

NAVIGATING DECOLONISATION LANDSCAPES AND YOUTH- LED MOVEMENTS: CURRENT PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES



YOUTH TRANSFORMING NARRATIVES

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Navigating Decolonisation Landscapes and Youth-led Movements: Current Practices and Challenges

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ABBREVIATIONS

AU	African Union
EU	European Union
FTYIP	The AU First Ten-Year Implementation Plan
IO	International Organizations
IOM	The International Organization on Migration
IMF	The International Monetary Fund
MOYS	Iraq's Ministry of Youth and Sports
NDICI	EU Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument
PCD	EU Policy Coherence for Development
PHM	The People's Health Movement
REC	Regional Economic Communities
SDGs	United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNPFII	United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
WHO	World Health Organization
YPS	Youth, Peace, and Security
YTN	Youth Transforming Narratives

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Decolonisation remains a pivotal process in dismantling colonial legacies that persist in social, political, economic, and cultural systems. This policy brief examines the intersection of decolonisation and the United Nations Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) Agenda, adopted with Resolution 2250 of the United Nations Security Council, advocating for youth-led initiatives as catalysts for transformative change. By addressing the structural inequalities entrenched in global systems, youth movements in the so-called Global Majority are advancing decolonial practices, fostering environmental sustainability, and championing localised solutions to historic injustices.

Within this policy paper, it is important to note that Youth Transforming Narratives (YTN) *uses the term "decolonisation" to encompass both decoloniality and the conventional understanding of decolonisation*. While decoloniality refers to the process of reshaping narratives and dismantling colonial epistemologies, decolonisation in its literal sense denotes the withdrawal of colonial military and administrative structures. Recognising the distinction between these concepts, YTN intentionally uses "decolonisation" as a general term to align with common usage while maintaining a specific focus on decoloniality. This approach ensures accessibility while emphasising the broader epistemic and structural transformations necessary for genuine decolonisation.

Despite significant progress, significant challenges hinder the effectiveness of decolonisation efforts. Power imbalances in funding, marginalisation of local voices, and cultural hegemony continue to perpetuate dependency and inequity. Equally, gaps in representation within governance structures and the lack of structural reforms undermine the transformative potential of decolonisation policies. These systemic barriers must be addressed to empower youth as meaningful agents of change in creating inclusive decolonial futures.

This policy brief recommends concrete actions to advance decolonisation through youth-led efforts. Key measures include establishing long-term, flexible funding mechanisms for youth organisations, embedding young people as equal partners in decision-making processes, and creating accessible platforms for localised, community-driven solutions. By centring youth agency and dismantling colonial power structures, stakeholders can enable sustainable and equitable progress towards a truly decolonised world.

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1. Navigating Decolonisation: Landscapes, Current Practices, Challenges and Youth-Led Movements

This section introduces decolonisation and its implementation in post-colonial states. It explores mechanisms designed to address current gaps in decolonisation efforts outlining a framework for YTN's analysis in youth-led decolonisation practices.

1.1 Background

Decolonisation is defined by the process through which colonised nations and peoples reclaim sovereignty from colonial powers, dismantling imperial structures that enforced political, cultural, and economic dependency.¹ As previously mentioned, Youth Transforming Narratives (YTN) uses the term “decolonisation” to refer both to decoloniality—the process of reshaping narratives—and its conventional meaning of withdrawing colonial structures, recognising their distinction while aligning with common usage. This approach ensures accessibility while emphasising the broader epistemic and structural transformations essential for genuine decolonisation.

With this in mind, the modern wave of decolonisation began in earnest after World War II, catalysed by anti-colonial movements, the weakening of European powers, and the rise of international organisations—like the United Nations—advocating for self-determination.^{2,3} While initially grounded in Enlightenment thought and Rousseau's ideas on autonomy, self-determination evolved into a legal principle with significant international weight, enshrined in the UN Charter, the 1960 Declaration on Colonial Independence, and later in the ICCPR and ICESCR, establishing its *jus cogens* status.⁴ However, its interpretation remains contested, with debates between traditional legal frameworks and post-colonial perspectives questioning whether self-determination functions as a universal right, a political instrument, or a tool for secessionist movements.⁵ In this context, self-determination is best understood as a dynamic norm of international law, allowing communities to collectively define their governance structures in line with their social, political, and economic aspirations. When the twentieth century came to an end, the world transformed beyond recognition, with almost 200 independent states being part of the United Nations. Currently, there are 193 members of the United Nations.⁶ The now independent states fought against the practices and ideologies imposed on them by colonial powers and underwent a transformative process to define their sovereignty.

¹ Fanon, Frantz. 1961. “The Wretched of the Earth.” New York: Grove Press.

² Getachew, Adom . 2019. “Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination.” *Jstor*. Princeton University Press. 2019. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv3znwvg>.

³ Self-determination, as a political and legal concept, gained prominence following World War I, when President Wilson's “Fourteen Points” proposed a liberal framework for post-war reconstruction, emphasizing the right of peoples to choose their own sovereign governance (Fisanov, Nechaieva-Yuriichuk, & Hissa-Ivanovych, 2022). Wilson's vision framed self-determination as a safeguard against imperial domination, asserting that no people should be treated as property and transferred between rulers without their consent (Cass, 1992, p. 23). Scholars such as Collins (1980) and Amberg (1985) further expanded on this definition, emphasising the collective right to political autonomy and the necessity of international recognition for self-determination claims.

⁴ Michael Saul, “The Normative Status of Self-Determination in International Law: A Formula for Uncertainty in the Scope and Content of the Right?” *Human Rights Law Review* 11, no. 4 (2011), <https://corteidh.or.cr/tablas/r27634.pdf>.

⁵ Morten Kudsen, “Self-Determination and Secession in International Law.” Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

⁶ Von Bismarck, Helene. 2012. “Defining Decolonization.” <https://www.helenevonbismarck.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Defining-Decolonization.pdf>.

Decolonisation is often framed as the political and administrative transfer of power, marked by **formal independence from a traditionalist perspective**.⁷ However, this traditionalist perspective overlooks how colonial legacies persist in global systems by perpetuating inequalities through economic neocolonial practices. Such practices include extracting human and natural resources from a less developed nation to flow into economies of economically dominant countries creating epistemological dominance.⁸ Thus, perpetuating the current system in which a set of social norms and collective knowledge is endorsed as superior to others, leading to the marginalisation or destruction of 'inferior knowledge.'⁹

Decolonisation goes beyond the political act of gaining independence. It addresses the deeper structural, economic, and cultural legacies of colonialism persisting after formal sovereignty is achieved.¹⁰ While independence focuses on the transfer of political power, **decolonisation requires dismantling colonial hierarchies in governance, education, and resource distribution** to achieve true autonomy and justice¹¹ within the new sovereign state. The historical significance of this process lies in its transformative potential, that challenges the **Westphalian notion of sovereignty**¹² imposed through colonial conquest and redefining global relations from a multipolar lens.¹³

Decolonisation is essential for the so-called Global Majority to reassert agency, disrupt extractive models, and reconstruct identities erased under imperialist rule. **Vital stakeholders including communities, scholars, and policymakers** lead this effort, emphasising decolonisation efforts at the local level. **Incorporating multiple perspectives is critical** for the successful introspection of how postcolonial nations can challenge internalised colonial hierarchies, while engaging in international solidarity to reform exploitative global systems.¹⁴ When these measures are applied correctly, the land, epistemologies, and systems of governance are officially deemed decolonised.

It is also important to understand that decolonisation within a new postcolonial state is not often peaceful. Decolonisation equally constitutes a complex dialectical inter-section of competing views and claims. Rather than simply signalling a linear, diplomatic transfer of power from colonial to postcolonial status, **one needs to decipher their colonial pasts, transitional presents, and inchoate futures**.¹⁵ In some cases, there are competing ideals rooted in colonialism within a postcolonial state which can lead to political and/or domestic violence, political revolutions and language conflicts. For example, during the Sri Lankan Civil War (1983–2009) tensions between the Sinhalese and Tamil communities over language policies, governance, and cultural identity escalated into a violent conflict. The Sinhala-Only Act of 1956, prioritising the Sinhalese language, exemplifies the marginalisation of the Tamil people and how conflicting visions of national identity and decolonisation can fuel ethnic divisions.¹⁶ During the Sri Lankan Civil War, **Sinhalese and Tamil youth played significant roles to promote reconciliation**, human rights, justice and advocating for peace and equal rights, although such efforts were often overshadowed by the larger conflict.¹⁷

7 Von Bismarck, Helene. *Op. cit.*

8 Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Sabelo J. 2013. "Coloniality of Power in Postcolonial Africa: Myths of Decolonization." Dakar: Council For The Development Of Social Science Research In Africa.

9 McDonnell, Jadie. "CHAPTER FIVE: Challenging the Euro-Western Epistemological Dominance of Development through African Cosmopolitanism." *Counterpoints* 443 (2014): 98–116. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42982050>.

10 Tuck, Eve, and K. Wayne Yang. 2012. "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1 (1): 1–40.

11 Fanon, Frantz. *Op. cit.*

12 Westphalian sovereignty became a shorthand in IR to define a state management system where each state has exclusive sovereignty over its territory. Hayman And, P.A., and John Williams. 2006. "Westphalian Sovereignty: Rights, Intervention, Meaning and Context." *Global Society* 20 (4): 521–41. doi:10.1080/13600820600929879.

13 Bhambra, Gurinder K. 2014. *Connected Sociologies*. Library.oapen.org. Bloomsbury Academic. <https://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/58766>.

14 Quijano, A. 2000. "Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America (2), 215–232. ." *Sage Journals*. 2000. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580900015002005>.

15 Christopher J. Lee, "Between a Moment and an Era" (2010, 8) <https://www.humanrightscareers.com/issues/decolonization-101-meaning-facts-and-examples/>

16 A. Jeyaratnam Wilson. 2000. *Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism*. UBC Press.

17 Anandakugan, Nithyani. 2020. "The Sri Lankan Civil War and Its History, Revisited in 2020." *Harvard International Review*. August 31, 2020. <https://hir.harvard.edu/sri-lankan-civil-war/>.



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Today, the **youth in the so-called Global Majority are challenging traditional power structures at the grassroots level and advocating for the inclusion of indigenous knowledge in education, politics, and development.** Youth-led movements are reshaping discourse around colonial legacies, pushing for economic justice, and championing environmental sustainability.^{18 19} Their efforts are central to reshaping post-colonial identities and promoting sustainable, locally rooted solutions.

1.2 Active International Policies Focused on Decolonisation Efforts

The international system has attempted to provide a legal framework, with internationally agreed- upon guidelines, to anchor contemporary decolonisation mechanisms in the post-World War II wave of independence movements. Through various United Nations agencies and inter-governmental organisations, like the European and African Unions, youth are able to leverage such frameworks to demand access to decolonisation initiatives. The following chapter outlines the main policies aimed at securing the rights of member states to institute decolonisation practices, including frameworks of colonial powers still ruling over non-self-governing territories today.

