

From Mentorship to Making Impact: WADEMOS Next Generation Initiative Young Leaders Advancing Democracy in West Africa

By: Grace Mawusi Annor

In an era where democratic institutions face growing pressure, a bold new wave of changemakers is working to restore civic trust, empower youth, and strengthen democratic participation across West Africa. Through the Next Generation Initiative, emerging leaders are turning vision into action, one community at a time within the ECOWAS region.

Launched in 2023, the Next Generation Initiative aims to equip young passionate aspiring democratic leaders aged 18-35 years with the tools, mentorship, and networks needed to implement grassroots democracy initiatives. Through peer learning sessions and other learning platforms, fellows collaborate, share challenges, and build a shared vision for West Africa's democratic future.

The NGI cohort 1 comprised of 15 dynamic fellows representing 13 countries notably, Nigeria, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Senegal, Togo, Benin, Gambia, Burkina Faso, Niger, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Supported by expert mentors and seasoned democracy activists such as Prof. Larry Diamond and Prof. Henry Kwasi Prempeh, the Next Generation Initiative cultivates a pan-African network of democratic defenders.



Figure 1 Next Gen First Cohort with some members of the WADEMOS Secretariat in a group picture at the Kwame Nkrumah Memorial Park in Accra, Ghana

In this regard, these Young Leaders did not only limit themselves in flying their counties flags high, but they have already begun transforming the democratic landscape in remarkable ways, thanks to a grant from WADEMOS to support the fellows, in order to materialize the knowledge gained throughout the 6-month mentorship program. WADEMOS disbursed a grant of 250 USD early this year to support the NGI Fellows in the implementation of local

activities and initiatives, bringing their visions to reality.

This will also seek to enhance their community and stakeholder engagement skills as advocates and activists. Among others, the fellows executed projects in areas such as countering misinformation and disinformation, women empowerment, enforcing civic

participation, peace and security, democracy education and awareness, citizen and youth engagement in inclusive democracy, trainings, national forums and more. While each fellow's initiative is locally rooted, their work echoes a regional mission: to strengthen democratic institutions, foster inclusive participation, and defend civic space in a time of uncertainty. This as well seeks to achieve SDGs 5 & 16 in West Africa.



Figure 2 A group picture of the First Cohort of the Next Gen Initiative

Together let's delve into their activities and the lasting impacts these brilliant minds created in their respective countries.

Implementation of country-level projects

➤ **Nigeria**



Figure 3 A representative from Nigeria, Emmanuel Zakari (first from left) in a group picture with participants after his mentorship event

The project titled “Project 25 Civic Amazons” was implemented by Zakari Emmanuel, Founder of a youth-led organization in Abuja called The Udama Unity Organization popularly known as Udama 4 Africa. This project's objective was to create awareness and build the capacity of 25 young female students on civic engagement, leadership, and good governance. Project 25 Civic Amazon was held in the Faculty of Law, University of Abuja in Nigeria, in a workshop training style mixed with storytelling, presentations and interactive sessions moderated by influential women in the Nigerian democratic space.

➤ Liberia



Figure 4 Sialyn Bockarie, the Liberian representative (first from right) holds a banner with some students after the event

NGI Fellow, Sialyn Hawa Bockarie, a Gender, Inclusion and Civic Engagement Manager at InfoQuest Liberia carried out the project titled: “YOUTH POWER! Inspiring a Generation, Shaping the Future” which was bent on the Theme: Empowering Young People with Knowledge of Sustainable Democracy and Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR).

The event brought together fifty (50) adolescents or school-going

youths to engage in discussions on a range of critical issues including mental health, youth empowerment, civic responsibility, good governance and accountability, and a foundational understanding of sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR). A central feature of this initiative will be to instore a long-term mentorship program, which supports the creation and development of school-based health and leadership clubs.

