



# Young women's leadership in advancing the implementation of the Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda in the Democratic Republic of Congo

An independent thematic paper from the Democratic Republic of Congo submitted for the 3rd Report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on Youth, Peace, and Security

by Marie Rose TSHITE & Lydie MUNGALA.

## Cordaid, 2024



# Authors



**MARIE ROSE TSHITE**  
tshitema@mail.uc.edu

is a Peacebuilding advocate and Ph.D. student in Political Science with a concentration in Feminist Comparative and International Politics at the University of Cincinnati. She is a Fulbright and a YALI Alumni, Co-founder of the Congolese Youth Peace and Security (YPS) Coalition, a member of the African Women Leadership Network-DRC Youth Caucus, and currently serves as the National Coordinator of the DRC Secretariat in charge of implementing the YPS agenda in the DRC.



**LYDIE MUKASEKURU MUNGALA**  
mungalalydie@gmail.com

is a Peacebuilding and Prison rights activist. She currently works as the program officer at Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation under the Folke Bernadotte Academy Scholarship on Women, Peace, and Security. She is a Mandela Washington Fellow (2021) and the Secretary General of the Young African Leaders Initiative in the Democratic Republic of Congo (YALI-DRC). She holds an Honours Degree in Peace Conflict and Governance (Great Zimbabwe University) and a Master of Science in Peace, Leadership and Conflict Resolution (Zimbabwe Open University).

**Acknowledgment:**

This is an independent thematic paper on Youth, Peace, and Security submitted to the call for thematic papers made by the United Nations entities and civil society organizations to contribute toward the forthcoming third Secretary-General report to the Security Council on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2250, 2419 and 2535 on Youth, Peace, and Security (mandated by Security Council resolution 2535 (2020)). The upcoming report will cover the 2022-2023 period and will be presented to the Security Council in the first half of 2024. As Congolese women who have been involved in the YPS National Action Plan process, we would like to thank our partners from Cordaid RDC for supporting the process of publication and helping to increase the documentation on the DRC YPS agenda. We would like to thank as well the Ministry of Youth and the STN-2250 for providing young people with the necessary collaboration to advance the YPS agenda in the DRC. We want to express our gratitude to the young peacebuilders in the DRC for their invaluable contributions and support throughout this research project. Their expertise and assistance significantly enhanced the quality and depth of our work.

**Disclaimer:**

This thematic paper on YPS in the DRC was submitted on 11/21/2023 to the UN Youth Office and UNFPA, and the arguments developed are entirely the responsibility of the two authors and do not engage Cordaid-RDC or any partners or institutions.

# INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

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Young women have played a crucial role in advancing the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) agenda in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). This paper strives to analyze the contributions and strategies of young people, specifically young women, to the YPS agenda by sharing their positive contributions in decentring traditional hierarchies, finding alternatives to promoting diverse voices, and emphasizing the value of creating spaces that prioritize diverse perspectives, collaboration, and inclusivity between the provincial and national levels. It further seeks to contribute to the growing literature and knowledge of young women's leadership to advance the institutionalization of the YPS agenda in the DRC and the challenges of overcoming hierarchical and culturally established norms. It aims to recognize young women's role in the promotion of strong engagement among youth at the local and national levels through the creation of the YPS coalition and the organizing of advocacy meetings with public officials that have led to the creation of a governmental body within the Congolese ministry of youth to coordinate efforts for the advancement of the YPS agenda in the DRC.

Young women have been promoting inclusive leadership by reconsidering whose voices and experiences are valued or not, acknowledging vulnerability, and navigating traditional structures, while at the same time emphasising the value of creating spaces that prioritise diverse perspectives, including men and people with disabilities, in the elaboration process of the Congolese National Action Plan (NAP 2250).



In their leadership role, young women have been making sure the voices of those at the local level are heard at the national level of decision-making, and their opinions are reflected in the DRC NAP. Young women in the DRC have initiated campaigns, organized meetings to support public officials' basic knowledge of the YPS agenda, and played a leadership role in coordinating and supervising the NAP elaboration process to a successful completion. They have essentially acted as a bridge between civil society organizations (CSOs) and the Ministry of Youth, public officials, but also with women already working on the "women, peace, and security" (WPS) agenda to learn from them and close gaps in young women's visibility, inclusion, and involvement in efforts to promote the implementation of the YPS agenda in the DRC.

