

NEW BLOOD

HOW YOUTH IN ZAMBIA ARE
RECLAIMING POLITICS

WRITTEN BY

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AND CHIMWEMWE ZAKEYO MWANSA

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Kapatiso, Mary Mwaba, Andrew Machila, Given Musanya Kapolyo, and
Chimwemwe Zakeyo Mwansa (2023)

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This book was written by the founders and core team of the Youth4Parliament movement in Zambia, eight activists under age 35 who have spent years striving to make their country a place that represents the interests of all young people. And they have been remarkably successful.

Youth4Parliament was founded by Thompson Luzendi and Nawa Sitali, two friends belonging to opposing political parties. They had a vision to create a space for disagreeing young people to have meaningful conversations about politics and to implement a movement that would launch the careers of youth politicians.

At the time of this writing, the core team is comprised of Muleta Kapatiso, Given Musanya Kapolyo, Andrew Machila, Mary Mwaba, Chimwemwe Zakeyo Mwansa, and Nalishebo Sinyama. Several of them have been organizing with Y4P since it started taking shape in 2018. Joined by Thompson and Nawa, each of them has shared their memories and insights from the first three years of the movement. Their individual writings have been woven together into a single narrative. Occasionally, the specific experiences of a particular activist are told, and their names are shared in those moments.

We can all learn a lot from Youth4Parliament. A movement—and the future it is fighting for—must be qualitatively different from the institutions that maintain the status quo. The vision of tomorrow must inform the mechanisms of change. Lasting resistance does more than swap the seats in the palaces of power. Instead, it returns power to the people. Those entrusted with governance must be servants of all, not their masters. Any movement that seeks to build a world like this must first enshrine these values in their own governance.

Youth4Parliament has demonstrated what can happen when youth leaders are consistent and uncompromising with their values. They have shown us how people once violently opposed—and oftentimes still disagreeing on specifics—can work together to make society and government function better.

This volume is an informal guidebook. It has no universal steps or formulas for success. But in telling the story of the Y4P movement in Zambia, it offers a reference point for your movement. As it reveals the decisions, struggles, and innovations of Y4P, it provides the opportunity for you to think critically about your own planning, decision-making, and leadership structures. It pushes you to conceive a vision of tomorrow, formulate values, design a theory of change, and determine actions to make a better world.

This is the first book in the Research-in-Action (REACT) Series, a partnership between ActionAid Denmark and ICNC. Much writing about movements is written from the outside. Success stories are documented in NGO reporting or academic journals. These are important channels of learning, but the insights are often slow to reach the activists who would benefit most. This series lifts the voices of activists as they write for other activists, tell their own stories, and share their first-hand experiences. We trust that you will value their words as much as we do.

Bruce Pearson, Series Editor



NAWA V. SITALI

Our story begins in 2018, when Zambia faced significant challenges in its political landscape. Public anger from the elections two years earlier was sowing seeds of chaos. The government's oppressive and aggressive nature stifled democratic processes and marginalized the voices of the youth. More than 70 percent of the population was under age 35, yet youth only held four of the 156 seats in parliament—and none were held by young women. Youth representation was severely limited.

Zambia had no space for youth to discuss their political ambitions. Voter apathy was prevalent, and they were disillusioned with the political system. Tensions between youth from different parties escalated, leading to detrimental conflicts that resulted in violence and death.

The country needed a way to unite the youth, to channel them toward contributing to society. They could be a voting bloc that would change the dominance of tribalism and division. We needed a movement dedicated to building the capacity of youth politicians and providing campaign support. Without it, aspiring young leaders would not have the necessary resources and guidance. And so, we started a movement, which we named Youth4Parliament (Y4P).

Many people came on board and joined us. We established campaign teams and offered tailor-made capacity building for candidates. We provided materials and human resources. As a result, youth were elected to positions of power, and there was a strong network of young politicians joining hands across party lines.

The 2021 general election was a historic moment. Y4P members were engaged in the campaigns of youth candidates running for the seats of councilors, council chairpersons, mayors, and MPs. About 60 percent of those who we supported won their elections. Afterward, youth who gained seats in parliament established the Youth Parliamentary Caucus. For the first time, Zambia now had a platform for youth and MPs to advance youth agendas. This marked a profound shift in the

country, amplifying youth influence in shaping national policies. Zambia experienced a remarkable transformation.

Youth4Parliament is the first movement in Zambia—perhaps even in the world—that has managed to bring together youth politicians from different parties under one roof to discuss the youth agenda peacefully, work together, and offer each other solidarity. In fact, Y4P’s official launch was the first time that secretaries general of various Zambian political parties were meeting in one room around a mutual cause for young people.

We have seen a lot of youth get involved and get elected, but we have also seen a lot of movements being formed because of Y4P. These movements—mobilizing solidarity around various issues—are all riding on the numbers and strength of young people. Most of them have had Y4P members as their frontline mobilizers, including Fight Inequality Alliance Zambia, Girls Gone Political, and Youth Ignite. Y4P has contributed to the eruption of social movements and capacity building for grassroots actors in Zambia.

Y4P has raised our political consciousness. Youth are now voting again and are demanding to be included in political parties. We detest being used as tools of violence. We are more aware of the duties of office bearers. We are more willing to engage in meaningful conversations and activities to develop initiatives that create a better place for us to thrive. Youth—especially young women—have begun to break the barriers that once hindered them.

A lot has changed in the political space because of Youth4Parliament.

This is how it happened.

– The Central Command Team and Founders of Youth4Parliament



THOMPSON KAMUHUZA LUZENDI

Y4P
#Youth4Parliament

2026 Youth

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WHY WE NEEDED A MOVEMENT

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In Zambia where there is a youth majority¹, the very definition of democracy is undermined when youth are left out of the systems that run the country. We cannot genuinely boost democracy when the majority are deliberately kept out of the corridors of power and decision-making.

From our heavy public debt and the adverse effects of climate change to our ever-depleting natural resources, the decisions being made today will ultimately affect youth the most. All these older politicians will be long gone and will not face the repercussions of their decisions.