These clubs will aim to foster leadership, civic participation, and health awareness among students from an early stage. The event took place on May 23, 2025 at the Sis IYE School System in Barnesville Monrovia, Liberia. Some of the key stakeholders were Mertu College of Health and laboratory Sciences, Liberia National Student Union and InfoQuest-Liberia.

➤ Benin

Mahugnon Néhémie Kotobiodjo, a Social Economist and Research Assistant at the Society-Environment Laboratory, University of Parakou on May 3rd, 2025, organised a forum gathering 20 participants, notably youth and women on the Theme: “Citizens Meeting for Peace and Social Cohesion”. This engagement raised collective awareness of the importance of revisiting and promoting civic values, tolerance and acceptance of others, which are essential for ensuring



Figure 5 Mahugnon Nehemie Kotobiodjo (4th from left) takes a picture with participants after the event

harmonious interpersonal relations. At the end of the discussions, a number of concrete recommendations were made, as there was a call to Strengthen community dialogue by involving all members of society (young people, women, traditional and religious leaders and local authorities) in building lasting peace. Also, the need to Advocate for the inclusion of vulnerable groups, particularly women and young people in precarious situations, in decision-making processes was enumerated.

Furthermore, the necessity to integrate the concepts of peace, social cohesion and responsible citizenship into educational programmes and school curricula; and the use of digital tools and social networks to conduct massive awareness-raising campaigns on non-violence, tolerance and civic participation were key highlights. The young participants also expressed their desire to become ‘Ambassadors for Peace’ in their respective neighbourhoods and villages.

➤ Togo



Figure 6 In Togo, Magnoudewa Potchosi organised a civic engagement program for women to raise awareness on inclusive development and democratic governance

An “Awareness Raising Campaign and Youth Mobilization to Strengthen Democratic Governance and a Safe Civic Space” was organized by NGI Fellow Magnoudewa Potchosi, on 15th April 2025 in Adétikopé/Lomé, Togo. Magnoudewa is the Founder of the Association for Promotion of Women and Youth Leadership in Togo.

The objective of this activity was to raise young people's

awareness of democratic governance and the protection of civic space in order to strengthen their knowledge, broaden civic space, and encourage their active participation and constructive dialogue between young people and decision-makers.

At the end of the debates, participants made the following recommendations which focused on organizing training workshops on civic commitment of young people in promoting democratic values, and the legal framework of the current constitution; Strengthening young people's communication and advocacy skills to enable them to participate fully and effectively at municipal level. A total of over 100 young people of which 60% were young women, were mobilized and made aware of the issues surrounding Togo's democratic framework.

➤ Burkina Faso

Sadiya Diallo, Founder and President of the Women in Action Association (AWA) from Burkina Faso, Ouagadougou organized a focus group discussion on citizen participation, which was held on Saturday 10 May 2025 at the Bangreweogo National Park. The event brought together 22 young people (8 men and 14 ladies) from a diverse range of backgrounds including students, youth leaders, and CSOs. The



Figure 8 Sadiya Diallo (1st from left) with cross-section of participants after the event



Figure 7 Artwork to raise awareness about the event in Burkina Faso

event highlighted the importance of citizen participation, followed by guided group discussions on a number of themes such as the need for the youth to be actively part of decision-making processes, the obstacles encountered, expectations and recommendations to encourage active participation. The activity involved peer to

peer exchanges, enabling participants to share practical experiences and reflect on the various realities in Burkina Faso, in particular young people's lack of awareness of their civic rights, as well as the need to create safe spaces for expression and training for young people.

➤ Nigeria



Figure 9 Chiamaka Ohelete, a Nigerian representative, held a stakeholder dialogue session with the Association of Persons with Disability focused on strengthening inclusive governance

Another fellow in Enugu, Nigeria in the name of Chiamaka Ohelete, a Disability Right Advocate at the Joint National Association of Persons with Disabilities carried out a project titled: "Accessibility and Inclusivity Workshop for Political Participation of Women with Disabilities in Enugu State". Its objectives sought to promote inclusive political participation and leadership among women with disabilities; strengthen democratic resilience through civic education; and foster accessibility and representation in governance. At the end of the event participants gained knowledge, confidence, and practical strategies for civic engagement. Advocacy networks were strengthened

and commitment to political participation was renewed. Overall, 20 women with disabilities were trained, and actionable strategies for inclusive participation in democratic processes were developed.