I. United Nations Special Committee on Decolonisation

The **United Nations Special Committee on Decolonisation**, commonly called the C-24, was established in 1961 to monitor the implementation of the 1960 Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. Mainly, the **Committee addresses colonial rule's political and economic inequalities to ensure self-determination remains a priority for the remaining 17 Non-Self-Governing Territories.**²⁰ Namely, the United Kingdom government remains the governing control of Anguilla, Bermuda, the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman and Falkland Islands (Malvinas),²¹ Montserrat, Saint Helena, Turks and Caicos Islands, Gibraltar, and Pitcairn. Similarly, Guam and American Samoa are legally under the protection of **the United States of America.** The nations of Tokelau, New Caledonia and French Polynesia are governed by **New Zealand and France** respectively. Western Sahara is also a non-governing territory viewed by the United Nations as it was governed by Spain until 1976 and a temporary government established with an international nature, which was reaffirmed in 1990.²² Similarly, numerous other territories globally face comparable governance complexities and international oversight. Therefore, the administering power of the territory is often contested depending on the source.²³ By engaging with local stakeholders, governments, and international bodies, the C-24 provides a platform for dialogue and action on decolonisation initiatives.²⁴ However, one might argue that the Committee can be seen as a guiding force to justify the continued unequal power balance and economic exploitation under current geopolitical dynamics rooted in colonialism.

¹⁸ Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Sabelo J. *Op. cit.*

¹⁹ Tuck, Eve, and K. Wayne Yang. *Op. cit.*

²⁰ United Nations, "Non-Self-Governing Territories | The United Nations and Decolonization," accessed December 12, 2024, <https://www.un.org/dppa/decolonization/nsqt>.

²¹ Although there is currently dispute over the territory between the Argentinian and the United Kingdom governments. For more information, please see https://www.un.org/dppa/decolonization/en/nsqt#_edn2.

²² United Nations, "Non-Self-Governing Territories | The United Nations and Decolonization." *Op. cit.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ "The United Nations and Decolonization |," United Nations, accessed December 12, 2024, <https://www.un.org/dppa/decolonization/en>.

Despite its achievements, **the Committee faces challenges in addressing the complexities of modern colonialism.** While many former colonies have achieved independence, territories such as Guam and Puerto Rico remain subject to significant geopolitical and economic influence, often hindering their self-determination.²⁵ The Committee works to bring these issues to the forefront through annual reports, consultations, and support for referendums. The C-24 also **collaborates with international agencies to address neocolonial practices**, such as economic exploitation and environmental degradation in territories under foreign control such as use of natural resources and monopolisation of local industries. This collaboration extends to fostering sustainable development practices, ensuring that decolonisation efforts are political and include social, cultural and economic revitalisation. However, critics argue that the Committee relies heavily on local civil society organisations and needs to adequately address structural barriers imposed by former colonial powers.²⁶ Moving forward, **the C-24 must balance international advocacy with tangible, locally driven initiatives** to comprehensively address the enduring legacies of colonialism.



CONTROVERSY SPOTLIGHT: THE UN SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON DECOLONISATION MEMBERSHIP AND THE HANDLING OF THE INSULAR CASES BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND PUERTO RICO

The UN Special Committee on Decolonization has faced controversies related to its membership and handling cases like Puerto Rico, revealing challenges in addressing colonial legacies. Some critics argue that the Committee's diverse membership including countries with varying colonial histories, leads to inconsistencies in addressing sovereignty issues, particularly for territories governed by powerful nations like the United States. **Puerto Rico's status as a U.S. territory, with limited autonomy under the Insular Cases**, remains contentious, with advocates pushing for the UN to recognise its decolonisation needs. However, the U.S. resists such calls, complicating the Committee's efforts. This reflects **broader difficulties the Committee faces in balancing international advocacy with the geopolitical interests of major powers**, underscoring the need for more robust mechanisms to support territories like Puerto Rico in confronting the enduring impacts of colonialism.

II. African Union and Agenda 2063: A Vision for the Future of Africa

As a long-term strategic framework, Agenda 2063 was adopted by the African Union (AU) in 2013. The policy represents a bold and ambitious vision for Africa's future, aiming to transform the continent into a prosperous, integrated, and peaceful region by 2063. The framework builds on the achievements of the past while addressing contemporary challenges, such as poverty, political instability, and economic dependency.²⁷ The Agenda's foundational documents, including the 50th Anniversary Solemn Declaration, emphasise the need for African unity and collective self-reliance. The vision sets clear goals for economic growth, social inclusion, governance, and environmental sustainability, driven by the Pan-African spirit of unity and solidarity.²⁸

²⁵ "Support to Non-Self-Governing Territories by the Specialized Agencies and International Institutions Associated with the United Nations," United Nations, July 16, 2024, accessed December 12, 2024, <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/ltd/n24/201/38/pdf/n2420138.pdf>.

²⁶ Poka Laenui, "Processes of Decolonization," San Jose State University, May 30, 2006, accessed December 12, 2024, <https://www.sjsu.edu/people/marcos.pizarro/courses/maestros/s0/Laenui.pdf>.

²⁷ "Linking Agenda 2063 and the SDGs," Linking Agenda 2063 and the SDGs | African Union, February 10, 2022, accessed December 1, 2024, <https://au.int/agenda2063/sdgs>.

²⁸ "50th Anniversary Solemn Declaration," 50th Anniversary Solemn Declaration (2013) | African Union, June 13, 2013, <https://au.int/documents/20130613/50th-anniversary-solemn-declaration-2013>.

One of the core components of the AU's Agenda 2063 is its alignment with the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, ensuring that the continent's aspirations are in sync with global efforts for sustainable development. Agenda 2063 outlines specific targets for **enhancing infrastructure, fostering innovation, and creating economic opportunities across all sectors**.²⁹ The strategy focuses on education, health, energy, and agriculture sectors, aiming to eradicate hunger, improve healthcare, and enhance quality education for all Africans. The integration of the SDGs into the AU's strategic agenda, and in theory, provides a clear roadmap for tackling both global and local challenges while fostering inclusive growth and development across Africa.³⁰

Additionally, the AU's **Continental Frameworks** for implementation provide a structured path for realising the goals of Agenda 2063. These frameworks support countries in aligning their national policies with continental priorities, ensuring that Africa's transformation is driven by regional cooperation and robust, localised action.³¹ Key initiatives, such as the **First Ten-Year Implementation Plan (FTYIP)**, play a crucial role in facilitating progress by setting short-to medium-term milestones, focusing on the most urgent areas such as infrastructure, energy, and governance.³² With the support of regional economic communities and other stakeholders, these frameworks enable the realisation of Agenda 2063's vision, reinforcing the importance of collective and individual action in transforming Africa's socio-economic landscape.

While widely praised for its ambitious vision for Africa's future, Agenda 2063 faces several controversies and challenges. One key issue is the **lack of effective monitoring and accountability mechanisms**, making tracking progress across different countries difficult. Critics argue that without solid systems in place, the ambitious goals outlined in the First Ten-Year Implementation Plan (FTYIP) risk being unrealised, particularly in countries facing political instability or governance challenges.³³ Furthermore, the emphasis on large-scale **infrastructure projects and economic growth** has raised concerns that these efforts may benefit wealthier nations and multinational corporations while leaving poorer regions and marginalised communities behind, exacerbating **socio-economic disparity** across the continent.³⁴

Governance issues also present significant obstacles. Despite Agenda 2063's call for democratic institutions and good governance, many African nations continue to struggle with **corruption and authoritarianism**, which undermine the Agenda's effectiveness.³⁵ Additionally, the **reliance on regional economic communities (RECs)** to lead development efforts is problematic, as many of these bodies lack the political and financial resources to enforce meaningful change. These challenges suggest that while Agenda 2063 offers a hopeful vision for the future,³⁶ its success will depend on overcoming deeply entrenched systemic issues, such as political instability, corruption, and inequality.

²⁹ "Linking Agenda 2063 and the SDGs." *Op. cit.*

³⁰ "Agenda 2063: Aspirations, Progress and STYIP," United Nations SDGs, 14AD, https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-12/APRMppp_Kumasi_13.11workshop_0.pdf.

³¹ African Union. (2024). *Continental frameworks for Agenda 2063*. Retrieved from <https://au.int/agenda2063/continental-frameworks>

³² African Union. (2024). *First Ten-Year Implementation Plan (FTYIP)*. Retrieved from <https://au.int/en/agenda2063/ftyip>

³³ "Agenda 2063: Aspirations, Progress and STYIP." *Op. cit.*

³⁴ "Linking Agenda 2063 and the SDGs." *Op. cit.*

³⁵ African Union. (2024). *First Ten-Year Implementation Plan (FTYIP)*. *Op.cit.*

³⁶ "50th Anniversary Solemn Declaration." *Op.cit.*

III. The Global Europe Framework: the European Union's Post-Colonial Engagement

The European Union's (EU) post-colonial engagement is shaped by historical legacy and modern strategic imperatives. One significant policy framework is the **Policy Coherence for Development (PCD)**, which was framed to ensure the EU's domestic policies do not undermine its development objectives. The PCD requires all EU policies, including trade, agriculture, and security, are aligned with sustainable development goals (SDGs) to promote global poverty reduction and justice, especially in former colonies.³⁷ This approach reflects the EU's recognition of its historical ties with former colonies and understanding the need to integrate these considerations into its modern policy frameworks. The framework aims to ensure that the EU fosters development while mitigating the adverse effects of policies that often perpetuate inequality or dependence.

A critical element of the EU's post-colonial strategy is its evolving relationship with Africa, outlined in the **EU-Africa Strategy (2020)**. This strategy is presented as an approach aimed at reducing reliance on traditional aid mechanisms, focusing instead on partnership, investment, and economic cooperation. It emphasises mutual benefit and shared values, focusing on climate change, trade, and governance. The EU-Africa relationship acknowledges the colonial past and aims to forge a new partnership that respects Africa's sovereignty and fosters long-term stability and prosperity.³⁸ The Strategy, however, has faced criticism for not adequately addressing historical inequalities or providing sufficient resources to challenge systemic development barriers within Africa. It also raises questions about how equitable this partnership can truly be when the EU's economic policies, like trade agreements, still favour European interests.³⁹

Similarly, the **Cotonou Agreement (2000-2021) and its successor agreements, such as the Post-Cotonou Agreement now known under the Samoa Agreement**, are crucial in framing the EU's relationship with its former colonies, especially in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific. The Cotonou and Samoa Agreements sought to strengthen political dialogue and economic cooperation, but their effectiveness in promoting sustainable development and good governance was often questioned.⁴⁰ While it provided financial assistance and trade preferences, critics argue that it often did not sufficiently empower recipient countries, and some have seen it as a means of reinforcing neo-colonial structures under the guise of cooperation.⁴¹ To address these concerns, the EU introduced the Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) under the **new Global Europe framework—which replaces the Cotonou Agreement**. This initiative aims to provide greater flexibility in development cooperation, placing a stronger emphasis on sustainable development, poverty reduction, and advancing the EU's geopolitical interests. It provides more flexibility and a focus on sustainable development in line with the EU's geopolitical ambitions.⁴² However, challenges remain in ensuring these frameworks prioritise genuine decolonisation efforts and avoid perpetuating dependencies in former colonies.

