in collaboration with Plan International, UNFPA, UNICEF, GIMAC, Rozaria Memorial Trust, and the Centre for Rights Education and Awareness.

Championing Gender Equality through Youth Participation



A Youth in Guinea Guides Her Peer on Using a Mobile App to Access Information on Gender-Based Violence (May 2024) @Association of Bloggers of Guinea/ Génération qui ose

Recognising the important role of youth in advancing gender equality, UNFPA actively supported the participation of two youth advocates in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action +30 Regional Review held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, at the end of October 2024.

Prior to the Africa Regional review, UNFPA held regional training workshops in partnership with accomplished female leaders, enabling over 300 youth from country offices to deepen their understanding of the Beijing Platform for Action and its relevance to the review process.

The youth made presentations and testimonies highlighting both progress and persistent gaps in gender equality, ultimately feeding into the continental review. This active engagement ensured that youth perspectives were integrated into shaping the outcomes document, promoting women's empowerment and gender justice.

UNFPA WCARO Reference Group Members **Elizabeth Talatu Williams** from Nigeria and **Jerye Sabine** from Cameroon actively participated, leading the West and Central Africa sub-regional online engagement process and regional meetings in Addis Ababa.



Partnering with Youth and YouthConnekt Africa to Innovate Solutions for Mental Health, Family Planning, and SRHR

In November 2024, UNFPA West and Central Africa Regional Office supported youth engagement at the [Youth Connekt Africa Summit](#) in Kigali, Rwanda, under the theme **“Jobs for Youth Through Innovative Skilling.”**

This platform provided an opportunity for youth leaders to showcase their innovative solutions and advocate for critical issues such as sexual and reproductive health and rights, family planning, reproductive health commodities, and mental health.

A key highlight of UNFPA’s engagement was the high-level plenary session, *“Thrive Together: Elevating Youth Health and Well-being for a Brighter Africa,”* co-organized with the UNFPA East and Southern Africa Regional Office, African Union Commission, UNICEF, UNAIDS, and the Imbuto Foundation. The session brought together policymakers, youth advocates, and experts to discuss the pressing challenges of adolescent pregnancies, young motherhood, and mental health.

Youth leaders, including **Sarata Ceesay** from The Gambia, **Irena Fouyaba** from Chad, **Zeinaba Maiga** from Mali, and **Marie Mornondé** from Chad, played pivotal roles as panel moderators, speakers, and masters of ceremony, amplifying youth voices and showcasing the power of youth-led solutions. The discussions emphasised the need for holistic strategies to ensure young people can thrive and contribute to Africa’s socio-economic transformation, highlighting UNFPA’s efforts to integrate youth perspectives into policymaking for responsive and inclusive health policies.

Beyond the plenary session, UNFPA reinforced its commitment to youth empowerment through initiatives like the *Let’s Hack Climate Change Hacklab*, which showcased innovative youth-led solutions addressing SRHR and climate resilience, and the provision of SRHR services during the summit. Our ongoing partnership with YouthConnekt Africa fosters collaboration, amplifies youth voices, and drives transformative solutions for improved health and economic outcomes for young people across the continent.



Youth Participants and UNFPA Team at the Youth Connekt Africa Summit, in Kigali, Rwanda (November 2024) @UNFPA Rwanda/Emile Ndayambaje



Leo Tiah of Liberia presents on Positive Masculinities at the Pan-African Youth Forum in Algeria in November 2024

Fostering Innovation and Leadership at the Pan-African Youth Forum

The 4th Pan-African Youth Forum, from November 1 to 4, 2024, in Oran, Algeria, aimed to create a vibrant platform for young people to engage in meaningful discussions.

The forum discussions focused on contributing to the development of strong educational systems and enhancing Africa's capacity for inclusive, equitable, and lifelong learning opportunities. Additionally, it served as an avenue for youth empowerment, networking, and cultivating a sense of hope for ongoing development across the continent.

UNFPA provided significant logistical and mentorship support to a dozen youth leaders from 12 countries across the region. Participants engaged in workshops focusing on digital activism, mental health awareness, and sustainable entrepreneurship, gaining practical skills to address contemporary challenges.

The forum saw the establishment of a Youth Innovation Fund, providing seed funding for grassroots projects led by youth entrepreneurs. Initiatives ranging from sustainable agriculture practices to technological solutions for improving education access were showcased, attracting significant interest from investors and partners.