Youth leadership and involvement in decision-making is crucial as the world is changing. Modern challenges require evolved solutions. The innovation and energy of youth is needed now more than ever. “In my tribe,” shares Y4P member Given Kapolyo, “we say ‘imiti ikula empanga,’ which directly translates to ‘the seedlings of today become the forest of tomorrow.’” Youth are said to be the future, so why should they not be involved in decision-making and have a voice in parliament? Parliament should be balanced with all age groups. Because of the exclusion of young people, we have lacked continuity as a country. All new leaders must start from scratch, which has slowed our growth as a nation.

A parliament without youth is a dead parliament that will run in circles making decisions and arguments. An inclusive parliament is a healthy assembly. To make a difference in the long term, it is essential that young people are engaged in formal political processes and help formulate the politics of today and tomorrow. Inclusive political participation is not only a fundamental democratic right but also is crucial to building stable and peaceful societies by developing policies that respond to the specific needs of younger generations. For young people to be adequately represented in political institutions, processes, and decision-making—and particularly in elections—they must know their rights and be given

GETTING STARTED

¹People under age 35 constitute more than 80 percent of the population.

the knowledge and capacity needed to participate in a meaningful way at all levels.

When laws and policies that govern this country are passed in parliament, they benefit a certain group of people who want to hold onto power. Youth are affected by the outcomes of these laws. The older generation has done very little, yet they claim to represent the interests of young people. They must be willing to pass on the baton.

With youth being the majority and left out of governance, most of the population does not see the issues they find important being prioritized at the national level. Through political inclusion, youth can play a vital role in developing themselves and their communities while they push the youth agenda forward.

THE PILLARS AND PRINCIPLES OF THE MOVEMENT

To meet this challenge, the first thing we did—before we even launched the movement in 2018—was draft the Founding Pillars and the Non-negotiable Principles. Facing the question of how to address the exclusion of youth and women, we started shaping these ideas. They came from our resolve to have a movement devoid of the things being used to disenfranchise young people from participating in civic and political spaces. We listed the factors that were hindering youth participation and used them to develop the values and culture that represented what we wanted to achieve.

The Founding Pillars and Non-negotiable Principles were informed by the experiences co-founders Thompson and Nawa had as young politicians², but also by the aspirations we had for the movement. We did not want the movement to take the shape of the political parties and do the same things they were doing. We did not want to create a movement that could easily compromise and change its character. That’s why we called them “non-negotiable”—to say we can alter anything about this movement except for the Pillars and Principles. Here is what we wrote:

²Thompson Luzendi was a Green Party of Zambia (GPZ) member, while Nawa Sitali was a National Restoration Party (NAREP) member. For the 2021 elections, GPZ endorsed the then-governing Patriotic Front (PF) party, while NAREP endorsed the then-opposition party, the United Party for National Development (UPND).

THE FOUNDING PILLARS OF YOUTH4PARLIAMENT

WE BELIEVE...

in ethical and authentic youth leadership as a tool for the emancipation of young people.

in the fight for equality and using the feminist lens as a tool for the political liberation of youth.

that young people must lead the conversation around climate change and that it requires radical and innovative solutions from young people.

young people are united, regardless of political affiliation, and that partisan politics is a tool that is used to bring division among young people.

young people are and have the solutions to the challenges they face and must be given a chance to bring solutions forward.

THE NON-NEGOTIABLE PRINCIPLES OF YOUTH4PARLIAMENT MOBILIZATION

We use grassroots mobilization and community organizing as a force of change.

We do not handle finances or money as it is one tool that has been used to stop youth participation in politics, and we counter it with people power.

We are a revolutionary cause that speaks to youth power and youth leadership.

We do not fight *for* young people, we fight *with* young people, seeing that we are young ourselves.

Our strength is in our numbers and the grassroots ground forces that mobilize in various communities.

OUR NON-PARTISAN COMMITMENT

One of our deliberate strategies was turning all the forces the older generation used to separate the youth into a uniting force. Political parties use party flags to divide the youth and turn them against each other. They create an “us against them” mentality to assert control. This has been a breeding ground for political violence, which has mainly happened among the youth.

We saw the opportunity to change the narrative. We have welcomed every well-meaning young person to join the movement regardless of their party affiliation. Now, they sit peacefully in one space and meaningfully engage in political conversations. They understand that they are youth first and party members second.

This strategy has helped youth realize the importance of unity of purpose—that their opposing political efforts actually pursued the same end goal of addressing the various social problems they were facing. They now understood that political parties are merely one of the vehicles to get into office, but nothing greater than the power they hold when united.

Our non-partisan commitment creates the space for young people to debate beyond party lines, which allows us to learn from each other. We have come to understand their experiences inside different parties. We can bring our grievances to the table and find solutions together that can be brought back to the parties for the benefit of all youth.

By being non-partisan, we have penetrated the party institutions, which already have operating systems in place. These parties have existing structures across the country that our members participate in. This carries the movement forward.

This strategy has helped sustain the movement by not sidelining youth based on party affiliation. Being non-partisan allows youth to join the movement without them denouncing their political party and ideology. It has resulted in the movement growing drastically.

A MOVEMENT WITHOUT MONEY

In our national context, politics has been monetized and commercialized. Money has been used to divide young people and keep us out of the corridors of power. If we embraced the money culture, we would remain divided. We deliberately made it our policy that we would not handle money.

As a result, within the leadership team, we do not fight over money—where it came from or where it went. There are no accusations of mismanaging funds because there is no money in the first place. All we have is each other. We realized what we needed instead of money was the power that we each held within ourselves. Money is not as important as people power. When we join together, we hold a power that can conquer anything.

When people learn about this policy, the first question we get is “How do you support young politicians?” Sometimes, this principle has made our work challenging. There are ideas we have not been able to run without the money. Yet every time, we have found ways to maneuver and find solutions. Instead of cash, we bring expertise. We campaign on the ground. We help them develop a strategy. We teach them how to brand their social media. We show candidates how to activate people power in their communities. We have seen it work with every young person who went on to win elections in 2021. This proved the power of people over money.