³⁷ Nora Fisher-Onar and Kalypso Nicolaidis, "The Decentering Agenda: A Post-Colonial Approach to EU External Action*," <https://kalypsonicolaidis.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Chapter-15-Fisher-Onar-and-Nicolaidis-final-10.8.pdf>, 2021

³⁸ Christiane Kliemann and Jan Orbie, "(UN)Learning EU Development Policy through Post-Colonial Lenses," *Debating Development Research*, September 3, 2022, <https://www.developmentresearch.eu/?p=1144>.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ "Global Europe: Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument," European Commission, accessed December 1, 2024, https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/global-europe-neighbourhood-development-and-international-cooperation-instrument_en.

⁴¹ "Policy Coherence for Development," International Partnerships, accessed December 1, 2024, https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/european-development-policy/policy-coherence-development_en.

⁴² "Africa and the EU," EEAS, accessed December 1, 2024, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/africa-and-eu_en#:~:text=The%20Africa%20EU%20Partnership%20is.political%20partner%20at%20continental%20level.

The EU's post-colonial engagement, through frameworks like the EU-Africa Strategy and Policy Coherence for Development (PCD), has been met with **significant controversy, particularly regarding power imbalances and the persistence of neo-colonial dynamics**. The 2020 EU-Africa Strategy emphasises mutual benefits, but critics argue it still prioritises European economic and geopolitical interests, perpetuating historical inequalities. While the **strategy focuses on trade, infrastructure, and security, it often overlooks the need to address systemic imbalances in economic development, leaving African nations vulnerable to exploitation**.⁴³ Similarly, the Cotonou Agreement and its successor, the Post-Cotonou Agreement, have been criticised for **maintaining European dominance over former colonies under the guise of partnership** rather than empowering these nations to achieve genuine autonomy and self-determination. Despite efforts to reform the Global Europe framework, critics argue that these agreements favour European interests, reinforcing neo-colonial structures in trade and governance.⁴⁴

Another critical issue with the EU's approach is the effectiveness of PCD, which aims to ensure that EU policies do not undermine global development goals. However, the **lack of enforceable mechanisms to hold EU member states accountable** for policies that impact the so-called Global Majority has led to scepticism about its actual impact. For example, EU trade agreements often benefit European industries at the expense of local economies in former colonies. These inconsistencies between the EU's development objectives and economic actions highlight the challenges in achieving true postcolonial justice. While the EU aims for coherence in development, critics argue that it often falls short in addressing the enduring legacies of colonialism and the systemic inequalities that continue to affect former colonies.⁴⁵

IV. United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII)

The **UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII)**, established in 2000 by the United Nations Economic and Social Council, is a crucial advisory body that addresses the specific concerns and rights of Indigenous peoples globally. Its mandate is to provide expert advice on Indigenous issues, focusing on human rights, development, culture, and the environment.⁴⁶ The Forum convenes annually to discuss these issues and their outcomes and inform UN policies and frameworks. Indigenous groups have utilised the UNPFII as a platform to amplify their voices, particularly in advocating for the implementation of the **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)**.⁴⁷ This body plays a role in fostering international solidarity and guiding the development of more inclusive policies for Indigenous communities across the globe.⁴⁸ Although widely endorsed, UNDRIP's implementation has still been inconsistent, with some governments failing to integrate its principles into national law.⁴⁹

⁴³ Nora Fisher-Onar and Kalypso Nicolaïdis. *Op. cit.*

⁴⁴ Christiane Kliemann and Jan Orbie. *Op. cit.*

⁴⁵ "Policy Coherence for Development." *Op. cit.*

⁴⁶ "United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (Unpfii) | Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD)," United Nations, accessed December 1, 2024, <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/indigenous-peoples/unpfii>.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Joshua Cooper, "How to Maximize Your Effectiveness after the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues," *Cultural*

⁴⁹ *Survival*, May 17, 2015, <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/how-maximize-your-effectiveness-after-united-nations>.

One of the critical roles of the UNPFII is to raise awareness about the intersection of climate change and Indigenous rights. Indigenous communities, who often live in vulnerable environments, are disproportionately affected by climate change. The UNPFII has highlighted the role of traditional knowledge and Indigenous stewardship in environmental conservation and climate resilience. In its studies and reports, the Forum emphasises the importance of **integrating Indigenous knowledge into climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies**, ensuring Indigenous peoples are recognised for their contributions and included in decision-making processes regarding environmental policies.⁵⁰ This focus on climate change is critical as it underscores the need for global frameworks to support Indigenous communities in mitigating environmental impacts, which are increasingly recognised by international bodies like the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

However, despite its successes, the UNPFII has faced criticism regarding its effectiveness in securing concrete outcomes. The **UNPFII's limited power to enforce the implementation of its recommendations despite its influential advisory role.** While the Forum provides a critical platform for discussing Indigenous rights, including **climate change and cultural preservation**, its effectiveness in securing tangible outcomes is often questioned. Furthermore, although the Forum successfully raises awareness and fosters international solidarity, critics argue that many Indigenous communities continue to face violations of their rights due to the lack of enforcement mechanisms.^{51 52} Lastly, the **UNPFII's dependency on member states for funding and support** has led to concerns about its ability to advocate effectively for marginalised communities, as political pressures and competing national interests often influence the forum's agenda and impact.⁵³ These limitations underscore the challenge of translating international recommendations into meaningful, binding actions that improve the lives of Indigenous peoples.

V. Decolonising Global Health Initiatives

Decolonising global health is an urgent and transformative movement aimed at addressing the inequities that have shaped global health systems over centuries. One of the **core principles of decolonising global health is the recognition and integration of Indigenous and local knowledge.** Many health interventions from the so-called Global North have ignored or dismissed traditional practices and systems that have existed for centuries in Indigenous communities. Especially, when these practices could be effective in addressing contemporary challenges in health care. This oversight often leads to culturally inappropriate solutions that fail to address these communities' real needs. The **Lancet Global Health Commission** and organisations like **Global Health 50/50** emphasise the importance of **incorporating Indigenous knowledge in developing health strategies**, particularly in areas like maternal health, infectious disease management, and environmental health.^{54 55} This shift involves recognising cultural competencies as central to effective health care, ensuring that interventions are context-specific and rooted in the values and traditions of the targeted populations.

⁵⁰ "Outcome Document of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples," Outcome Document of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples | Indian Law Resource Center, accessed December 13, 2024, <https://indianlaw.org/wcjp/outcome-document-world-conference-indigenous-peoples>.

⁵¹ "Home," Global Indigenous Youth Caucus, accessed December 1, 2024, <https://www.globalindigenouyouthcaucus.org/>.

⁵² "Climate Change for Indigenous Peoples." *Op. cit.*

⁵³ Joshua Cooper. *Op. cit.*

⁵⁴ "Gender and Global Health - Global Health 50/50," Global Health 50/50, accessed December 1, 2024, <https://globalhealth5050.org/gender-and-global-health/>.

⁵⁵ "The Lancet Global Health Hub," The Lancet Global Health, accessed November 30, 2024, <https://www.thelancet.com/global-health>.

A critical component of decolonising global health is addressing **historical injustices** that have perpetuated health disparities. The **legacy of colonialism** left African, Indigenous, and other marginalised communities with disproportionately high disease burdens and lower access to healthcare services. Global health initiatives must address the symptoms of these inequalities and the underlying structural factors, including **economic exploitation and social exclusion**.⁵⁶ The decolonisation of global health includes a concerted effort to **redistribute resources** and **prioritise equitable access to healthcare**, especially in the wake of global crises like the COVID-19 pandemic and the climate crisis. Furthermore, as health systems across the world continue to be stretched, it is crucial to **reshape global health narratives and promote resilient systems that are responsive to the needs of the populations they serve**, particularly the most marginalised.^{57 58}

One of the major controversies surrounding the decolonisation of global health initiatives is the ongoing power imbalance between the so-called Global Majority and so-called Global North in shaping global health policies and interventions. Critics argue that, despite efforts to decentralise and promote local leadership, **global health governance remains predominantly controlled by institutions based in the so-called Global North**, such as the World Health Organization and the World Bank.^{59 60} While pivotal in responding to health crises, these organisations have been **accused of perpetuating neocolonial dynamics**, where policies often favour the interests of wealthier nations- leaving the so-called Global Majority with limited decision-making power. This is compounded by the fact that **many global health programmes still operate under top-down models**, where countries in the so-called Global Majority are expected to implement policies designed without sufficient consultation or respect for local needs and cultural practices.^{61 62} Additionally, critics point out that the **so-called Global Majority institutions' financial and logistical support is often tied to the imposition of Western ideals, creating dependency rather than fostering self-sustaining health systems**.^{63 64} These ongoing power dynamics hinder the true decolonisation of global health, as local expertise and Indigenous knowledge are often sidelined in favour of external, so-called Western-driven solutions.

⁵⁶ David McCoy et al., "Developing an Agenda for the Decolonization of Global Health," *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*, February 1, 2024, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10835633/>.

⁵⁷ Global Health Review. (2022). *Decolonizing global health: Moving from theory to practice*. *Global Health Review*. Retrieved from <https://ghrp.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s41256-022-00237-3>

⁵⁸ Xiaoxiao Kwete et al., "Decolonizing Global Health: What Should Be the Target of This Movement and Where Does It Lead Us? - Global Health Research and Policy," *BioMed Central*, January 24, 2022, <https://ghrp.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s41256-022-00237-3>.

⁵⁹ "Gender and Global Health – Global Health 50/50." Op. cit.

⁶⁰ Xiaoxiao Kwete et al. Op. cit.

⁶¹ "The Lancet Global Health Hub." Op. cit.

⁶² "Decolonize Global Health," Decolonize Global Health, accessed November 30, 2024, <https://decolonizeglobalhealth.org/>.

⁶³ "Decolonize Global Health, Harvard Global Health Institute, accessed November 30, 2024, <https://globalhealth.harvard.edu>.

⁶⁴ "Decolonization health systems in Africa", World Health Organization - Africa, accessed November 30, 2024, <https://www.afro.who.int>



KEY TAKEAWAYS

Decolonisation involves *reclaiming sovereignty from colonial powers, dismantling imperial structures, and addressing political, cultural, and economic dependencies.*

It includes both the withdrawal of colonial structures and the reshaping of narratives (decoloniality).

Modern decolonisation began post-WWII, driven by *anti-colonial movements, weakened European powers, and the rise of international organisations* like the UN.

Self-determination became a *key legal principle*, though its interpretation remains contested.

Decolonisation is not just about political independence but also about *dismantling colonial hierarchies* in governance, education, and resource distribution *to achieve true autonomy and justice.*

Youth in the Global Majority are *challenging traditional power structures*, advocating for indigenous knowledge, economic justice, and environmental sustainability, *reshaping post-colonial identities.*

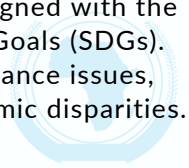
UN Special Committee on Decolonisation (C-24)

Established in 1961, it monitors the implementation of decolonisation efforts, focusing on 17 Non-Self-Governing Territories. However, it faces challenges in addressing modern colonialism and geopolitical influences.



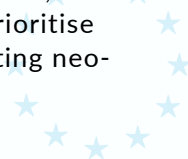
African Union's Agenda 2063

Strategic framework aiming to transform Africa into a prosperous, integrated, and peaceful region by 2063, aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Challenges include governance issues, corruption, and socio-economic disparities.