Though young people represent a large demographic number, as pointed out in recent data from UNICEF, which indicates that young men and young women in the DRC account for a sizable portion of the population, "they make up 67%" of the population (UNICEF, 2021). Young women have been shut out of the political, social, and cultural arenas that ought to be assisting them in becoming engaged members of society. In addition to being marginalized or not considered for leadership roles due to the deeply patriarchal culture, young people have constituted the core of engaged citizens while also representing a significant number of those affected by violent conflicts (Constitutional Framework for Youth Peace and Security, 2022).

Despite the outdated cultural and societal norms and practices, young women in the DRC have made a substantial impact on the YPS agenda. Their leadership contribution, among other efforts, has made the DRC the first Francophone country and second African state to elaborate a National Action Plan on the Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda (YPS NAP).



Yves Bunkulu, Minister for Youth and Annie Matundu, the PAN 2250 Consultant.



# YOUNG WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL 2250 AGENDA

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On August 12, 2022, the DRC became the first francophone country and third in the world to launch its National Action Plan 2250 on the Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda (NAP 2250), a date that will be forever marked in the memory of thousands of young Congolese. After the NAP's release, the cabinet of the Ministry of Youth in the DRC worked closely with the National Technical Secretariat of Resolution 2250 (STN-2250), the government body tasked with coordinating efforts to advance the YPS agenda, to ensure that the plan would also be adopted at the 67th Ministerial Council Meeting on November 18, 2022 (Actualite.cd, November 2022). Both the launch and the adoption of the YPS NAP at a government level have been done under the strong leadership capacity of young women in collaboration with state officials.

Young women in the DRC have made huge contributions to the YPS agenda in the DRC since 2017. Following the participation of one young Congolese woman at the Western and Central African consultations on the YPS agenda in Benin in 2017, a collective effort was carried out under her leadership that involved several Congolese youth-led organizations in 12 provinces through information-sharing sessions about the YPS agenda and the progress studies report on UNSCR 2250 organized in Central and West Africa, which led to UNSCR 2419 in December 2018. Those information sessions from 2017 onward were instrumental in raising awareness about the resolution in Kinshasa and in provinces and served to remind them of their contribution as peacebuilders in their daily lives and in their communities since many were already doing peacebuilding work without knowing about the existence of UNSCR 2250 (Tshite, MR 2021; STN-2250, unpublished report December 2020). ***Young women had leadership roles in organizing information sessions about the existence of the resolution as an international tool that could be used to reclaim youth participation.***

Additionally, those who attended other international gatherings or other regional consultations on the roles and contributions of YPS in Africa between 2019 and 2020 joined the YPS wind that was already flowing in the capital city of Kinshasa and also initiated activities with other youth-led organizations and local governments in their respective provinces, leading to a desire for better synergy of YPS organizations throughout the country (Akilimali, 2022; Tshite, 2021). For instance, in November and December 2020 in Kinshasa, young women initiated

two advocacy meetings with the former youth minister, Billy Kambale, to inform him about the growing demands of youth voices at a local level for the UNSCR 2250 to be implemented in the country (YALI-RDC December 2020 Report, Unpublished). Other similar advocacy meetings were done by young women and men not only in Kinshasa but also in North and South Kivu, eventually leading the Congolese government to institutionalize on December 28th, 2020, through the Ministry of Youth, the National Technical Secretary for the implementation of UNSCR 2250 in the DRC (STN-2250/DRC).



(Photo credit YALI-RDC November 2020 on YPS Advocacy with the Youth ministry for the Institutionalization of the YPS in the DRC).  
<https://yalirdc.org/rencontre-de-la-coordination-du-reseaux-yali-rdc-avec-le-ministre-de-la-jeunesse/>

***“You first get a good reputation at a local level, with other NGO working on the matter, then have enough solid graces to be effective at the national level in front of public officials” (Marie- Rose Tshite, unpublished autobiography, 2023).***