Of course, we do accept support. It could be with campaign materials for our candidates. It could be securing a venue to hold a town hall meeting for youth candidates to address their constituency. It could be donating refreshments for the community that come to hear the candidates. The material support we received helped the movement implement its objectives, especially during the campaign period. We used donated resources to amplify the voices of youth and to reach out to as many people as we could to vote.

When we first started growing rapidly, we were supported by a movement coach. This was one of the best forms of help the

team could receive, especially at that stage. The coaching sessions helped us develop new knowledge and skills that equipped us to manage the movement effectively. There are many ways movements can be supported without giving them cash and the challenges it brings. We take pride in the fact that people have been able to help us.

This is one of our Non-negotiable Principles, and if you ask me—Given Kapolyo—it is one of my favorites. It has kept us original. It has kept us organic. It has kept us legit. Most importantly, it has made it possible for us to embrace all young people, because we are incorruptible.

MY FIRST Y4P MEETING

I remember my first Y4P meeting like it was yesterday. The introductions were confusing.

As each person said their names and party affiliations, I could not understand what was happening. It was unheard of! How is this possible? I thought to myself. Young politicians from different parties all in one room. No insults, no machetes, and no bloodshed. It was political heaven.

As the meeting progressed, at times I felt the tension in the room. I noted the radicalism in youth politicians' ability to defend their parties. But above it all, I noticed the anger in their voices when they spoke about the challenges they were facing as youth in their respective parties.

In that moment, we all realized why it was significant to have every young person be a part of Y4P—regardless of which party we belonged to, which party we supported, or even if we did not belong to any party at all. We are youth first.

Given Kapolyo

NALISHEBO SINYAMA



BUILDING THE CENTRAL COMMAND TEAM

When we officially launched the movement in 2018, after years of background conversations, we knew we needed to put a leadership team in place to steer the movement on its path to success. However, we did not have a method to do this, so we decided to handpick Central Command Team members from among our friends and acquaintances.

At this point, we had already established the Non-negotiable Principles, one of which stated that we could not apply for any grants or handle money. The first core team, upon realizing that there would not be any remuneration, brought a motion to vote away the principles on the handling of finances and our non-alliance to a political party. We—Thompson and Nawa—knew this decision would alter the very nature of the movement and would make us vulnerable to being bought out by political parties. As the founders, we fought the motion so strongly that the core team members decided that if we continued, they would vote to remove us.

By the middle of the year, after constant back and forth, our persistence led to the other members leaving the team. The selection of core team members of the movement had been targeted, but after reflection, we realized that we were only targeting from within our circles, and this was not the best approach for a revolutionary movement. We could only get the right people if they knew what the movement stood for. We knew that we needed to cast our net wide, so we decided on an open call for applications from activists and human rights defenders.

The selection process was intense. We would vet applicants with an interview, and they were put through several competency tests that challenged their thought processes. We also deliberately welcomed as few young people as possible from the capital city, because we did not want to be labeled

as only a Lusaka-based movement. We also selected candidates who were members of different political parties.

Before the end of the year, the new team was built. These days, the core team is involved in the vetting process of new candidates. They review their applications and rank them according to their performance as activists. There have also been times when we have recruited core team members without an open application because of their record as organizers.

MEMBERSHIP

To get a seat at the table, we first needed to gather youth around the movement. People needed to buy into the message and join us, either as supporters, activists, or organizers. Any form of engagement was welcome. We deployed a ladder structure with different layers of engagement to strengthen the movement.

The first level of membership is the **supporters**. These are people who directly or indirectly support what the movement does. We count on them to vote for youth candidates.

The second level is comprised of **activists**, who spread the news of the movement to the supporters and the general public.

The third level is **grassroots organizers**, who are active community organizers for the movement in different provinces, districts, and communities. These members are documented so we can easily contact them.

The Central Command Team comprises the leadership members who are nominated based on their performance as organizers or selected from applicants.

Our strategy for movement growth starts with having the right people in the core team with influence, tact, and the skill to mobilize fellow young people within their spheres of influence. All team members help recruit key individuals across the provinces to be regional movement organizers, who, in turn, recruit at the district and community levels.

Membership in the movement is inclusive and open to everyone below the age of 35. We do not discriminate based on race, gender, age, tribe, education level, religious beliefs, or political affiliation. Our membership includes all who identify with the youth agenda and subscribe to our Pillars and Non-negotiable Principles. We do not have any formal membership registration because we want all youth to be members of the movement. We are more of a revolution than an organization.

Those who play key roles as organizers and core team members sign a commitment with the movement in which they pledge a certain number of hours to movement support. Organizers commit at least eight hours each week, while core team members commit to be available when requested by the movement manager.

COMMUNICATIONS

Y4P communicates to its members and the country through several channels. When addressing members, we use social media groups. This method is fast and reaches many movement members. Some core team members are responsible for sharing information on these platforms. We also use emails to communicate with partners.

When communicating to all Zambians, we most often rely on our organizers, activists, and supporters to pass on the information. This is especially useful for reaching remote areas of the country. Sometimes we use radio and television stations. On social media, we use written posts, posters, and sometimes videos to communicate externally. When we have a message targeting a particular segment of society, we ask allies who have a larger audience on social media to share our message.

The face and spokesperson of the movement is the movement manager. All the statements and external communications are signed off by them, as they carry the legal liability of the movement.

RECRUITMENT

The movement uses the engagement ladder described above as a network for recruitment. Early on, we coined the phrase, “If your next-door neighbor doesn’t know what you are doing, then you are not doing anything.” At each level of the ladder, core team members, organizers, and activists are responsible for sharing the movement’s message and inviting their neighbors to join.