➤ Sierra Leone



Figure 11 Marina Terry (Center right) is a passionate advocate for mental health and anti-drug abuse in Sierra Leone

Marina Terry is a Journalist affiliated to the Africa Young Voices Media Empire. She implemented The Empower Her: Breaking Chains initiative on June 28, 2025 in Kroobay Community, Freetown to tackle the growing use of drugs among young people, particularly women in slum communities which has become a national concern. For young women and girls, this crisis is compounded by limited access to mental health services, stigma,

trauma, and socio-economic vulnerability. This life changing event was a grassroots, gender-focused intervention aimed at starting dialogue, building awareness, and creating linkages between at-risk young women and available institutional support systems. It sought to challenge taboos, affirm healing, and amplify the resilience of women navigating addiction and mental health issues. 50 women and girls were engaged in mental health and drug recovery dialogues; key insights were shared by professionals and survivors of addiction; and media coverage of the event extended awareness beyond the local community.



Figure 10 Marina Terry keenly follows a presentation during the sensitization workshop

➤ Côte d'Ivoire



Figure 12 Picture of panelists at a stakeholder dialogue in Ivory Coast organized by Jean-Yves Tetchi Yavo

Jean-Yves Tetchi Yavo is a legal mediator who occupies the position of Protocol Officer at Pouvoir et Influence (Pi Côte d'Ivoire), a non-profit think tank in Abidjan. His activity held on 4th July, 2025 marked the 6th Edition of the Great Citizens' Forum, a flagship program of the organization, and was labelled "Ivorian Identity and Nationality: Legacy



Figure 13 An artwork used for publicity

of the Past or Political Instrument?”. As the Ivorian Presidential Election is fast approaching, it was crucial to revisit this topic that has influenced the country’s politics since the 1990s, in order to avoid tensions, fight against hate speech or the spread of exclusionism, and promote a climate of peace. This event brought together representatives of political parties, civil society stakeholders and participants from all walks of life to have an inclusive and participatory debate on electoral reforms, raise awareness among the

population about election-related matters, and further promote peace and social cohesion.

➤ Senegal



Figure 14 An engagement session organized by Malamine Badiane in Senegal

In order to guarantee a democracy-led future, there is a need to revisit its fundamental principles and popularize it from the grassroots. On this note, Malamine Badiane, an ambassador for the "Eco Network Global" in Senegal and Coordinator of the CorpsAfrica Green Initiative, carried out a sensitization activity in primary schools located in the Kaolack rural community. The event educated 30 children aged 10 - 15

years on citizenship and democracy through interactive and fun workshops, in order to reinforce a democratic culture from an early age. The activity was a success and the schools requested for support to integrate citizenship modules into their extracurricular programmes.

➤ Guinea-Bissau



Figure 15 Participants at the forum organized by Rosalia Djedjo in Guinea-Bissau

Rosalia Djedjo is a Human Rights Activist and advocate for the right to education and youth participation, at the National Confederation of Student Associations of Guinea-Bissau. She organized a Training on Youth Democratic and Political Participation on May 17, 2025, and the goal was to strengthen the civic and political awareness of young people by

promoting their active and informed participation in democratic processes and decision-making structures. This activity generated an increased young people's knowledge of their democratic rights and duties; participants showed enthusiasm for greater motivation to engage in community and political actions. There was also a collective commitment to create a youth group to promote active citizenship in their neighbourhoods.