The context that led to the creation of the National Technical Secretariat for the implementation of Resolution 2250 in the DRC considered the real need for the contribution of young people to the restoration of peace, security, and development, in accordance with the prescriptions of Resolution 2250 of the Security Council of the United Nations, considering the socio-political context of the country. Thus, on December 28, 2020, the Democratic Republic of the Congo signed decree N°051/CAB-MIN/J&INC/2021 on the establishment, management, and operation of the Technical Secretariat responsible for carrying out Resolution 2250 on youth, peace, and security through the Ministry of Youth, Initiation to the New Citizenship, and National Cohesion. He then issued a second decree appointing young individuals to head this implementational body (STN-2250 decree, December 28, 2020). A facility to host this service was then made available for that purpose. Initially, there were only three young women among the 12 members of the Technical Secretariat when it was first chaired by a man. However, as young women who demonstrated strong leader-

ship roles in initiating YPS activities in the country, they were later added to the STN-2250 for their commitment. The STN-2250 is currently made up of 13 members, including 6 women, ensuring equal representation of young men and young women. This government institution is today led by a young woman who made proven efforts in creating the YPS Coalition, and it includes eight members from CSOs and youth platforms working on the YPS agenda on the ground.

As the STN-2250 started his work in getting in touch with various partners and informing them of its existence, they realized that many youth-led structures worked separately, without knowing each other, in various provinces. In South Kivu, for instance, there were youth groups like “Collectif 2250” while in another province called Tshopo, they gathered under the umbrella of “Réseau Tshopo 2250”. Knowing all that, young women within the STN-2250 made use of their position as members of a governmental body to facilitate and organize information sessions and consultation meetings between major youth-led structures such as YALI-RDC, Youth4Peace DRC, NPCYP, YWPL, AFIA MAMA, CONAJEFEL, Collectif 2250, Réseau Tshopo 2250, and other structures already working on this thematic to exchange with other coalitions from six other countries (Canada, US, Finland, Nigeria, Philippines, and El Salvador) to learn how they could also come up with their own Congolese National Coalition on Youth, Peace, and Security in the DRC (Tshite, MR 2021). ***Those exchange sessions with different YPS coalitions were all planned, organized, and moderated by three to four young women from Kinshasa, Goma, and Bukavu, but the attendance was filled by young men.*** Knowledge learned through these exchange sessions led to the creation of the YPS Congolese Coalition in December 2021, at the 6th anniversary of UNSCR 2250. The coalition was founded by 11 youth leaders, 6 young women, and 5 young men (COMPTE RENDU, October 2021). It is currently chaired by two men and one young woman, respectively, representing youth-led platforms, namely the Youth for Peace (Y4P) DRC, NPCYP, and the Young African Leaders Initiatives (YALI-RDC).

Young women members of the National Technical Secretariat have been active in supporting other young women from civil society in coming all together up to the creation of the YPS coalition, through brainstorming awareness session ideas and facilitating contacts with other youth leaders in other countries where they were already part of the YPS coalition. They have understood that such a governmental body could not efficiently monitor and support all activities related to Agenda 2250 in such a big country as the DRC without communication and collaboration with local SCOs. In fact, YPS CSOs' role in supporting the STN-2250 during the elaboration process of the NAP has proved later to be undeniable.

For instance, insufficient funding was provided by the youth ministry during the data collection phase of the NAP elaboration process, especially regarding outreach to youth in remote areas. *Young women in the STN-2250 have forged new avenues through the YPS Congolese coalition to other young people, especially those in provinces, by making sure that their voices could be carried at a national level during meetings with the youth minister, by co-signing declarations on the conflicting country situations in the eastern part of the DRC, or by simply intervening in different activities by youth organizations on the YPS agenda and its implementations in the DRC.*

Young women have also benefited from partner training and capacity-building approaches to peacebuilding advocacy efforts. For instance, the United Nations Mission for the Stabilization of the Congo (MONUSCO) has, through its gender section, trained a core group of women mediators for conflict resolution.

One of the participants highlighted the importance of this training as follows: “This sensitization session comes at an opportune moment because we live in an area where there are conflicts of all kinds”. She further said: “We must play our part in all processes of resolving these conflicts that cause us so much harm. We, women must get more actively involved today than in the past” (MONUSCO,2023).

Young women have been encouraging other women to enhance their participation in public affairs through the dissemination of the YPS agenda. For instance, in Lubumbashi, the YALI-DRC organized a series of training on women's leadership that aimed to equip young women with the necessary skills and knowledge to be active in civil spaces. These trainings aimed to increase the participation of young women in politics through civil society organizations.



“If you can’t build good relationships with public officials, you can’t be effective in advancing the YPS agenda at the national level”

(Marie-Rose Tshite, unpublished autobiography, 2023).