The movement also recruits from universities, taking advantage of induction week when new students enter campus. Our team speaks about the movement to prospective members. We have also hosted debates to attract students. Some core team members came from the university branches of the movement and, on graduation, left replacements to continue the movement’s life on campus.

People who are interested in becoming members can contact the movement through a Google Form that collects their name, contact information, and region. Each core team member manages registration in their allocated province. Prospective members must be active in their communities and should support youth getting involved in politics and governance.

We task students with recruiting at least ten of their friends to be members. We also used this approach outside the university setting to recruit organizers across communities. Furthermore, we do door-to-door voter registration campaigns. This allowed the movement to quickly grow to 1,000 members in its early days. By the end of 2018 when we approached the parties to sign our Youth Social Contract, we already had 60,000 members.

Y4P DEBATES

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I saw an ad on Facebook that was asking young people to apply to be part of a debate. I remember the debate was on how to increase youth participation in politics and governance and how to increase the number of elected youth MPs and leaders. Though I was very doubtful, I applied. I received a phone call telling me I had been accepted to attend the activity. It was very surprising to me that I got selected to be part of their Youth Debate Zambia event. Through it, I was introduced to the movement and gained a deeper understanding of what they wanted to achieve.

Given Kapolyo

”



MULETA KAPATISO

CONCEIVING THE IDEA

Young people could not get into spaces of political leadership without the parties. Yet the parties did not have deliberate policies that would enable youth to be adopted as candidates to run for parliamentary and local council positions. We saw that political parties could play an important role in securing an increase in the number of young people participating in politics.

We decided to design a social contract that would ensure their youth members could be adopted as candidates. Before writing the contract, we reflected on the challenges youth faced and what commitments we wanted from the parties. In addition to the need for adoption procedures, we identified the lack of financial support for youth candidates, the lack of strategic positioning of youth in party structures, and gender inequality.

The social contract only had two clauses: The first committed the signing parties to adopt at least five youth candidates in each of the ten provinces to run for parliamentary office on their ticket. The second required that at least 50 percent of the adopted candidates in each province were women. This would guarantee the participation and adoption of young women to run for parliamentary office.

PERSUADING THE PARTIES

Engaging the political parties was difficult. We approached them through movement members who belonged to each group. Young party members were now holding their leadership accountable. It was challenging for us to secure appointments, and even when we accomplished this, parties would express they did not want to commit due to youth violence. We would tell them the benefits of adopting youth candidates and the need for youth in decision-making spaces.

We shared that we had over 60,000 active members in our

movement, and if they did not adopt youth candidates, they would not get youth votes. This was one of our biggest points of leverage. We had the numbers, and the secretaries general came to understand that without us, they stood no chance of winning the 2021 general elections. We had organized and mobilized, and, in this way, we seized the power to disrupt the status quo in Zambia.

We knew that it was very important for the main opposition party to sign the social contract. We knew this would persuade the party in power, and, in turn, having the two biggest parties would persuade others to sign. After several meetings, they had both committed. We started using this against the others, telling them, “Your friends have indicated they will sign the social contract. If you don’t sign, you will lose your young members and the youth of the nation.” More parties agreed to sign because they did not want to lose the youth vote.

Once each secretary general of a party had agreed to sign, we would not let them do it right away. Instead, we would tell them to attend the upcoming signing ceremony. We invited them and asked them not to send a youth proxy. We wanted all the secretaries general of the political parties to be present during the signing of the contract.

THE SIGNING CEREMONY

Of the fifteen political parties we approached, the eight strongest parties in Zambia agreed to the demands of the Youth Social Contract. At our historic signing ceremony on August 31, 2018, Youth4Parliament became the first group to bring together the secretaries general of the major parties into one room to enact a singular vision to promote youth candidates. To date, no other movement, local organization, or NGO has accomplished this.

On the day of the signing, we were not certain the parties would

³ The parties that signed were the Patriotic Front, the United Party for National Development, the Forum for Democracy Development, the United National Independence Party, the Alliance for Democracy and Development, the Movement for Multiparty Democracy, the National Restoration Party, and the Green Party of Zambia.

CONFIRMING SIGNEES

“When we first tried to meet with the secretary general of the Patriot Front—the ruling party at the time—he canceled our appointment 20 minutes after the meeting time. We moved our meeting to the following day, but again, he could not meet. He asked us to leave a copy of the contract.

Eventually, I received a phone call one morning at 7:00 AM from his secretary who told me he was ready to meet in three hours. I live two hours away from his office, so I caught the first bus into Lusaka. Although the meeting began two hours late, he shared that the contract was a good idea. We discussed his concerns, and he committed to sharing it with the party leadership.

We didn't hear from him again until the morning of the signing ceremony. He personally called and confirmed that he would be there. I was so excited that I didn't even know what to say. It was a short call, but it was one of the best I've ever received.

Nawa Sitali

show up. Early that morning, the secretary general of the main opposition party called us to enquire about the venue and event time. We shared the details, and within an hour he had arrived. When he got there, we took photos of him and shared them with the other opposition political parties. Upon seeing him at our event, all of them quickly showed up. Even the secretary general of the ruling party arrived.

The secretaries general and their proxies were seated at the high table. We began with introductions and formalities. Our co-founder Nawa invited them to sign the Youth Social Contract and commit their parties to a cause that we would mutually benefit their party youth and the apolitical youth of Zambia. Finally, they all signed, and put down their pens. The room filled with applause.

We realized that we were headed for success. The signing of the contract opened doors for the movement to directly engage with young people from all political parties. It guaranteed the adoption of youth to campaign in their preferred political parties. It also gave youth entry points to engage with their party leaders and hold them accountable to their commitment to adopting youth candidates.

This event changed the scope of the movement. We now had the huge task of mobilizing youth from different parties and preparing them for the general elections.



MARY MWABA

MAKING DECISIONS AND PLANNING ACTIONS

Decision-making and planning have been essential in sustaining the movement and securing our victories. As a movement, we do not speak or act for youth; we do it with youth. They are the movement, and we have deliberately structured our leadership under their mandate.