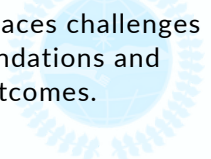
EU's Post-Colonial Engagement

The EU's Policy Coherence for Development (PCD) and EU-Africa Strategy aim to address historical inequalities and promote sustainable development. However, critics argue these policies often prioritise European interests, perpetuating neo-colonial dynamics.



UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII)

Established in 2000, it addresses Indigenous rights, focusing on human rights, development, culture, and the environment. Despite its advisory role, it faces challenges in enforcing its recommendations and securing tangible outcomes.





KEY TAKEAWAYS

The **Decolonising Global Health movement** seeks to *address historical injustices and health disparities* by integrating Indigenous knowledge and promoting equitable access to healthcare. However, *global health governance remains dominated by institutions in the Global North, perpetuating neocolonial dynamics*.

Key decolonisation challenges include *power imbalances* in funding, exploitation of resources, marginalisation of local voices, cultural hegemony, lack of representation, and resistance to structural reform. *Tokenistic localisation and operational inefficiencies further hinder progress*.

Youth are *central to reshaping post-colonial identities* and advocating for sustainable, locally rooted solutions, though *they often face exclusion* from decision-making processes and funding mechanisms.



Credits: Kelly on Pexels

1.3 Current Gaps and Challenges in Decolonisation through Our Lens

Despite policy efforts, **decolonisation strategies continue to face substantial challenges in fully decolonising its political, economic, and social systems.** Remnants of colonial power dynamics persist in governance, education, and resource distribution.⁶⁵ Key gaps in decolonising practices include power imbalances in funding, exploitation of resources, marginalisation of local voices, and the perpetuation of cultural hegemony. Further, the lack of representation in stakeholder initiatives, resistance to structural reform, tokenistic localisation, and operational inefficiencies continue to exacerbate current colonial legacies.



ECONOMIC CHALLENGES

Power Imbalances in Funding: Although there is access to funding, we as youth at YTN, an international registered NGO, are often excluded from actually acquiring available funds due to limiting and rigid funding requirements. Funding systems within international aid often reinforce colonial hierarchies by centralising decision-making power in donor countries, leaving recipient nations, especially those with a larger youth bulge, dependent and without meaningful agency in determining priorities.⁶⁶ This dynamic sidelines localised development strategies and perpetuates inequality, as resources are allocated based on donor-driven agendas rather than the actual needs of communities.⁶⁷

Exploitation of Resources: Many decolonisation efforts are undermined by neo-colonial resource extraction models, where so-called Global Majority nations provide raw materials to so-called Global North economies, perpetuating economic dependency.⁶⁸ The lack of adequate and youth-accessible mechanisms to ensure equitable distribution of resource benefits exacerbates systemic inequities and stifles sustainable development in the so-called Global Majority.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Tuck, Eve, and K. Wayne Yang. 2012. "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1 (1): 1–40.

⁶⁶ Mbembe, Achille. 2017. *Critique of Black Reason*. Translated by Laurent Dubois. Duke University Press.

⁶⁷ Asante, Serwah. 2023. "Organising towards a Practice of Decoloniality, Refugee/IDP Leadership, and Power Redistribution in Humanitarian Aid: Experiences from inside the International Humanitarian Aid Sector." *Humanitarian Practice Network*. June 6, 2023. <https://odihpn.org/publication/organising-towards-a-practice-of-decoloniality-refugee-idp-leadership-and-power-redistribution-in-humanitarian-aid-experiences-from-inside-the-international-humanitarian-aid-sector/>.

⁶⁸ Aly, Heba. 2022. "Ten Efforts to Decolonise Aid." *Thenewhumanitarian*, August 12, 2022. <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/feature/2022/08/12/10-efforts-to-decolonise-aid>.

⁶⁹ Rejali, Saman. 2020. "Race, Equity, and Neo-Colonial Legacies: Identifying Paths Forward for Principled Humanitarian Action." *Humanitarian Law & Policy Blog*. July 16, 2020. <https://blogs.icrc.org/law-and-policy/2020/07/16/race-equity-neo-colonial-legacies-humanitarian/>.



SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CHALLENGES

Marginalisation of Local Voices: Despite calls for localisation efforts to involve youth, the perspectives of local actors and youth actors are often dismissed in favour of international experts, diminishing the relevance and effectiveness of decolonising initiatives.⁷⁰ This exclusion perpetuates top-down practices ignoring the lived experiences and grassroots knowledge of affected communities.⁷¹

Cultural Hegemony: Cultural hegemony manifests as a barrier to decolonisation by imposing Western values as universally applicable.⁷² Dominant cultural narratives and frameworks within humanitarian and development sectors overshadow indigenous knowledge systems, perpetuating Eurocentric solutions that fail to address local complexities.⁷³



POLITICAL CHALLENGES

Gaps in Our Representation: Political systems in global governance lack equitable representation of youth in general, but especially voices of those from the so-called Global Majority. This results in policies that fail to address their unique challenges.⁷⁴ The tokenistic inclusion of Global Majority leaders reinforces structural inequalities rather than challenging them.⁷⁵

Lack of Structural Reform: Many decolonisation policies are superficial without an actionable methodology for monitoring and evaluation, failing to dismantle entrenched power structures within global institutions. Therefore, the cycle of unequal access to political representation for us as youth remains. This gap hinders transformative change and perpetuates a dependency relationship in global geopolitical dynamics.

⁷⁰ Ringo Project. 2021. "Transformation in the Aid and Development Sector Decolonising Aid." Centre for Humanitarian Leadership. <https://www.centreforhumanitarianleadership.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Decolonising-Aid.pdf>.

⁷¹ Steinberg (2020).

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Asante, Serwah. *Op. cit.*

⁷⁴ Steinberg (2020).

⁷⁵ Asante, Serwah. *Op. cit.*



SOCIO-ECONOMIC GAPS

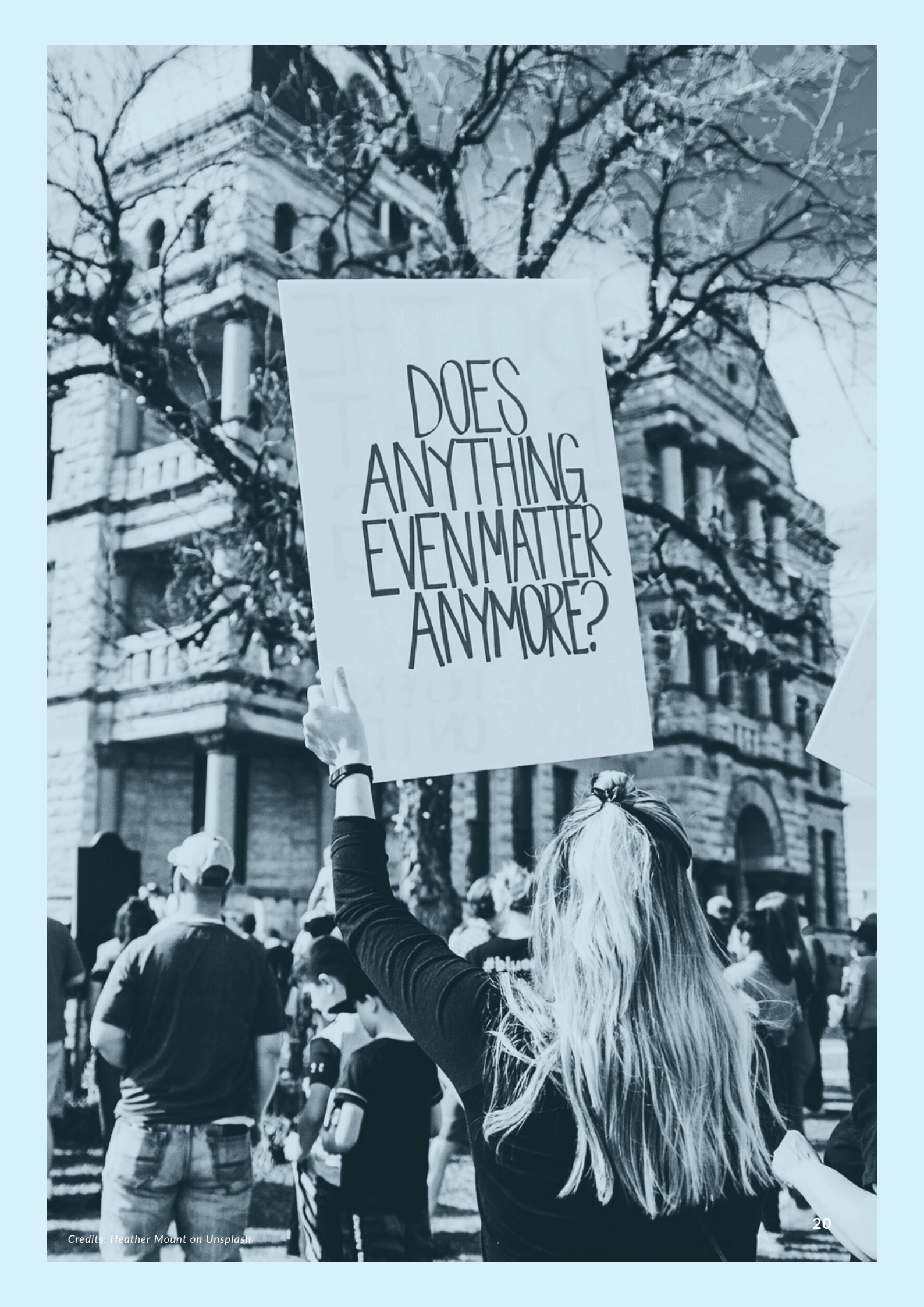
Tokenistic Localisation of our Inclusion: Efforts to localise aid result in symbolic gestures rather than substantive measures that facilitate equitable redistribution of power and resources, reducing youth to passive beneficiaries rather than recognising them as active agents of change. The purpose is for funding organisations to retain significant control over decision-making processes.⁷⁶ These practices fail to empower local actors, undermining the principles of effective decolonisation.

Operational Inefficiencies: Bureaucratic inefficiencies and lack of accountability in aid mechanisms create significant barriers to effective decolonisation, as resources are misallocated, and the needs of communities, and us, remain unmet.⁷⁷ Such inefficiencies disproportionately impact marginalised communities, exacerbating socio-economic disparities.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Mallard, G, M Galvin, and D Eggel. 2021. "Global Challenges - Decolonisation: A Past That Keeps Questioning Us." Global Challenges. 2021. <https://globalchallenges.ch/issue/10/decolonisation-the-many-facets-of-an-ongoing-struggle/>.

⁷⁷ Council on Foreign Relations. 2023. "How Did Decolonization Reshape the World?" CFR Education from the Council on Foreign Relations. February 14, 2023. <https://education.cfr.org/learn/reading/how-did-decolonization-reshape-world>.

⁷⁸ Hasche, Lilli. 2024. "Decolonization through Decolonial Reforming." Verfassungsblog, April. <https://doi.org/10.59704/c42aa5bdcc99d510>.