## DIGITALIZATION AS AN ALTERNATIVE TOOL FOR YOUNG WOMEN'S INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP AND COLLABORATION IN PROMOTING THE YOUTH PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA

The creation of the STN-2250 has been a progress and achievement. In a patriarchal society, it was commendable to have a young Congolese woman leading the STN-2250 and overseeing the NAP's development processes, which would address the obstacles young people encounter when trying to gain access to decision-making bodies. Although young men and women collaborate as allies to carry out multiple initiatives, young women from CSOs, particularly the coalition, have been active in initiating digitalization as an alternative to improve communication on the YPS agenda and carrying out numerous online campaigns. The most recent was a call to DRC President H.E. Felix Tshisekedi to sign the YPS NAP document. Young women have used diplomatic dinners and international conferences to express their dissatisfaction with the delayed signature by the head of state.

As previously stated, associated CSOs used online campaigns to demand the implementation of the YPS agenda. Disseminating the NAP questionnaires electronically via KOBO Collect was proposed by young women of the STN-2250 with the technical support of Search for Common Ground (SFCG) as an alternative to not delay the planned timeline of the NAP process due to a lack of funding during the elaboration phase. To support the STN-2250 during the NAP process, a survey was conducted electronically with the help of UNICEF bloggers to assess young people's knowledge of UNSCR2250. The survey was the baseline for the design and elaboration of the NAP, which informs the government and other stakeholders on the implementation of the 2250 agenda. The cartography of youth-led organizations required during the NAP process was also completed digitally, reducing the need for financial resources. With the help of young men and women from the coalition, focus groups for people with albinism, people living with disabilities, and political party youth leagues were organized in a few places and in remote areas with less Wi-Fi connectivity.



## **DIGITALIZATION AS AN ALTERNATIVE TOOL FOR YOUNG WOMEN'S INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP AND COLLABORATION IN PROMOTING THE YOUTH PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA**

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CSO organizations actively collaborated with the government through the STN-220 as critical partners in disseminating information at the local and provincial levels and constantly brainstorming alternatives through digitalization. They were also willing to use funds from their local organizations to support the transportation and internet of public officials or marginalized youth in certain zones where digitalization could be a difficult option. Young women and men were also involved politically at the subnational level (local and district), sometimes “steering the ship” in advancing the YPS agenda. Having them during the elaboration of the process facilitated a better acceptance and localization of the NAP in the North and South- Kivu.

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## **YOUNG WOMEN YPS ADVOCATES NAVIGATING CHALLENGES, TO PRIORITISE THE INSTITUTIONALISATION OF THE AGENDA IN THE DRC DURING THE 2020–2023 PERIOD.**

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Young women have been at the forefront of efforts to mainstream gender issues in peace and security agendas in the DRC. They were the first ones to organize information-sharing sessions on the YPS agenda in 2017 in Kinshasa, calling on and inviting other youth organizations as mentioned in the introduction of this paper.

They have actively challenged gender stereotypes and advocated for the inclusion of gender-sensitive approaches in peacebuilding initiatives, ensuring that the unique experiences and needs of young women are considered in the NAP process.

The years 2020 to 2023 have been mostly characterized by the vibrancy of youth peacebuilder networks in advancing the process toward the adoption of the NAP. Young women peacebuilders took the front row and forged strategic partnerships and alliances with public officials, decision-makers, and politicians to institutionalize the implementation of the YPS agenda in the DRC through direct advocacy meetings with the minister of youth and the participation of youth minister advisors in their YPS information sharing sessions. However, those approaches have let them face sexist arguments accusing them of being “too close” to politicians, which is not “culturally well seen or appropriate” in a patriarchal society, hoping to see young women seated at the backstage table and not assuming leadership roles. They have navigated informal, highly gendered discourses reproduced by normalised hierarchical imbalances, becoming impervious to change as a result, hence the necessity at some points to overhaul the organisational culture of different ministers intersecting with the YPS agenda in the DRC.



Even though they frequently demonstrated competence and leadership by initiating numerous activities and advocacy meetings to explain the basis of the YPS agenda to public officials, they've always been confronted with “informal” patriarchal misconceptions about their leadership role. Hence, they attempt to navigate those barriers by adopting an attitude of “non-confrontation” and “strategic-obedience” toward these decision-makers, who often have these misconceptions.