Our planning method has three components: the People's Resolve, the National Gathering, and the Central Command Team.

The **People's Resolve** is a national event where we invite youth from all ten provinces of Zambia—representatives from the various branches of Y4P, student leaders, elected youth leaders, local and international partner organizations, and political party youth leaders—to evaluate the work of the movement and set a strategy going forward. The first People's Resolve was held in 2018.

The **National Gathering** is an annual meeting between the Central Command Team and Y4P organizers from across the country. In these sessions, Y4P leadership determines specific goals for the movement in accordance with the People's Resolve. The first National Gathering was held November 1–3, 2019.

The **Central Command Team** takes the strategies and goals of the two bodies and determines the best actions to execute the vision that has been set by the youth themselves. They also ensure the decisions align with the Non-negotiable Principles and Founding Pillars of the movement.

Y4P practices democratic centralism. The core team must always reach a consensus. Even those who disagree with a particular decision must agree with the majority. If the team makes a decision that conflicts with the Pillars and Principles, the **Movement Manager** reserves the right to overrule

them. Likewise, when emergency decisions must be made, the team entrusts the Movement Manager to make the decision and update the core team.

The Movement Manager is assisted by the Resource Person–Legal to ensure we are within the law. The Grassroots Engagement Lead supports the Movement Manager with the ground implementation of actions. The movement also has an advisory panel comprised of the founders and former managers who support the Movement Manager in conflicts upon request.

FROM MEETINGS TO CAMPAIGNS

In 2018, the first People’s Resolve determined that the movement would focus on sending youth to parliament and local government posts. Delegates to the sessions were voted in by different branches of the movement to form commissions. The People’s Resolve also voted for leadership to launch campaigns to increase political participation, voter registration, and increasing voter turnout.

At the National Gathering which followed, over 120 youth from all ten provinces came to Lusaka to deliberate on how best they could champion the youth agenda. These youth were from different backgrounds, political affiliations, and status in society. Most were victims of the exclusionary tendencies of political parties and leadership spaces.

The Gathering was held to discuss matters of the movement, including its purpose, its progress, and planning for the future. Attendees raised several issues affecting youth, such as unemployment, underdevelopment, shrinking political spaces for youth and women, and how the movement would find solutions. Most attendees revealed their interest in running in the 2021 general elections. Together, we set targets for the numbers we wanted in parliament and determined standards for how to create political partnerships.

THE NATIONAL GATHERING

“

I was so excited about the National Gathering. It was the first time I was able to meet and interact with different youth who were influential in politics. I had the opportunity to talk with the current minister of education and the next minister of foreign affairs. It was rare to have leaders of the ruling and opposition parties seated together in a space full of youth, responding to questions and concerns.

Mary Mwaba

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At the Gathering, the goals previously determined at the People's Resolve took shape as the Get Out Campaign. This was the foundation upon which all our programs and activities were anchored from 2019 through 2021. The three-year campaign was divided into implementation phases that focused on different stages of activating youth for political action. The first phase, which started in 2019, was **Get Out and Participate**. This phase concentrated on highlighting the need for greater participation of youth in civic and political spaces.

In 2020, the second phase of the campaign was **Get Out and Register**. This phase, which rallied youth to register to vote in the 2021 general elections, secured 1.5 million young people as registered voters. Movement members were deployed across the country to ensure people knew the registration requirements, centers, and deadlines. Members also worked with the Electoral Commission of Zambia to clarify misconceptions about online registration. Furthermore, members were stationed at registration centers to maintain transparency and expedite registrations.

Get Out and Vote was the third phase, which began the following year. This phase urged youth to vote for youth candidates in the general election. The election results showed a huge increase in the number of youth candidates who got elected to office.

The National Gathering in November 2019 was a defining moment that united us. It was the birthing ground of many youth politicians who have gone on to become MPs, mayors, and local councilors. The youth revolution was upon us. We were called to action. The National Gathering was a historic event that gave purpose and meaning to the struggle of Zambian youth. Beyond this, it was the beginning of lifelong friendships and solidarity in the struggle.

ANDREW MACHILA



**2026 Youth
Candidates Program**



A SURGE OF DISCONTENT

In May 2020, the economy took a nosedive. The cost of living was unbearable. The unemployment level among youth was skyrocketing. The government had no empowerment programs dedicated to liberating youth from poverty. They were oblivious to our challenges as the COVID-19 pandemic worsened conditions. As if this was not enough, the government was granting gold mining licenses to political elites at the expense of ordinary Zambians who would be displaced from their communities. Not only were they imprudent with the management of our natural resources, but they could not listen to any criticism. They paraded a minister on national television issuing statements that dissenters did not know what they were doing and that they were “just naked youth.”

On June 3, I—Muleta Kapatiso—contacted my fellow core team members to argue that this was not only a window of opportunity to organize, but it was also important for the movement to ensure that the anger of youth would not become a leaderless and violent revolution. We decided that we could not stand by while the government acted with impunity and youth discontent burgeoned. The core team reached a consensus to mobilize a mass protest on June 22 that would culminate at the National Assembly.

We realized the risk of organizing this action. The regime was intent on consolidating its power and was intolerant of any activism. Without careful planning, we could lose the trust of Zambian youth, and protesters might even lose their lives. Y4P reached out to its organizing network, getting buy-in from members to take part in the action and ensuring they understood we needed to hold the protests together on the same date.

Leadership assigned tasks to core team members. Some were tasked with being the voice and face of the protest, while others were tasked with ensuring that all was in place for a successful event—making placards, arranging transpor-

tation, establishing safe houses, and liaising with legal support in case protesters got apprehended by the police. Only three of the dozen core team members knew all the details. Information was siloed, even which member was responsible for which task. This confidentiality prevented leaks that would have compromised the entire operation.

After the necessary strategic planning, we drafted a letter notifying the police of the protest. Two activists were recruited to deliver the letters. On June 5, we launched an online engagement strategy using videos to announce the national protest and call youth to join in solidarity.