DOES
ANYTHING
EVEN MATTER
ANYMORE?

2. Combining Current Decolonisation Practices and the UN Youth, Peace and Security Agenda

This section provides an overview of the Youth Peace and Security (YPS) Agenda encouraging youth to be agents of change, briefly summarising and highlighting key achievements in decolonisation under the YPS framework.

2.1 Overview: The Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda

The **UN Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) Agenda** emerged as a transformative framework advocating for the essential role of young people in peace and security processes worldwide. Following substantial advocacy from over 11,000 young people across more than 110 countries, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 2250 in 2015.⁷⁹ This landmark resolution formally recognised youth as critical contributors to international peace and security, putting forward five core pillars—participation, protection, prevention, partnerships, and reintegration—as focal points for action.⁸⁰ The YPS Agenda emphasises the importance of granting young people meaningful influence at all decision-making levels, encouraging mechanisms that allow youth voices to shape peace processes more substantively.⁸¹ By recognising young people's unique agency, the YPS Agenda aims to dismantle stereotypes of youth as a homogeneous group and instead highlights their diverse roles in building lasting peace. Overall, it represents a significant step within the broader UN peacebuilding efforts towards inclusivity, alongside complementary frameworks like the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda, which has influenced a more comprehensive approach to including traditionally marginalised voices in peacebuilding efforts.

Key Aspects of UNSCR 2250:

Participation

A cornerstone of the YPS Agenda, participation emphasises the active involvement of young people in decision-making processes, particularly in areas directly related to peace and security. This includes **engagement in decisions at the local, national, and international levels**. Importantly, it advocates for youth inclusion across various fields of governance, including peace processes, electoral participation, policy formulation, and justice systems.

Protection

This pillar is focused on **safeguarding young people from the impacts of conflict, including violence, exploitation, recruitment into armed groups, and displacement**. It requires robust legal frameworks that ensure their safety, access to basic services, and their rights to be respected in both conflict and post-conflict contexts.

⁷⁹ United Nations, "Youth, Peace and Security | PEACEBUILDING," www.un.org, 2022, <https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/policy-issues-and-partnerships/policy/youth>.

⁸⁰ UNSC, "Resolution 2250 (2015)," 2015, <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n15/413/06/pdf/n1541306.pdf>.

⁸¹ Helen Berents and Caitlin Mollica, "Reciprocal Institutional Visibility: Youth, Peace and Security and 'Inclusive' Agendas at the United Nations," *Cooperation and Conflict* 57, no. 1 (April 6, 2021): 001083672110078, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00108367211007873>.

⁸² Marisa O Ensor, *Securitizing Youth: Young People's Roles in the Global Peace and Security Agenda* (Rutgers University Press, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2v55hp9>.

Prevention

Prevention involves the proactive engagement of youth in identifying and addressing the root causes of conflict. Strategies include **youth-led peacebuilding initiatives, conflict resolution training, and the creation of youth networks** advocating for non-violent solutions to conflicts.

Partnerships

This pillar calls for **stronger partnerships between governments, International Organisations, civil society, and youth organisations**. These partnerships help create fora where young people's perspectives are valued and acted upon. At Youth Transforming Narratives (YTN), we foster these connections by leveraging our global network to provide young professionals and leaders with platforms and collaborative opportunities to address peace and security challenges effectively.

Disengagement and Reintegration

For youth who have been involved in armed conflict, the YPS Agenda stresses the importance of reintegration programmes that help them transition back into society. This includes **providing access to education, vocational training, psychological support, and employment opportunities**.⁸³

Since the adoption of UNSCR 2250, YPS has been strengthened through subsequent resolutions, including UNSCR 2419 (2018) and UNSCR 2535 (2020). These resolutions have institutionalised youth participation in peacebuilding by urging member states to integrate youth perspectives into policymaking, to establish youth advisory boards, and develop actionable strategies to enhance youth involvement in governance and conflict resolution processes.

2.2 Youth as Agents of Change and Decolonisation in Peacebuilding

One of the **key strengths of the YPS Agenda is its recognition that youth are not passive actors but rather powerful agents of change in peacebuilding processes**. This is particularly significant in post-colonial societies, where youth populations often face significant challenges due to the legacies of colonisation, conflict, and marginalisation. Historically, young people—especially those from the so-called Global Majority—have been excluded from leadership roles and decision-making processes, even though they are often disproportionately affected by conflict, violence, and instability.

⁸³ UNSC, "Resolution 2250 (2015)," 2015, <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n15/413/06/pdf/n1541306.pdf>.

YPS actively challenges traditional views that frame youth solely as potential sources of instability and violence, a perspective that has often marginalised their contributions.⁸⁴ By reframing youth and recognising their potential, YPS seeks to dismantle colonial-era power dynamics that have historically marginalised young people from participating in formal political and social institutions. For instance, in countries where youth make up a significant proportion of the population, like South Sudan, YPS repositions youth as key peacebuilders with unique insights and solutions to the challenges their communities face, rather than threats or potential instigators of violence.⁸⁵

In the context of YPS, youth-led decolonisation efforts are thus aimed at:

Challenging structural inequities

As young people, particularly in the so-called Global Majority, we have been at the forefront of movements that challenge colonial legacies, including unequal access to resources, historical erasure, and the marginalisation of indigenous cultures and knowledge.⁸⁶ **In Ireland, initiatives like the Young Irish Filmmakers empower us as youth to document and preserve Irish culture and language, addressing colonial-era suppression of their heritage.**⁸⁷ YPS supports these movements by incentivising platforms for us young people to engage in debates around decolonial topics and challenge long-standing inequalities.⁸⁸

Building localised solutions

YPS promotes youth-led, locally-driven peacebuilding initiatives grounded in their experiences and contexts. In post-conflict societies, youth are actively engaging in dialogue, mediation, and grassroots advocacy, addressing the specific needs and aspirations of their communities. These efforts shift away from top-down approaches, which often overlook local realities and historical grievances. For instance, **in Cyprus, bi-communal youth projects like the Cyprus Friendship Programme bring Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot youth together to foster dialogue and understanding.**⁸⁹ By grounding their efforts in shared experiences, the program has enabled youth to play a central role in localised peacebuilding, promoting coexistence and reconciliation in a context shaped by decades of division.

⁸⁴ Ricardo Santos and Mario Novelli, "The Effect of the Ebola Crisis on the Education System's Contribution to Post-Conflict Sustainable Peacebuilding in Liberia" (The Research Consortium on Education and Peacebuilding, 2017).

⁸⁵ UNDP, "Why Does the Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda Matter to Young People of South Sudan? | United Nations Development Programme," UNDP, n.d., <https://www.undp.org/south-sudan/why-does-youth-peace-and-security-agenda-matter-young-people-south-sudan>.

⁸⁶ Heike Becker, "'Youth Speaking Truth to Power': Intersectional Decolonial Activism in Namibia," *Dialectical Anthropology* 47, no. 1 (December 2, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10624-022-09678-1>.

⁸⁷ Young Irish Film makers, "About Us – YIFM," Yifm.com, 2023, <https://yifm.com/about-us-2/>.

⁸⁸ Arab Reform Initiative and Folke, "Youth, Peace, and Security in Iraq: Operationalizing Youth Peacebuilding Priorities in Practice," Arab Reform Initiative (Arab Reform Initiative, January 7, 2022), <https://www.arab-reform.net/publication/youth-peace-and-security-in-iraq-operationalizing-youth-peacebuilding-priorities-in-practice/>.

⁸⁹ CFP, "Creating Friendships for Peace – People UNITED in Countries Divided," CFP, n.d., <https://friendships4peace.org/>.



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Challenging externally imposed peace processes

Historically, peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction have been largely driven by foreign governments and international organisations. Therefore, the policies often overlook our needs and perspectives as local youth. Through YPS, we are positioned as active agents of change, with participation in peace talks and policy development ensuring that the solutions put in place are relevant and sustainable for local communities.⁹⁰ For example, the peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction of Liberia were heavily influenced by international actors, such as the United Nations (UN) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), along with key foreign governments like the United States. These actors played a central role in brokering the peace deal and shaping the rebuilding of Liberia after the war. However, local voices, especially those of youth, were often underrepresented during the peace negotiations and in the formulation of post-conflict policies. Despite this, **youth-led movements in Liberia played a critical role in shaping the post-conflict landscape, advocating for better inclusion in decision-making processes, particularly around issues such as education, employment, and political participation.**⁹¹

Advocating for inclusive governance

As youth we often face barriers to political participation due to systemic exclusion from formal decision-making structures, especially in post-colonial societies. YPS advocates for inclusive governance frameworks ensuring youth from all backgrounds have a seat at the table, particularly those from rural areas, indigenous groups, and marginalised communities. **In Romania, groups like Funky Citizens have successfully promoted participatory governance by lobbying for transparency and accountability in decision-making.** By advocating for youth participation in budgetary planning and local governance, they ensure that policies reflect the needs of diverse communities, including rural and marginalised youth populations.⁹²

Overall, YPS seeks to empower young people by recognising their agency and giving them the tools and platforms to contribute meaningfully to peacebuilding efforts. In doing so, it positions youth as leaders, innovators, and critical agents of change who can help create a more inclusive, decolonial future.

⁹⁰ Restless Development, "Global Strategy 2022-2030," 2022, <https://restlessdevelopment.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Restless-Development-global-strategy.pdf>.

⁹¹ Gberie, L. (2005). "The End of the Civil War in Liberia." *Africa Today*, 51(1), 19-39.

⁹² UNDP (2004). "The Role of Youth in Peacebuilding: A Case Study of Liberia". United Nations Development Programme, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26382621>.



YOUTH-LED PEACEBUILDING IN IRAQ: A POST-CONFLICT EXAMPLE

In Iraq, the UN Youth Peace and Security Agenda has gained significant momentum in the country since the adoption of UNSCR 2250 in 2015. The Ministry of Youth and Sports (MOYS) has played a central role in raising awareness and pushing for its operationalisation, especially in the aftermath of the ISIS conflict, where the impact on youth was profound.⁹³ The formation of the YPS Coalition in December 2020 brought together youth peacebuilders, NGOs, government officials, and international stakeholders to advance the Agenda. Youth autonomy was at the heart of the Coalition's Terms of Reference and a five-year program, which encouraged young people to lead initiatives while benefiting from MOYS advisory support and funding.⁹⁴

This commitment to youth-led initiatives has taken shape through various programmes, such as youth-led community centres in conflict-affected areas. These centres have become instrumental in fostering local peace and social cohesion. They acted as safe spaces for young people to engage in capacity building, psychological support, and community dialogue.⁹⁵ This approach ensured youth were not merely beneficiaries of peace efforts but active participants in shaping the rebuilding of their communities. It has fostered a greater sense of local ownership and responsibility, a critical element for long-term (decolonial) peacebuilding.⁹⁶

Iraq's adoption of YPS has a broader regional dimension, aligning with the Arab Strategy for Youth, Peace, and Security (2023–2028). Developed under Resolution No. 1010 by the Council of Arab Ministers of Youth and Sports in May 2022, this strategy promotes youth empowerment and policymaking in the MENA region. Collaborations with entities like the Arab League and UNFPA aim to influence countries such as Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia, fostering the establishment of national YPS coalitions across the region.⁹⁷

This collective effort represents a critical shift in the way youth are engaged in peacebuilding processes, moving away from traditional top-down approaches and ensuring that young people have the resources, platforms, and autonomy to lead their own recovery and development initiatives.