The Forum also facilitated valuable cultural exchange, using artistic expressions to enhance cross-continental dialogue. The inspiration and hope expressed by participants such as *Leo Tiah* from Liberia highlighted the Forum's success in fostering a sense of community and equipping young people with the confidence to become powerful advocates for change.

The Forum culminated in adopting the [2024 Pan African Youth Forum Declaration](#).



UNFPA, Gambia, Strategic Dialogue with Young Parliamentarian and Youth Political Activists

Forging Pathways for Youth-Inclusive Policies with Youth Parliamentarians

A UNFPA-led strategic dialogue in Banjul, The Gambia, from 3 to 4 December 2024, brought together 18 youth parliamentarians and six youth political activists from across the region to discuss youth-inclusive policymaking.

In partnership with the Government and the UN Youth Office, the two-day event discussed the Cotonou Youth Action Agenda, particularly its emphasis on sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, gender equality, and peace-building.

Despite its brief duration, the dialogue achieved significant milestones.

Participants deepened their understanding of the Youth, Peace, and Security agenda and identified concrete strategies to bridge the gap between policy and practice.

A key outcome was the unanimous commitment to empower young women in leadership roles, ensuring their active participation in shaping policies that affect their futures. The event also fostered cross-regional collaboration, enabling parliamentarians to share best practices and develop innovative approaches to youth empowerment.



Driving Systemic Change By Embedding Youth Empowerment into Peace-building and Security Efforts

The UN Security Council Resolution 2250 highlights the critical role of young people as essential partners in building sustainable peace.

On December 9, 2024, the 9th anniversary of this groundbreaking resolution was commemorated in Dakar, Senegal, under the leadership of Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General Barrie Freeman. The event, themed “*Youth Facing Insecurity and Political Transitions in West Africa and the Sahel*,” was organised by the UN Inter-Agency Group on Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS), co-chaired by UNFPA and UNDP.

The event brought together over 100 youth-led associations, organisations, and networks actively advancing the YPS agenda at national and regional levels. It also engaged United Nations entities, bilateral and multilateral partners, and participants from 22 West and Central African countries in person and online.

Representing UNFPA, Deputy Regional Director Fabrizia Falcione emphasised the UNFPA’s commitment to systemic change: “UNFPA remains dedicated to the full implementation of UNSCR 2250 and the YPS agenda, ensuring these frameworks are inclusive, gender-responsive, and adequately resourced. While progress has been made over the past nine years, we must continue to embed youth empowerment into the core of peace-building and security efforts to address ongoing challenges.”

The commemoration also showcased the UN Inter-Agency Group on Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) in West Africa and the Sahel, which was officially launched on June 27, 2023. Coordinated by UNOWAS in partnership with relevant Department of Political and Peace-building Affairs (DPPA) missions, the group is co-led by UNDP and UNFPA, with leadership rotating among member agencies every two years. Its core objectives include strengthening coordination, promoting accountability, and harmonising interventions by UN entities across the region.

This event celebrated the transformative role of youth in peace and security, aligning with UNFPA’s strategic approach to driving systemic change. UNFPA continues to embed youth empowerment into the fabric of peace-building and security efforts By fostering partnerships and institutionalising youth participation in decision-making processes.

These initiatives ensure young people are recognised and supported as catalysts for positive change in West Africa and the Sahel. Through such efforts, UNFPA’s Regional Office continues to lay the foundation for sustainable peace, keeping youth empowerment at the heart of regional and global security frameworks.

Spotlight on Inspiring Youth-Led Peace Initiatives in WCA

The Gambia: Building Sustainable Peace:

The Peace Hub initiative, established with the support of UNFPA in 2020, is creating an environment conducive to youth engagement in peace-building. It promotes social cohesion and reconciliation and strengthens the Gambia Transitional Justice (TJ) processes. The initiative has also ensured that youth voices are integral to the policy process, especially in developing the National Action Plan on Youth Peace and Security.

Nigeria: Pioneering Youth Inclusion: Nigeria stands at the forefront of developing Africa's first National Action Plan on Youth, Peace, and Security.

This groundbreaking achievement has opened doors traditionally closed to youth, fostering unity among young peace advocates and setting a precedent for youth inclusion in policy-making across the continent.