ADJUSTING TO THE REGIME'S THREATS

Following the announcement, the regime started a campaign against the protest, contacting us one by one to buy us off. This did not work for them. Meanwhile, the police informed us that the protest should not take place due to their lack of capacity to police the event. We made a video announcing that although the police had refused their obligations, we would proceed as it was within our constitutional rights. We shared that we had appealed to the minister of home affairs according to statutory requirements. The video went viral.

Through subtle actions, the regime tried persuading us to cancel the protests. To their surprise, the youth were unwilling to negotiate on their demands and cancel the event. On realizing their attempts to foil the protest were in vain, they resorted to blatant threats of violence. They warned the public against the protests and called on the police to beat and arrest any participants. One prominent MP from the ruling party called on the police to “break the bones” of protesters.

This backfired, as it agitated the youth even more.

When the day of the protest arrived, thousands of heavily armed police officers patrolled the streets of Lusaka looking for protesters. The spokesperson of the protest announced that we would

THE POLICE USE INTIMIDATION

“ One Sunday morning, I received a call from the Lusaka Central Police. The officer told me to come to the station the next day. I immediately informed my fellow activists, who advised me to go there with a lawyer. I requested time off from work and showed up that morning with movement co-founder Nawa and Mr. Josiah Kalala, a lawyer from Chapter One Foundation.

At the police station, we were taken to an investigation room. Senior officers threw jabs at us and claimed the country’s security was becoming fragile due to our call for protests. We held our position that the ordinary youth of Zambia needed to be heard. Protests were the language of the unheard as dialogue and mutual respect was no longer granted by the authorities. We were let go without any official warning, caution, or arrest.

Muleta Kapatiso



not be taking to the streets of the capital. Instead, they told people to protest in the bush. We resorted to protesting in the bush to prevent violence because it was in our Non-negotiable Principles to avoid it in any form.

These dispersed protests across rural Zambia were broadcast online. Many protesters wore black and posted content demanding freedoms and holding the government accountable for their wrongs. In the first ten minutes of streaming, we had more than 100,000 viewers. Thousands of young people joined the conversation, calling out the government for its violent behavior.

In our livestream, we announced that the police patrolling Lusaka were protesting on our behalf. The head of the police went live on national television to say they were close to finding us. He even announced our supposed location, but it was wrong.

When the livestreaming ended, our informants told us heavily armed para-military trucks were patrolling all entrances into Lusaka. Some had even stationed themselves near the home of the main opposition leader, whom they thought was harboring us.

Our informants kept updating us with intelligence on the routes we could use and how to reach the safe houses. We spent the next week hiding, jumping from one safe house to another until it was safe to come out. One activist hid us for three days, providing food and shelter. To this day, only those who took to the bush, and the one core team member providing support, know the location of the Bush Protests.

The Bush Protests left the regime feeling the power slip out of their hands. They had lost the youth of the country. In response, they began dishing out money in the form of grants and loans to youth and artists. They initiated an apprenticeship program to curb unemployment. They also launched conferences and dialogues to engage with youth regarding their various challenges. This helped the youth, but it did not stop the regime's fall from

grace. The Bush Protests harnessed youth discontent and channeled it into mass mobilization against a corrupt regime. It was one of the biggest direct actions in Zambian history since the Cha Cha Cha marches of the early 1960s that secured national independence.



GIVEN MUSANYA KAPOLYO

YAP
#Youth4Parliament
Get Out & Vote

IDENTIFYING YOUTH CANDIDATES

In late 2020, building on the success of the Youth Social Contract and the viability demonstrated in the Bush Protests, Youth4Parliament launched a program to bolster youth candidates. This was a major focus of the year, identifying, training, and supporting the youth who were going to run in the 2021 general election.

During the identification of candidates, the core team was tasked to identify and reach out to young people who were contesting in the 2021 general elections in different provinces and develop a working relationship with them. During various movement events, youth would express their interest in running for office. We also posted a call on social media platforms for youth who were active in their communities to apply as candidates.

Core team members would submit names of candidates who had demonstrated potential. They assessed what kind of resources would be best allocated to each candidate, considering the limited material and human resources we had available. Prospective candidates were enrolled in the Y4P mentorship program. This included different capacity-building trainings in preparation for them to be competent and effective leaders and to gain skills in fundraising, mobilizing, and campaigning.

However, not every young person who was identified in this process was adopted for elections by their parties. Some ran as independent candidates. Others decided to pull out of the race and join the campaign trails of other youth candidates.

SELECTING AND SUPPORTING CANDIDATES

Candidates or Y4P members who were contemplating running for office would request support from the movement and, at times, solidarity in their bids to get political party

adoption. They also would request technical and human resource assistance to help them build a winning strategy.

Between May and August 2021, we ran the National Election Campaign. The Youth Social Contract made it easy for us to visit the political parties and ask for names and contacts of young people whom they had adopted to run. We supported the youth candidates, whether they were adopted on party tickets or ran as independent candidates.

This was the moment to put the strength of the movement to the test. We could honor the mandate of the youth by supporting every youth candidate despite their political affiliation or location. Youth4Parliament members were deployed across the country to campaign with the candidates. Now we were youth before we were anything else. We had youth from the party in power campaigning for candidates from the opposition, and vice versa.

Every core team member went to various parts of the country to support the campaigns. It was not easy to penetrate certain areas because of poor road networks, and some areas were very far, but the team managed to reach all the areas they were assigned. Sometimes we were confronted with tribalism, but that never shook the spirit of the team. Our aim was solidarity.

Many youth candidates ran for office, and 60 percent of those supported by Youth4Parliament got elected. Six candidates won seats in parliament, one of whom was a woman. Six youth won mayoral positions, two of whom were women and the youngest of whom was 26. More than 150 youth candidates won their campaigns for councilor positions. In the town of Chama, all the councilors—even the chair—are now youth. These victories showed us young people are ready to lead.