⁹³ Restless Development, "Global Strategy 2022-2030," 2022, <https://restlessdevelopment.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Restless-Development-global-strategy.pdf>.

⁹⁴ Gberie, L. (2005). "The End of the Civil War in Liberia." *Africa Today*, 51(1), 19–39. UNDP (2004). "The Role of Youth in Peacebuilding: A Case Study of Liberia."

⁹⁵ United Nations Development Programme, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26382621>.

⁹⁶ UNFPA, "The Arab Strategy for Youth, Peace and Security," 2023, <https://arabstates.unfpa.org/en/publications/arab-strategy-youth-peace-and-security-2023-2028>.

2.3 Current Gaps and Challenges through Our Lens

Despite some progress made under the YPS framework, we identified significant persisting challenges:

Lack of Funding

Many youth organisations rely on short-term donor support, limiting their ability to plan long-term initiatives. Especially in post-conflict or low-resource settings. For example, in Iraq, youth-led reconciliation efforts in Mosul were heavily dependent on external funding, which ceased when donor support ended, stalling progress. This created dependency on donors, particularly from the so-called Global North, often forces youth movements to align with external agendas, undermining our local ownership and decolonisation efforts.⁹⁸

Exclusion from Decision-Making

We as youth, and particularly those of us who are from marginalised communities, continue to face exclusion from meaningful political decision-making in peacebuilding. Often relegated to advisory roles with little decision-making power, we struggle to influence policies which directly impact our lives. Such exclusions limit youth-led movements' potential to bring about sustainable, locally owned peacebuilding reforms.⁹⁹

Systemic Barriers

In many post-colonial societies, youth movements face systemic barriers that prevent them from achieving their full potential. These barriers include discriminatory laws, lack of access to education and employment, and weak civil society infrastructures. Even when we are involved in peacebuilding, these structural challenges can limit our effectiveness. These systemic issues hinder our ability within youth-led movements to achieve the decolonised peacebuilding processes envisioned under the YPS framework.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ UNFPA, "The Arab Strategy for Youth, Peace and Security," 2023, <https://arabstates.unfpa.org/en/publications/arab-strategy-youth-peace-and-security-2023-2028>.

⁹⁸ Kristin Perry and Khogir Wirya, "OUTCOME HARVESTING EVALUATION REPORT - Youth Community of Practice in Peacebuilding" (MERI, July 2020), https://documents.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Youth-Community-of-Practice-in-Peacebuilding_Outcome-Harvesting-Report-Iraq.pdf.

⁹⁹ Politically Speaking, "Youth Still Largely Excluded from Decision-Making, despite Key Role in Building Sustainable Peace," Medium, April 18, 2024, <https://dppa.medium.com/youth-still-largely-excluded-from-decision-making-despite-key-role-in-building-sustainable-peace-231d9dd62de9>.

¹⁰⁰ Kristin Perry and Khogir Wirya. *Op. cit.*



KEY TAKEAWAYS

Established through UNSCR 2250 (2015), the **YPS Agenda** recognises youth as key contributors to peace and security. It focuses on five pillars: **participation, protection, prevention, partnerships, and reintegration**. The agenda challenges stereotypes of youth as threats, instead highlighting their role as agents of change, especially in post-colonial societies.

Youth are reframed as active peacebuilders, challenging colonial legacies and advocating for inclusive governance. They address structural inequities, promote localised solutions, and reshape peacebuilding to reflect their communities' needs.



KEY PILLARS OF YPS



Participation: Youth involvement in decision-making.



Protection: Safeguarding youth from violence and exploitation.



Prevention: Youth-led initiatives to address conflict root causes.



Partnerships: Collaboration between governments, organisations, and youth.

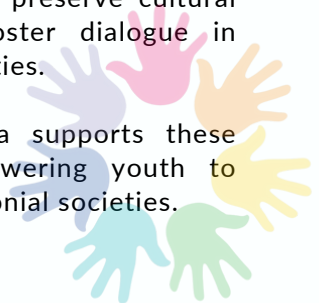


Reintegration: Support for youth transitioning out of conflict.

YOUTH-LED DECOLONISATION EFFORTS

Youth lead efforts to challenge colonial legacies, preserve cultural heritage, and foster dialogue in divided communities.

The YPS Agenda supports these initiatives, empowering youth to reshape post-colonial societies.



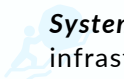
CHALLENGES OF YPS



Lack of Funding: Short-term donor support limits long-term planning.



Exclusion from Decision-Making: Youth, especially from marginalised groups, lack meaningful political influence.

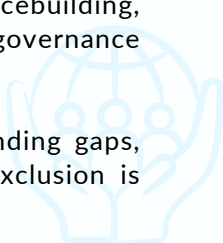


Systemic Barriers: Discriminatory laws and weak infrastructures hinder youth-led peacebuilding.

OVERALL IMPACT

The YPS Agenda empowers youth to lead decolonial peacebuilding, promoting inclusive governance and localised solutions.

However, addressing funding gaps, systemic barriers, and exclusion is crucial for its success.





3. Operational and Policy Coherence in Youth-Led Decolonisation Initiatives

This section provides a comprehensive analysis of the legal protections against colonisation in the so-called Global Majority and outlines the current challenges in synthesising implementation strategies tackling the linkages between decolonisation and Youth Peace and Security policies.

3.1 Overview: Legal Protections, Decolonisation, and Youth Engagement in Post-Colonial Challenges

Legal protections against colonisation in the so-called Global Majority, mainly through international frameworks like the **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)**, have provided vital mechanisms for addressing the historical injustices and ongoing effects of colonialism. These protections aim to secure the rights of Indigenous populations, protect their land, and support their self-determination. However, while these legal frameworks establish essential rights, the challenge lies in **effective implementation** at the national level, where legal systems and political contexts often need to align with international standards. Countries in the so-called Global Majority continue to struggle to enforce these protections, often due to **weak judicial systems, political resistance, or conflicting interests** between national governments and corporate or foreign entities seeking to exploit natural resources.¹⁰¹ The linkages between decolonisation efforts and the implementation of United Nations **Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) policies**¹⁰² illustrate the critical need for legal reforms that explicitly support the **engagement of marginalised communities**, especially youth, in post-colonial governance.

Synthesising implementation strategies that address **decolonisation and YPS** policies requires a holistic approach integrating legal protections with youth empowerment and active participation in decision-making processes. Legal and policy analysis can play a critical role in bridging the gap between decolonisation and YPS by ensuring that legal frameworks provide protections and actively **enable marginalised youth** to shape the policies that affect their lives. Challenges remain, such as the need for more infrastructure to support youth-led initiatives and the **fragmentation of policy approaches**, which can hinder comprehensive, integrated solutions. Tackling the linkage between decolonisation and YPS requires **multi-level governance**, where local, national, and international legal frameworks are harmonised to promote **youth participation** in post-colonial reconstruction, governance, and conflict prevention strategies.^{103 104} Through targeted legal reforms and strengthened policies, youth can become powerful agents of change in decolonisation processes, ensuring that the legacy of colonialism is addressed through active, inclusive governance.

¹⁰¹ "United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (Unpfii) | Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD)," United Nations, accessed December 1, 2024, <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/indigenous-peoples/unpfii>.

¹⁰² "Youth, Peace and Security | Peacebuilding," United Nations, accessed December 1, 2024, <https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/policy-issues-and-partnerships/policy/youth>.

¹⁰³ "Global Health 50/50," Global Health 50/50, accessed December 1, 2024, <https://globalhealth5050.org>.

¹⁰⁴ Poka Laenui, "Processes of Decolonization," San Jose State University, May 30, 2006, accessed December 12, 2024, <https://www.sjsu.edu/people/marcos.pizarro/courses/maestros/s0/Laenui.pdf>.



3.2 Decolonisation Efforts Legal Framework

The United Nations' decolonisation efforts are rooted in the principle of "equality of rights and self-determination of peoples" as outlined in Article 1(2) of the United Nations Charter. This principle is further supported by Chapters XI, XII, and XIII of the Charter, which focus on the interests of dependent peoples. Chapter XI sets forth the principles guiding decolonisation, while Chapter XII establishes the International Trusteeship Regime, and Chapter XIII creates the Trusteeship Council to oversee Trust Territories. These frameworks continue to shape the UN's commitment to decolonisation and the promotion of self-determination.¹⁰⁵

The **International Court of Justice (ICJ)** plays a crucial role in decolonisation by providing legal interpretations and advisory opinions on self-determination and the rights of peoples under colonial rule.¹⁰⁶ Notable cases include the advisory opinion on Western Sahara in 1975, where the ICJ emphasised the right to self-determination of the Sahrawi people, and the advisory opinion on the Chagos Archipelago in 2019,¹⁰⁷ which determined that the decolonisation of Mauritius was not lawfully completed. These cases highlight the ICJ's role in addressing historical injustices and supporting the decolonisation process by upholding international law and the principles of self-determination.

Although not directly having the mandate of focusing on decolonisation policies, the **International Criminal Court (ICC)** can serve to address the legacies of decolonisation by prosecuting individuals for crimes such as genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. The ICC's work is crucial in the context of decolonisation, as it seeks to provide justice for victims of atrocities rooted in colonial histories. Notable cases include the prosecution of individuals responsible for the 2007-2008 post-election violence in Kenya, highlighting the enduring impact of colonial violence and ethnic divisions. Another significant case is the ICC's involvement in the Central African Republic, where the court has prosecuted individuals for crimes committed during the country's civil conflict, which has roots in colonial-era divisions and exploitation. These cases underscore the ICC's role in addressing historical injustices and supporting the decolonisation process by upholding international law and the principles of justice and accountability.

¹⁰⁵ United Nations (n.d.). *Las Naciones Unidas y la descolonización*. <https://www.un.org/dppa/decolonization/es/about>.

¹⁰⁶ Zyberi, G (2010). Self-Determination Through the Lens of the International Court of Justice. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1622793.

¹⁰⁷ ICC (n.d.). *Legal Consequences of the Separation of the Chagos Archipelago from Mauritius in 1965*. <https://www.icj-cij.org/case/169>.

The **Inter-American system's** decolonisation efforts are grounded in the principle of “equality of rights and self-determination of peoples,” similar to the approach of the United Nations. The Charter of the Organization of American States (OAS) establishes the promotion of self-determination and independence of peoples as one of its core principles (Article 3). Additionally, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR Court) has also focused on this principle, particularly in protecting indigenous territories.