Cameroon and Mali: Women Leading for Peace: In Cameroon and Mali, young women are leading the charge in promoting peace and social cohesion. They address local conflicts and societal challenges through dedicated community social cohesion, peace campaigns, and digital awareness, demonstrating resilience and commitment to building harmonious societies.

Addressing Harmful Practices

UNFPA and partners leveraged youth advocacy, policy engagement, and cross-sectoral partnerships to protect young women and girls from harmful practices.

In The Gambia, a strong [youth coalition](#) and youth parliament played a pivotal role in challenging opposition and securing the non-repeal of the 2015 Women's Amendment Law, showcasing the power of [youth voices](#) in advocating against harmful practices like Female Genital Mutilation.

In Sierra Leone, the **First Lady's advocacy** led to the passage of the [Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2024](#), which bans marriage before 18, criminalises the practice and ensures protective measures such as access to education. These achievements demonstrate the impact of youth-led advocacy and high-level partnerships in driving legal and social change.

[Nigeria](#) and the Central African Republic further strengthened their commitments by finalising the review, started in 2023, of their National Child Marriage Strategies.

Developed through inclusive, participatory processes that actively engage young people, these strategies reflect a growing regional focus on protecting girls and boys.

To inform policies and programmes, the regional office prioritised evidence generation.

A socio-ecological study in **Guinea** identified barriers to addressing Female Genital Mutilation, providing critical insights for the 2025 action plan.

The UNFPA Regional Office also partnered with the World Food Programme to produce a [technical brief on the interlinkages between child marriage and food insecurity](#).

Launched during the 16 Days of Activism under the Regional Initiative on the Centrality of Populations (RiCoP) framework, the brief underscores the need for holistic, cross-sectoral approaches to tackle the challenges faced by girls in the region.

Moving Forward into 2025



UNFPA Ghana Youth Leaders' Fellowship, Cohort 5 @UNFPA Ghana/Henry Alagbua

As we embrace 2025, we carry forward a deep sense of optimism and purpose fueled by the remarkable achievements in youth leadership and participation throughout 2024. UNFPA's strategic focus for the coming year centres on scaling and sustaining initiatives that harness the transformative power of youth to drive meaningful change across West and Central Africa. Our commitment to expanding successful programs ensures they reach more communities, adapt to local contexts, and remain sustainable beyond initial funding cycles.

To achieve this, we are strengthening partnerships with governments, NGOs, civil society organisations, the private sector, and other UN agencies. We aim to maximise shared resources and expertise by creating a unified front for change. A key priority is enhancing capacity-building efforts and equipping youth leaders with advocacy, leadership, project management, and financial literacy skills to navigate today's complex challenges effectively.

Furthermore, promoting intergenerational dialogue and collaboration will remain a cornerstone of our approach. By fostering meaningful interactions between emerging youth leaders and seasoned professionals, we facilitate knowledge transfer and mentorship opportunities.

As we address emerging challenges—particularly those linked to climate change, peace and security, migration, and gender inequality—we remain steadfast in ensuring inclusivity and equity are at the heart of our efforts.

This includes prioritising marginalised and vulnerable youth populations, such as those with disabilities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTIQ+) youth, rural youth, youth living with HIV, teenage mothers and those affected by conflict or displacement.

To sustain youth leadership in policymaking, we will build on proven models like SWEDD's Demographic Dividend Observatories, which engage youth in monitoring population and gender policies, and SWEDD's approach to integrating youth into national and regional legal frameworks—including those supporting girls' education, reproductive health, and GBV prevention—offers a scalable model for youth-led accountability in UNFPA programs.

The successes of 2024 have laid a robust foundation, confirmed the need for continued trust in the capabilities of young people, and ignited a movement for progress and development across Africa. Moving forward, we are committed to building on this momentum, expanding our partnerships, and inspiring a new generation of courageous and resilient youth leaders.

Together, we will build towards a more inclusive, interconnected, and sustainable future where young people have the tools and opportunities to take charge of their paths while shaping the future of their communities and nations.

“A huge thank you to UNFPA for their support in 2024! We look forward to a successful 2025 working together to improve youth reproductive health in French-speaking Africa.”

Djicolmbaye Bebare Aristide, Chad
Regional Coordinator, Network of Youth Organizations in Francophone Africa for Reproductive Health and Family Planning

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