However, it is not called a struggle for nothing. The youth revolution has been a battlefield. Being part of the movement is like being on the war front. The victories we have recorded came at a cost, from being regarded as unserious by senior party members, to being ridiculed by family who feared we were getting too serious, to losing personal relationships because of the spontaneous

SUPPORTING ALL YOUTH



Being part of the core team meant that I had my allegiance with the movement above everything else. I cannot involve myself with anything that speaks against the movement—be it private or public actions, certain jobs, or certain organizations.

Being part of the movement meant working with all youth, including some with whom I disagreed and didn't get along. Being tolerant became the norm. This can be frustrating, but we all embrace it.

Mary Mwaba



nature of movement programming. When the movement called, we would jump. Regardless of when and where, we were ready to go.

Long journeys, hiking, or taking trucks to places buses would not reach. Cracked lips, sore throats, lost voices from the shouting. Hungry and tired, cramping feet. Long days, longer nights, and tsetse fly bites. The national voter registration and election campaigns were hectic, but we would do it all over again. And now, as we look to the next national election, we are doing it again.



CHIMWEMWE ZAKEYO MWANSA

**2026 Youth
Candidates Program**

YFP
#TruthParliament

Supporting
GLOBAL PLANNING

AFRICANS RISING

Since the 2021 national elections, Youth4Parliament has participated in several international engagements. It has spread its wings to other parts of the continent, attending the Global People Power Forum in Tanzania and speaking at the Activista boot camp in Zimbabwe. Y4P was privileged to convene with the most courageous activists in Southern Africa. The movement was also nominated for the Africans Rising Awards under the “Social Movement of the Year” category. For the first time in history, a grassroots social movement from Southern Africa won this award.

After we won the award, Africans Rising became interested in learning more about how we managed to achieve our goals. Africans Rising is a Pan-African movement working across the continent and diaspora to push governments, businesses, and NGOs to focus on the issues Africans deem critical. At their 2022 preparatory convention for the All African Movements Assembly (AAMA), they had Y4P leaders lead the conversation on the key issues they would want to see the assembly address.

At the AAMA event in Arusha, Tanzania, Y4P was identified as one of the movements that recorded massive success. On behalf of the movement, Mary Mwaba was asked to speak and share with an audience of over 350 delegates from various African nations on what the movement was about, what it had done, and how it managed to achieve its objectives. Furthermore, she shared some of the key movement practices that other African social movements and organizations could adopt to develop Africa.

YOUTH PARLIAMENTARY CAUCUS

Domestically, the work of Youth4Parliament is not complete. On September 28, 2022, in partnership with ActionAid through the Global Platform Zambia, elected youth MPs officially launched the Zambian Youth Parliamentary Caucus

(ZYPC) at the National Assembly with the theme “Bridging the Gap Between Youth and Parliament.”

ZYPC was established to advance the youth agenda and the work that Y4P began. The caucus works to build solidarity among youth MPs from the different parties, represent the rights and interests of youth MPs, and promote youth representation in politics at large. This caucus has established a spirit of camaraderie among the youth MPs. This was one of the greatest achievements that the movement has been part of.

The launch of the caucus was very important in the work of the movement because of the narrative it presented. At the launch, Nalishebo spoke on behalf of the movement. It was the first time in Zambia that a youth, representing a social movement, spoke at a high-level government event with the head of the Legislative Arm of Government. The caucus launch also reflected the deliberate approach that Y4P has been taking to promote young women’s leadership. The speakers at the launch of the caucus were all women, ranging from the Speaker of the National Assembly and the ActionAid Zambia Country Director, to the Movement Manager and the Chairperson of the Caucus, who herself was a candidate that the movement had supported during the elections.

PASSING THE TORCH

In the early days, before we had even chosen the name of the movement, we determined a process to regularly bring new leadership into the movement. Thompson and I—Nawa—had agreed we needed a comprehensive transitional process. Passing the torch would mean that no Y4P member could think they are bigger than the movement. It also created a robust internal system of accountability and transparency. Most importantly, since we had started this movement to address the exclusion of youth from leadership, we could not support structures in our own system that would be exclusive.

The agreement was that the movement manager would serve a term of two years. After every term, the core team recommends

a fellow core team member to become the movement manager. Aside from the founding Y4P members who were only allowed one term, movement managers could serve a second term on the recommendation of the core team. Once the core team makes a recommendation, they share it with the organizers of the movement, who formally decide at the People's Resolve. The outgoing movement manager becomes an advisor to the core team and provides technical assistance when requested. They also return to being a movement organizer in their respective area of residence. This ensures that the movement retains all former core team members in the grassroots work of recruiting and activating communities for action.

Nawa served as the first movement manager. When Thompson took over the position, Nawa became an advisor. In the wake of the National Election Campaign, Thompson's term was coming to an end, and he was transitioning to the advisor role. I—Nal-ishebo—remember vividly when an internal advert for the role of movement manager was posted in our core team discussion group. Having seen how committed and dedicated everyone was, I thought I would not stand a chance. But I gave it a shot and, a few days later, received an email that I was a shortlisted candidate. I was invited for interviews and ultimately selected as movement manager, becoming the first female manager. I took over the mantle in late 2021, after the election euphoria was over. The movement was now in its contraction phase and had lost power. There was a need to rebuild and reenergize all its structures, including the core team.

Passing the torch of leadership enables different ideas that suit the current context. Youth4Parliament is fighting against old people who have stayed in positions of leadership since the 1990s. Some have been serving as members of parliament for over 25 years. Some have been serving in local leadership for 15 to 20 years. If we are fighting a constituency dictatorship, we cannot be internally dictatorial. We cannot push for fresh youth leadership in politics when internally we are not advancing the interests of youth leadership in our own rank and file. As a Movement Manager, you must understand that your time in the position is lim-

ited, and you must give it to other people. This also ensures there will always be fresh ideas running the movement.