CASE STUDIES: MAYAGNA (SUMO) AWAS TINGNI COMMUNITY V. NICARAGUA (2001) & LHAKA HONHAT ASSOCIATION V. ARGENTINA (2020)

A landmark case in this context is the Case of the Mayagna (Sumo) Awas Tingni Community v. Nicaragua, decided in 2001. The Court found that Nicaragua had violated the rights of the Mayagna (Sumo) Awas Tingni Community by failing to recognise their communal property rights over their ancestral lands. The Court ordered Nicaragua to demarcate and title the community's lands, setting a significant precedent for the protection of indigenous territorial rights in the Americas. In a more recent case, the IACHR Court ruled in favour of the indigenous communities of the Lhaka Honhat Association in Argentina. The judgment, issued on February 6, 2020, determined that Argentina had violated the communal property rights, cultural identity, healthy environment, adequate food, and water rights of the indigenous communities due to ineffective state measures to halt activities harming these rights. The Court ordered the State to adopt reparative measures, including the demarcation and titling of indigenous lands and the implementation of policies to protect the cultural and environmental rights of the communities.

These cases underscore the ongoing struggle of indigenous peoples to reclaim and protect the integrity of their lands in the face of historical colonisation. The jurisprudence of the IACHR Court has been crucial in establishing standards for the protection of indigenous territorial rights, promoting justice and equity in the region. By reinforcing the principle of self-determination, these legal frameworks empower indigenous communities to assert their autonomy and preserve their cultural heritage, ensuring that their voices are heard and respected in the ongoing process of decolonisation.



Credits: Katrin Bolovtsova on Pexels

The **African human rights system**, through the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, plays a key role in decolonisation. The ACHPR emphasises the rights to self-determination (Article 20), development (Article 22), and cultural identity (Article 17). The African Commission promotes these rights, focusing on protecting indigenous peoples' rights. A notable case is Endorois Welfare Council v. Kenya, where the African Commission ruled in favour of the Endorois people's right to their ancestral land, setting a precedent for indigenous land rights in Africa.



CASE STUDY: ENDOROIS WELFARE COUNCIL V. KENYA (2010)

The Endorois Welfare Council v. Kenya case, decided in 2010, is a landmark decision by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. The case was brought by the Centre for Minority Rights Development (Kenya) and Minority Rights Group International on behalf of the Endorois Welfare Council.¹⁰⁸ The complaint alleged that the Kenyan government had violated the rights of the Endorois community by forcibly removing them from their ancestral lands around Lake Bogoria to create a game reserve for tourism without proper consultation or adequate compensation. The African Commission found that the Kenyan government had violated several rights under the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, including the rights to property (Article 14), to culture (Article 17), to the free disposition of natural resources (Article 21), and to development (Article 22). The Commission emphasised that the Endorois community's connection to their land was integral to their cultural and spiritual practices, and their displacement had severely disrupted their way of life.

This case set a significant precedent for indigenous land rights in Africa, highlighting the importance of legal frameworks in protecting the rights and self-determination of indigenous peoples. It underscored the need for governments to respect the cultural and spiritual connections that indigenous communities have with their ancestral lands and to ensure their participation in decisions affecting their livelihoods.

3.3 Policy Analysis of Decolonisation Efforts

The **United Nations Special Committee on Decolonisation (C-24)** plays a critical role in monitoring the progress of decolonisation efforts and advocating for the self-determination of Non-Self-Governing Territories. Through annual sessions, the Committee engages member states, international organisations, and civil society to ensure that the rights of Indigenous peoples and former colonies are upheld. While the C-24's work has been essential in raising awareness and providing policy guidance, its influence remains limited due to a lack of enforcement power. The Committee's inability to compel member states to act on its recommendations often undermines its impact, particularly in regions where decolonisation is stymied by political resistance and economic interests.¹⁰⁹ Despite these challenges, the C-24 remains a significant space for dialogue, pushing for stronger international legal frameworks to protect the rights of marginalised communities.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ African Human Rights Case Law Analyser (n.d.). Communication 276/03 - Centre for Minority Rights Development (Kenya) & Minority Rights Group (on behalf of Endorois Welfare Council) v. Kenya. <https://caselaw.ahrda.org/entity/qlw2i6u4vw8?page=1&file=15555005007057glq02av379.pdf> ESCR- Net (n.d.). Centre for Minority Rights Development (Kenya) and Minority Rights Group International on behalf of Endorois Welfare Council v. Kenya, 276/2003. <https://www.escri-net.org/caselaw/2010/centre-minority-rights-development-kenya-and-minority-rights-group-international-behalf/>

¹⁰⁹ "United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (Unpfii) | Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD)," United Nations, accessed December 1, 2024, <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/indigenous-peoples/unpfii>.

¹¹⁰ "Support to Non-Self-Governing Territories by the Specialized Agencies and International Institutions Associated with the United Nations," United Nations, July 16, 2024, <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/ltd/n24/201/38/pdf/n2420138.pdf>.

The **African Union's Agenda 2063** sets forth a comprehensive vision for Africa's development, seeking to transform the continent into a prosperous, integrated, and peaceful region. While Agenda 2063 focuses on fostering economic growth and political unity, it also addresses the deep-rooted effects of colonialism by advocating for African-led development initiatives and regional self-reliance. However, challenges persist in translating the agenda into tangible outcomes, particularly given the economic disparities between African countries and the persistent influence of former colonial powers.¹¹¹ The integration of decolonisation into the African Union's strategies is crucial. Yet, the effectiveness of this framework depends on addressing both internal governance issues and external geopolitical pressures that continue to limit Africa's autonomy.

The **United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII)** has been instrumental in bringing attention to the rights of Indigenous peoples globally, particularly in decolonisation. By providing policy advice and promoting the inclusion of Indigenous voices in global decision-making, the UNPFII has played a vital role in advancing Indigenous rights within international frameworks. However, its effectiveness is limited by the **lack of enforcement power**, which undermines its ability to push for meaningful legal reforms or compel governments to adopt its recommendations. The forum's advisory role continues to be essential, but it faces ongoing challenges in ensuring that its recommendations lead to tangible improvements in the lives of Indigenous peoples.^{112 113}

The **European Union's post-colonial engagement** has been shaped by policies that support sustainable development, economic cooperation, and good governance in former colonies, particularly through agreements like the **Cotonou Agreement** and the **Post-Cotonou Agreement**. These agreements are designed to foster equal partnerships with former colonies, particularly in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific. However, critics argue that the EU's post-colonial policies often perpetuate neo-colonial dynamics by prioritising its interests, particularly in trade and security, over the genuine development needs of these regions. Although the EU has made strides towards addressing historical inequalities, there are concerns that its policies may still reinforce dependency and limit the sovereignty of former colonies.^{114 115}

The **European Union (EU)** has been actively working on partnerships and initiatives in Latin America¹¹⁶ to promote shared values such as sustainable development, human rights, and democracy. While they do not contribute directly to decolonisation, these efforts focus on fostering equitable partnerships and reducing historical asymmetries in their relationships with the region. Key initiatives include the **Global Gateway investment strategy**, which aims to promote fair and green transitions, enhance digital connectivity, and tackle inequalities with a huge involvement of youth-leadership. Partnerships with sub-regional organisations, such as the **Andean Community and Mercosur**, aim to strengthen regulatory frameworks and expand cooperation in areas like human rights, environmental conservation, and trade. The EU also supports political dialogues and projects that address social and economic challenges while promoting democracy and rule of law.¹¹⁷

¹¹¹ "50th Anniversary Solemn Declaration." *Op.cit.*

¹¹² "Climate Change for Indigenous Peoples." *Op. cit.*

¹¹³ Joshua Cooper. *Op. cit.*

¹¹⁴ "Policy Coherence for Development." *Op. cit.*

¹¹⁵ Christiane Kliemann and Jan Orbie. *Op. cit.*

¹¹⁶ European Commission, "EU-Latin America and the Caribbean Flagship Projects for 2023" (European Commission, March 2023), <https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-05/EU-LAC-flagship-projects-for-2023-v05.pdf>.

¹¹⁷ Nolte, Dr. Detlef. 2023. "Detlef Nolte- Tions/Giga-Focus/Euro- Pean-Union-And-Latin-America-Re- Newing-Partnership-After-Drift-Ing-Apart." GIGA Focus 2 (January). <https://doi.org/10.57671/gTa-23022>.

During October 2024, the EU held the annual **Global Gateway Conference** open to participants of most countries to gather to understand the EU's efforts in prioritising youth and women's empowerment, sustainable infrastructure projects and providing education, skill-building and funding to local grassroots efforts. This conference provided a platform for different local youth activists to network and understand the available resources. **YTN members also took part in this two-day conference and learned about other facets of the Global Gateway Project including the EU-Latin America and Caribbean Digital Alliance, launched in 2023 and Horizon Europe, which funds collaborative research and innovation projects.**¹¹⁸

YOUNG EUROPEAN AMBASSADORS
STRONGER TOGETHER

The Young European Ambassadors (YEAs) are a non-political, voluntary communication and civic activism initiative, a network of proactive young people from the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries, the European Union and the United Kingdom, keen to connect, share and work together for a better future. We believe that the EU and the Eastern partner countries are **#strongertogether**. The YEAs' initiative was launched by the European Union in June 2016, when the first 100 young people were appointed as YEAs. There are currently more than 1100 YEAs with an active mandate.

WE AIM TO:

- Raise awareness about the European Union, its partnership and cooperation with the Eastern partner countries, and the impact on people's daily lives
- Make EU opportunities accessible to everyone, organising public diplomacy activities and empowering youth with specific focus on those less advantaged
- Strengthen civic activism at the community level and develop the sense of solidarity between young people
- Connect, share and learn from each other, and support young people's personal and professional growth

WHAT WE DO?

Our activities include:

- Awareness raising on social media and with local events
- Civic engagement actions
- Trainings, workshops, quizzes, contests, challenges and more
- School and university visits
- International, regional and local events focusing on youth participation and activism

RESULTS:

- More than 1,500 regional and in-country activities
- More than 2,300 young people young people have been involved in the YEAs initiative
- Activities have demonstrated a long-lasting impact on youth awareness of the EU, its cultural diversity and shared values
- YEA activities stimulate curiosity about EU-related information and EU-funded opportunities for citizens of the Eastern partner countries

What does it mean to be a Young European Ambassador?

"I believe that the one step we have to do as young people with ideas and aspirations, is to **find safe spaces to express them and make them heard**. Decision makers always say that they want more youth participation, no matter which part of the world one comes from and lives in. The EU NEIGHBOURS east Young European Ambassadors' initiative is an example of that, where youth from all over the world and especially the Eastern partner countries make their dreams and voices heard."

Despoina Panteli, GREECE

¹¹⁸ "New Agenda to Strengthen EU's Partnership with Latin America and the Caribbean." 2023. EU-CELAC. June 14, 2023. <https://www.eucelac-platform.eu/news-and-events/news/new-agenda-strengthen-eus-partnership-latin-america-and-caribbean>. <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://hdr.undp.org/content/human-development-report-2023-24&ved=2ahUKewilt7n9maSKAxXjVKQEH5FFCQGOQFnoECBQQAQ&usq=AOvVaw24LZwjHjyNIKNYNWuclhB>.



Credits: Sushil Nash on Unsplash

4. Youth Empowerment Partnerships for Decolonisation Initiatives

This section looks at how the donor community empower youth to work on decolonisation policies and develop impactful solutions to achieving decolonisation world-wide, and what youth have done to overcome current gaps and challenges in their programming.