➤ Ghana

Ophelia Awinboma Azure, a Clinical Psychologist at the Centre for Public Health Development Initiative organized a three-day radio campaign named “Building the Capacity of Women Leaders to Support Governance and Inclusive Development at the District Level” from 9th – 11th July, 2025 in Upper East Region, Ghana. The project aimed to explore the unique challenges faced by women political leaders, highlighting their experiences and contributions to governance.



Figure 16 An interaction during one of the radio interviews as part of the campaign spearheaded by Ophelia Azure

Despite progress in women's representation in politics, barriers persist including gender bias, stereotypes, and a lack of support. The participants emphasized that this project is a crucial step towards raising awareness about women's empowerment, inclusivity, and support in political leadership. Overall, this project has laid a solid foundation for future initiatives aimed at enhancing women's roles in governance.

➤ The Gambia

On 25th June, 2025, Ndey Fatou, Programme Assistant at Peace Hub The Gambia (PHTG) carried out an activity titled “Echoing the Voices of Young Women in the Implementation of the National Action Plan on Youth Peace and Security”. The



Figure 17 Ndey Fatou takes a group picture with beneficiaries of her activity in The Gambia

emphasis was to leverage the influence and ingenuity of young women in peace and decision-making processes in the quest of promoting meaningful participation of youths, and give them a voice in recommending reforms for sustainable peace and development.

10 young girls from the St Joseph's senior Secondary School in Banjul were trained on youth peace and security, women peace and security and the respective national action plans as part of the Gambia's transitional justice process. This led to a joint

partnership with former students of the school to kickstart the first ever summer camp where students will have the opportunity to interact with former students, seek career guidance and dialogue on peace and security challenges in the Gambia.

➤ Guinea



Figure 18 Participants at the capacity building workshop on entrepreneurship organized by Aisha Diallo in Guinea.

Aïcha Diallo, a self-employed Business Entrepreneur driven by a passion to empower the upcoming generation, organized a Training on Personal Development, aimed at helping children to develop self-confidence and learn how to overcome their limitations. The activity took place on 9th June 2025 at the Raby and Children NGO, and the main objectives were children capacity building, encouraging their development of self-esteem for public speaking, and shaping future career aspirations and

orientation. In a nutshell, the event promoted childhood development leaving no one behind in building an inclusive future for All.

➤ Niger



Figure 20 Participants engaging in an activity during the civic engagement training

Ousman Goulo Abdoulaye, Assistant Chief of Staff to the Chief Executive Officer of the City of Niamey (Central Town Hall), organized a Training on Civic Engagement and Participation on 31st May, 2025. The main priorities of this activity were to Raise awareness among young people about their rights and responsibilities as citizens; Develop leadership and advocacy skills for

inclusive community initiatives; Promote gender parity and inclusion in decision-making mechanisms at local and national levels; and Increase the rate of youth participation in civic initiatives in Niger.

This youth engagement resulted in building a collective awareness of the need to get



Figure 19 A publicity artwork disseminated ahead of the event

involved in community, local and national decision-making bodies; and personal commitments made by several participants to initiate or join civic actions in their communities. The event gathered 28 participants of which 2 were Persons living with disabilities.

Looking Ahead: Building Momentum



Figure 22 Participants showcasing their certificates during the closing ceremony

sustainable.

These Young Leaders are not waiting for permission to lead change, they are living proof that democracy can triumph again and we can together build a West African community which is People oriented and where peace and prosperity prevails.

As their projects scale and mature, NGI Young Leaders are embarking on a transformative agenda, and laying the foundation for a more participatory, transparent, and resilient democratic culture in West Africa. In order to ensure a vibrant Alumni Network, WADEMOS will leverage on their existing impact and keep ensuring their participation and youth inclusion on regional platforms, while fostering long term inclusive opportunities to share their insights towards making the region more



Figure 21 Fellows in a group picture with Prof. Gyimah-Boadi, Co-founder of CDD-Ghana

About the Author

Grace Mawusi Annor is the Bilingual Project Assistant at the West Africa Democracy Solidarity Network (WADEMOS).