PREPARING FOR THE 2026 ELECTIONS

Following the 2021 general elections, Youth4Parliament has continued engaging with young people using various platforms. Recently, we released a call for all youth wanting to run in the 2026 elections to register for the 2026 Candidates Program. This program supports their candidacy in the general elections by empowering them with the knowledge and skills necessary to prepare for their nominations, campaigns, and general elections. We conduct in-person and online trainings for those who have applied and are already mobilizing and organizing in their communities. Topics covered in these trainings include Political Leadership, Public Policy, Governance and Political Parties, Sustainable Development, Human Rights, Public Speaking and Media Relations, Advocacy and Lobbying, Anti-Corruption and Integrity, and the Lawmaking Process, among many others. These topics are essential for building youth capacity as candidates and public officers.

Additionally, Youth4Parliament has launched a new recruitment protocol. In this process, we ensure that every young person intending to join the movement as a regular member, mobilizer, or organizer undergoes training to understand what the movement is about, what their role is, what the opportunities are, and how they can contribute to the overall goal of the movement. This is done through bi-weekly meetings facilitated by the core team. This initiative ensures we continue growing the movement with well-informed and like-minded youth who are willing and able to build the movement.

We have also continued to engage with the youth parliamentarians whom we supported in the previous elections. We use social media to shine a light on the work they are doing in their wards, districts, and constituencies. This effort exhibits the outcomes of meaningful youth participation in governance and politics.

WE CAN'T BECOME WHAT WE FIGHT AGAINST

“As a young activist rising within my political party, I was often taken aback that party officials never relinquished their positions and would often stay on until they were either kicked out or died. There were no opportunities for fresh young minds with brilliant ideas to come in and revive the party structures. Many young people were frustrated and leaving the party rank and file because they couldn't meaningfully engage and contribute to the party's growth.

I made it my principle to ensure that every time I would have an opportunity to serve and lead my fellow comrades, I would do so for a limited time. This would ensure that all youth I worked with would have an opportunity to move up the leadership ladder of engagement and eventually take over the reins from me. My fear has always been that I become the very thing that I fought so hard to remove from power. It is from this idea that passing on the leadership torch became enshrined as a value and principle for Y4P.

Thompson Luzendi

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Looking ahead, we keep interacting with young people through the School of Political Education sessions conducted in person and online. These sessions help youth realize the power they hold to solve the problems they face in their communities, hold their leaders accountable, and promote transparency. In this way, we continue to activate and strengthen youth civic participation.



NAWA V. SITALI

Nawa V. Sitali is a social movement specialist and political activist from the territory of Barotseland in Zambia. Growing up in rural Nampundwe, a small village west of the Capital City, Nawa developed a passion for politics but was never given an opportunity to meaningfully engage in politics due to his age. In 2018, he co-founded the social movement called Youth4Parliament as a response to the exclusion of youth in politics.

THOMPSON KAMUHUZA LUZENDI

Thompson Luzendi is a co-founder of Youth4Parliament. He is a grassroots social movement organizing expert, a graduate of the Program for Young Politicians in Africa, the African Presidential Leadership Program, and an alumnus of the Young African Leaders Initiative and the Apolitical Academy. Thompson is an active politician and uses organizing as a strategy to activate his community for transformative sustainable development. He is part of the 2026 Youth4Parliament candidates programs.

NALISHEBO SINYAMA

Nalishebo Sinyama is currently serving as the Movement Manager of Youth4Parliament. She is a community organizing specialist, feminist, and young female politician. Nalishebo is the first and youngest woman to be appointed as provincial chairperson in one of the biggest political parties in Zambia. In 2021, Nalishebo was the only female aspirant vying for the Kabwata Constituency parliamentary elections under the opposition political party (the Patriotic Front).

MULETA KAPATISO

Muleta Kapatiso is a lawyer, activist, and research consultant. Muleta has work experience in the legal and civil society sectors, having worked with social movements and human

rights organizations. As part of his work to advance human rights, social justice, and the rule of law, Muleta serves as a regional council member on the Youth4UHC movement based in Kenya, the steering committee member of the Fight Inequality Alliance Zambia, and the Central Command Team member of the Youth-4Parliament movement, a social movement championing for meaningful participation of the youth in Zambian politics.

MARY MWABA

Mary Mwaba is a core team member of Youth4Parliament. She joined the movement in 2019. She is a graduate of the University of Zambia. She is passionate about youth and women leadership, governance, human rights, and sustainable development.

ANDREW MACHILA

Andrew Machila is a young person from the southern part of Zambia. He is certified in agriculture, ICT, and irrigation technology. He is the founder and CEO of Andmac Farm, which produces horticultural crops and broiler chickens in the rural district of Chilanga. He has been involved in organizing with Youth4Parliament since 2018 and has been in the core team since February 2019.

GIVEN MUSANYA KAPOLYO

Given, popularly known as the “people’s president,” holds a degree in civic education. She is a vibrant, dedicated, and radical youth and gender activist who joined the movement in 2019 and has grown from a grassroots organizer in the northern province of Kasama to being part of the movement’s core team.

CHIMWEMWE ZAKEYO MWANSA

Chimwemwe is a young Zambian male who holds a degree in primary teaching and a diploma in journalism and mass communication. He is very passionate about science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. He is a person who is always willing to learn more, be more, and do more in all aspects of life.

In 2018, Zambia grappled with political turmoil, a stifled democratic process, and marginalized youth voices. Physical violence among youth from different political factions was a hard reality. Amid this chaos, two friends from opposing parties began the Youth4Parliament (Y4P) movement, igniting a transformation that would reshape Zambia's political landscape.

Discover how Y4P's pioneering spirit united young activists across party lines, inspiring a historic shift in the country's politics. From fostering youth leaders to run for office to mobilizing youth to vote and join an unprecedented emergence of social movements, Y4P's journey is a testament to the power of youth determination.

This is the story of Youth4Parliament's first few years—their challenges and victories—told in their own voices. But this book is more than a recounting of their journey; it's a guidebook for changemakers.

MELLEMFOLKELIG
SAMVIRKE **actionaid**

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