They've led by maintaining a constant state of reflexivity and sharing of information with public officials to allow them to feel some “sense of power and control” of the YPS process in environments where the ego-masculin dominates the leadership style. They have managed the complex administrative environment with its patriarchal hierarchy, which needs to feel in control of the young people. Young women often played the “role of naif” or “delayed steps in advocacy,” as a strategy to avoid clashes with those who have the power to decide or the capacity to move the agenda forward, such as public officials and different ministers' advisors. Hence, their varied “consciousness” adaptability makes the leadership of young women greatly accepted at the national level, because they are perceived as more cooperative and less threatening in a political environment.

## **NOTABLE TRENDS, CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES DISCERNIBLE WITHIN THE YPS AGENDA AS WE DRAW TOWARDS THE SEVENTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ADOPTION OF THE FIRST SECURITY COUNCIL.**

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Since the national launch of the Congolese National Action Plan on Youth Peace and Security on August 12th 2022, some notable trends have been registered, such as:

- ✓ The roundtable of partners involved in the implementation of the YPS on September 6, 2022;
- ✓ **The adoption by the Council of Ministers of the 2250 National Action Plan, November 18, 2022;**
- ✓ The presentation of the annual report on the activities of STN 2250 for 2022:
- ✓ The technical and financial partners and members of the Government, On December 9, 2022;
- ✓ The celebrations and acceptance of the YPS agenda through youth activities throughout December 2022;
- ✓ The localisation of the YPS agenda in the North and South Kivu, Ituri, and Tanganyika through the provincial youth ministry division with the support of the YPS Coalition, financially and technically supported by partners such as UNFPA, GNWP, and ISOKO, throughout December 2022;
- ✓ Workshops on legal instruments and capacity building organised by FBA, SFCG, and UNFPA in April 2023
- ✓ Public awareness-raising on the National Action Plan of UN Security Council Resolution 2250 on the occasion of the Congolese first anniversary of its YPS NAP launch, with the support of Cordaid-RDC in August 2023;
- ✓ The launch of the YPS agenda implementation guide for public servants in French in October 2023;
- ✓ **The retreat of UN YPS focal points in the DRC, with the STN-2250 taking active part of it with other youth-led organisations for better coordination of YPS activities between UN agencies, the STN-2250 as state formal institutions, and other youth organisations in November 2023.**

## PERSISTENT CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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From 2017 to the present, the vibrancy of youth peacebuilder networks has been critical in advancing the process toward NAP adoption. Youth peacebuilders have been on the front lines, and their ownership of forming strategic partnerships and alliances with public officials, decision-makers, and politicians has been critical to success. They navigated their insufficiencies and created opportunities for public officials to get trained to enhance their acceptance of the YPS agenda. This is not to say that young women have worked alone; rather, in their leadership roles, they have collaborated with young men as long-term partners to have public officials as allies. Training sessions with patterns such as SFCG, GNWP, ISOKO, FBA, and UNFPA to towards public officials from different ministries with other youth-led organizations in 2022 and 2023 benefited them all, especially the youth ministry.

Furthermore, as YPS advocates, young men and women have actively participated in community resilience-building initiatives such as education programs, psychosocial support, and peace education. These initiatives aim to address the root causes of conflicts and build sustainable peace by empowering young women with the skills and knowledge to contribute to peaceful coexistence within communities. However, challenges currently faced for the NAP implementation include the lack of funding for NAP implementation, the low involvement of other ministries intersecting with the YPS agenda, and the identification of other entities working on peace and security issues in the region or elsewhere with whom STN-2250 can share experiences regularly.

*Hence, the recommendation is to support the STN-2250 to find external partners who can provide technical and the logistical for NAP support implementation and intensify its dissemination throughout the country, especially in conflict-affected areas including North and South Kivu, Ituri, Kasai Central, Haut-Katanga, Lualaba, and Mai-Ndombe.*

## CONCLUSION

Young women have played a crucial role in advancing the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) agenda in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). They have promoted inclusive leadership, acknowledged vulnerability, and navigated traditional structures while emphasizing the value of creating space for all. Despite the challenges, young women and men have led efforts to ensure the dissemination of YPS at all levels and to have youth contributions acknowledged by the state throughout the NAP elaboration process. The creation of the STN-2250 is a governmental response, giving young women and men ownership of this agenda to coordinate activities related to the agenda alongside various state institutions and non-state actors involved in the YPS agenda in the DRC.



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