4.1 Overview: Legal Protections, Decolonisation, and Youth Engagement in Post-Colonial Challenges

The **donor community plays a crucial role in empowering youth to lead decolonisation initiatives** by providing financial resources, capacity-building opportunities, and advocacy platforms. Beyond funding, donors foster youth-led initiatives by offering training in advocacy, policy analysis, and decolonisation frameworks while facilitating direct engagement with decision-makers. These efforts ensure young people transition from passive participants to active agents of systemic change, influencing local and global decolonisation agendas. By prioritising youth involvement in decision-making, donors help dismantle colonial legacies and reshape governance structures, paving the way for inclusive and equitable development across the so-called Global Majority.

Youth-led movements are pivotal in challenging colonial legacies. In regions of the so-called Global Majority, youth-led movements have become central to rethinking policies and advocating for social justice. International initiatives emphasise the need for youth to participate directly in the processes that affect their futures. For instance, **youth engagement in Rwanda has influenced significant policy shifts on issues** such as teen motherhood and child welfare, demonstrating the potential of youth-driven advocacy to advance social justice. By involving youth in these discussions, donor organisations and governments acknowledge the capacity of young people to lead and reshape governance in ways that prioritise long-term social justice and equality.

Despite the crucial role youth-led initiatives play in decolonisation movements, these face significant barriers such as bureaucratic hurdles, limited funding, and a lack of prioritisation within larger institutions. **The bureaucratic complexities youth organisations encounter—such as long application processes and rigid reporting requirements—can be particularly challenging for groups with fewer resources.** Moreover, many institutions still view youth-led initiatives as peripheral. This leads to underfunding and a lack of political will to integrate them into core governance frameworks. These challenges underscore the urgent need for more supportive and inclusive environments for youth to actively contribute to governance and policy-making processes. Creating such environments will ensure that youth are not only involved in decolonisation efforts but can drive them effectively.

To address these barriers, there is growing advocacy for the simplification of funding processes and institutionalising youth participation in decision-making, both of which would enhance the sustainability and impact of youth-led initiatives.

4.2 Youth-Led Initiatives with a Localised Perspective

I. The African Youth Union (AYU)

AYU is a Pan-African platform advocating for youth involvement in decolonisation processes across Africa. By promoting the recognition of traditional African systems and supporting self-determined development, AYU ensures youth voices are integral to shaping policies addressing the historical impacts of colonialism. Through lobbying, policy dialogues, and grassroots mobilisation, AYU amplifies youth-led advocacy for decolonisation on the continent.

For more information visit: <https://www.youthpolicy.org>

One remarkable initiative that aligns with the African Youth Union's mission is the Ignite African Youth Project, led by the Youth Café and funded by the European Union. The project is designed to empower young people, particularly women, to take active roles in shaping democratic processes. It achieves this through a blend of advocacy masterclasses, stakeholder needs assessments, and peer-learning events, all tailored to build the skills and confidence of young leaders. By fostering civic engagement and equipping youth with practical tools, this initiative sets a strong example of how youth-focused organisations are driving meaningful democratic change across Africa.

For more information visit: <https://www.theyouthcafe.com/>

II. The Latin American Youth Forum (FOJAL)

The Latin American Youth Forum, or FOJAL, serves as a collaborative platform for young leaders across Latin America, advocating for indigenous rights, cultural preservation, and economic sovereignty. The Forum addresses the challenges of neo-colonial influences and promotes the rethinking of educational and economic systems deeply rooted in colonial legacies. Through its youth-led initiatives, FOJAL fosters a vision for a decolonised and socially just future, emphasising cultural awareness and systemic change. This collective action aims to reshape the region's development narrative, ensuring the empowerment of youth in shaping the future.

One notable initiative is the **Indigenous Youth Leadership and Advocacy Program**, led by the FOJAL, which empowers young indigenous leaders to advocate for their rights and cultural preservation. Through **leadership training, workshops, and advocacy campaigns, the program focuses on critical areas such as indigenous land rights, environmental protection, and cultural heritage**. This program has been successful in increasing indigenous youth participation in local governance and promoting systemic changes in education and economic systems that marginalise these communities. It has played a significant role in increasing the participation of indigenous youth in local governance while pushing for much-needed systemic reforms in education and economic systems that have historically marginalised these communities. The initiative has helped foster a generation of young leaders who are not only equipped with knowledge about their cultural heritage but are also actively driving policy changes.

For more information visit: <http://www.fojal.org/>

III. Youth for Decolonisation

Youth for Decolonisation is a regional network of youth organisations across the Asia-Pacific tackling the lasting impacts of colonialism, particularly for indigenous and marginalised communities. The **network empowers youth to lead grassroots campaigns and advocate for policy changes, promoting indigenous sovereignty and challenging colonial-era social and political structures.** By dismantling these entrenched systems, Youth for Decolonisation seeks to advance anti-colonial movements and create a more just future for indigenous peoples in the region.

One of the key initiatives under this movement is the **Asia Indigenous Youth Platform (AIYP). The platform connects young leaders from across the Asia-Pacific, equipping them to advocate for indigenous land protection, cultural heritage preservation, and human rights.** AIYP plays a crucial role in increasing indigenous youth participation in political processes, pushing for the recognition of indigenous rights, and opposing harmful development projects that threaten indigenous communities and their environments.¹¹⁹

For more information visit: aippnet.org.

IV. Restless Development

Restless Development is a non-profit agency that places youth at the heart of community-driven development. With a focus on peacebuilding, health, education, and gender equality, the organisation **empowers young people to address critical issues such as youth unemployment, conflict, and social marginalisation.** Restless Development operates in several countries, including Sierra Leone, the US, UK, Lebanon and India, targeting vulnerable youth in both urban and rural settings, particularly those affected by conflict and displacement.¹²⁰

One of the organisation's key initiatives is its Youth Leadership Programme, which trains young people in leadership, advocacy, and peacebuilding skills. For instance, during the aftermath of the Ebola crisis in Sierra Leone, Restless Development worked with young community leaders to promote peace and prevent the spread of violence and misinformation. These youth leaders played a crucial role in rebuilding trust within communities and creating safe spaces for dialogue between conflicting groups. The program's impact was significant, as it not only helped to stabilise communities but also trained young people who are now continuing peacebuilding efforts in post-crisis environments.¹²¹

By partnering with community-based organisations and ensuring that young people lead the design and implementation of its programmes, Restless Development has been able to scale its initiatives while maintaining relevance to local contexts. This approach has allowed young leaders to drive change from the ground up, ensuring that youth voices are not just heard but are actively shaping the future of their communities.¹²²

¹¹⁹ Restless Development, "What We Do," Restless Development, 2024, <https://restlessdevelopment.org/what-we-do/>.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ Restless Development, "Annual Report 2022," 2022, https://restlessdevelopment.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/RDAR_2022.pdf.

¹²² *Ibid.*

4.3 Current Gaps and Challenges in Youth-Led Decolonisation Initiatives

I. Institutional Norm, Not an Exception

Youth-led decolonisation initiatives often face the challenge of being viewed as exceptions rather than being integrated into institutional agendas. This marginalisation stems from the tendency of donor institutions, governments, and large NGOs to treat youth-led efforts as tokenism—sidelining them in favour of more established stakeholders. Such perspectives hinder the long-term sustainability of these initiatives, as they are not fully incorporated into mainstream policy and development agendas. When youth involvement is seen as a special or temporary project, it limits their influence and integration into systemic changes needed for true decolonisation.

II. Bureaucratic Barriers

Many institutions—including donor organisations—operate with slow, bureaucratic processes creating significant barriers for youth-led initiatives. Barriers may include lengthy application processes, cumbersome reporting requirements, as a preference for funding larger, more established organisations. Consequently, **youth-led initiatives often struggle to secure the needed financial and logistical support.** Complex procedures for accessing funding can overwhelm smaller youth organisations, which may lack the capacity or resources to navigate such systems. This not only restricts their growth but also perpetuates the marginalisation of youth voices in critical decolonisation efforts.

At Youth Transforming Narratives, we believe that youth are not only the leaders of tomorrow but are essential in driving decolonisation efforts today. By embracing these recommendations, we can create an ecosystem where youth-led initiatives are not just encouraged but fully supported, ensuring they are impactful, equitable, and sustainable.



5. Actionable Recommendations: A Youth Perspective

1

Invest in Long-Term, Flexible Funding

Donors should establish dedicated, community-driven youth funds with simplified bureaucratic processes, offering flexible and scaled funding mechanisms that align with youth-led initiatives' needs and visions for change without demanding strict structures or advanced organisational prerequisites.

Example: [The Global Fund for Children](#) provides flexible, long-term funding to grassroots organisations led by young people, allowing them to design and implement their own programmes. This approach ensures that resources are aligned with local priorities and needs. As well as, the [European Youth Forum \(EYF\)](#), a key advocacy group that directly influences EU policies on youth participation and funding. Through its structured representation in European decision-making bodies, it has successfully lobbied for increased youth funding in programmes, like Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps. This model demonstrates how structured youth engagement can lead to sustained policy change and should be replicated in decolonisation efforts to ensure youth voices are central in governance decisions.

Embed Youth in Decision-Making Processes

Governments and international bodies must institutionalise meaningful youth participation by mandating youth-led task forces, creating mentorship pipelines, and ensuring permanent advisory boards to make youth voices integral to policy development and peacebuilding frameworks.

Example: [The United Nations Youth Advisory Group](#) works with UN bodies to ensure youth are actively involved in shaping global policies. Similarly, the [European Youth Forum](#) has established a permanent advisory structure to include youth representatives in EU policy-making processes.

2

3

Dismantle Barriers to Youth Empowerment

Implement policies that guarantee access to free, quality education and remove bureaucratic barriers to youth-led initiatives, fostering inclusive spaces for skill-building, legal aid, and networking, especially for marginalised communities.

Example: The [African Youth Development Forum](#) runs youth hubs across Africa, offering a range of services like legal aid, training, and networking opportunities. These hubs specifically target marginalised youth to support their empowerment and leadership development.

4

Promote Capacity-Building and Mentorship

Establish targeted training programmes and mentorship networks to enhance young leaders' skills in advocacy, governance, and policy development, while ensuring global outreach to ensure equitable access to resources and training opportunities.

Example: [Youth Transforming Narratives](#) (YTN) is a global movement of young people led by young people for young people who commit to re-defining global responses to the world's most pressing issues. Building on the principles of decolonisation, localisation, and youth leadership, we are determined to challenge the narrative, take the lead in transforming the current existing structures, and bridge the South-North gap to re-shape future engagement.

Prioritise Equity in Resource Allocation

Allocate funding to marginalised youth, ensuring localised and transparent funding mechanisms that prioritise equity parameters, such as gender and geography, in decolonisation efforts.

Example: [The Global Giving Fund](#) specifically targets rural and indigenous youth in post-colonial regions by offering localised grants and ensuring gender and geographic equity in its funding criteria. This ensures that marginalised youth communities are prioritised in decolonisation efforts.

5



OUR COMMITMENT

At **Youth Transforming Narratives**, we are committed to ensuring that **youth-led initiatives are at the forefront of the decolonisation movement**. By embracing these measures, we can create a world where **young people are empowered to be active agents of change**, ensuring that decolonisation is not just a goal, but a living, evolving process driven by the youth themselves.

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