#YALIVotes: “Give Young People the Feeling They’re Cared About”

(Kendra Helmer/USAID)

Ako Essan Emile has seen what happens when elections go bad. He was attending a university in Côte d’Ivoire’s city of Abidjan when violence broke out in the wake of the disputed 2010 election.

In the years since then, he’s thought a lot about what it takes to bring free and fair elections to his country. “Much has to be done to build trust between young people and politicians,” Ako said. “YALI Network members in Côte d’Ivoire have started creating a platform for young people to interact with political leaders.”

He contrasted his experience as a Mandela Washington Fellow with his experience with politicians at home. “We came to the United States in August and we had the opportunity to talk to President Obama. We’d never had this opportunity in our country.”

Ako sees open communication between candidates and the people they hope to represent as an important basis for better elections and better leadership. “Most leaders don’t consider young people when making their strategies. They just use young people as bait to attract other young people.”

Ako is the managing director of Radio Arc-en-ciel, a community-based station in the urban area of Abobo. In the months leading up to the October election, Radio Arc-en-ciel hosted roundtable discussions to give a voice to one of the country’s largest (1.5 million) and least-represented communities and also to inform Abobo’s residents.

“One of the key issues is lack of education about the electoral process,” Ako said. “No accurate information is given, and if a politician comes into a community he will talk to the population according to his point of view, but not in a balanced way. People can be misled and it can cause conflict.”

Ako Essan Emile (right) in the Radio Arc-en-ciel studio in September 2015.
(Kendra Helmer/USAID)

In addition to the roundtable radio shows, Radio Arc-en-ciel hosted events that balanced live music with information. “We invited experts to come in and explain the electoral code to the population. If they know the electoral code, they will be able to monitor whether the election is going the right way or the wrong way. If someone doesn’t have accurate information they can feel that fraud is going on, and then one rumor will come out and spark into violence and escalate into bloodshed.”

With elections upcoming in Burkina Faso, Benin, Niger and Uganda, Ako pointed to things that worked well in Côte d’Ivoire in keeping the elections nonviolent and fair. “During our election, young people were on the ground as observers and were reporting live. Some other civil society organizations copied this example, so there were many young people spread around Côte d’Ivoire

reporting, which helped to deter any kind of fraud."

Ako sees responsibility on both sides for improving elections. Leaders must listen to the voters. "Young people should draft their own manifestos (or platforms), give them to the politicians and say, "These are our priorities."

And voters have to be responsible in how they use their vote. "Sometimes the population is much more passionate about politics than the issues that relate to them directly. In many capital cities, there's no access to water and electricity, and the roads are in bad condition. Mobilize to address these specific issues. I think more and more we need to select our leaders based on their manifestos and what they put forward, instead of voting for them because they come from our region or because they are the uncle of my brother or something like that."

Can we stop climate change? The Paris summit may be the key.

It may sound like the latest film noir movie, but it has nothing to do with a police whodunnit. In America, people often informally use the word "cop" to refer to a police officer. But in this case, COP21 is shorthand for the 21st Conference of Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).
To put it simply, COP21 is an upcoming summit that brings countries together to solve the problems of global warming and climate change.

It all began at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, where the UNFCCC was formed to find ways to "stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere" at low levels to stop further environmental damage. Scientists had found that these emissions from transportation and industry precipitated more rapid climate change — not a good thing.

I love Paris in the winter

COP21 will meet in Paris from November 30 to December 11. It’s going to be big. To date, there are 196 parties to the convention, most of whom will attend. There are also nonmember attendees — observer states and nongovernmental organizations. The parties hope to draft a new international agreement, or protocol, on the climate.

To date, at least 150 countries have submitted goals for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and achieving a low-carbon future through cleaner, more sustainable practices. These goals, called Intended Nationally Determined Contributions, will figure in the the discussions among the parties on how to halt the progress of global warming and climate change. Forty-nine African nations have submitted their goals. Ethiopia, for instance, plans to reduce its emissions by 64 percent below projected business-as-usual emissions by 2030.

Climate change is happening faster because of us

Scientists agree that human activity is largely responsible for the rapid increase in global warming in the past 40 years. There is strong evidence supporting the seriousness of climate change. Drastic changes in weather patterns are occurring: more violent storms, hotter summers and colder winters. If the world continues to warm, sea levels will rise, harming communities located along coastlines. That and drought could create new migration patterns and harm agriculture. Crop yields in some places have diminished in recent years because of exposure to ozone. And warming oceans will affect marine life worldwide in ways that will harm fisheries upon which people depend for food.

Droughts are expected to increase in central and southern Africa, along with unprecedented extremes of heat. Studies predict increased annual precipitation in the Horn of Africa and parts of East Africa that will increase the risk of flooding.

It will not be just a gab fest

COP21 will be about cleaner air, healthier people, stronger economies and keeping island nations from disappearing under the sea. The goal: act now to keep global warming below 2 degrees Celsius. To accomplish that, significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions worldwide will have to be made over the next few decades. (Carbon dioxide emissions have reached the highest levels this year, according to NASA, the U.S. space agency.)

So what can I do if I'm not in Paris?

- Learn as much as you can about the effects of climate change. NASA's Vital Signs of the Planet website is a great place to start.
- Improve your understanding of the negotiations, and get to know the two diplomats (Daniel Reifsnyder of the U.S. and Ahmed Djoghlaf of Algeria) at the center of the agreement.
- Stay tuned to the U.S. Center at COP21 for live webcasts during the two weeks of the conference.
- Publish your climate solution on the Climate Solutions Hub.
- Follow @FactsOnClimate and @US_Center on Twitter, and use hashtags#ActOnClimate and #AskUSCenter to tweet your views.
- Contact your government officials and urge them to take action now!
- Take the YALI Network Online Course "Understanding Climate Change."
- Facilitate or participate in a YALI Learns event on climate change.

#Africa4Her Generates Support for Women and Girls: Olivier Nathacia, South Africa

We asked some of the many YALI Network members who in March made an #Africa4Her pledge to invest in women and girls in their community how they have fulfilled that pledge. Here is Olivier Nathacia's story.

I have pledged to invest my time, knowledge and the other resources accessible to me to improve and empower the lives of women and girls within my community.

As a young woman residing in South Africa, I noticed that there is a gap regarding support of women's development and growth. Women are still sidelined, especially those residing in less privileged areas.

I also experienced the challenges that most young women and girls come across, especially in the corporate and business arenas. I realized that women are still severely hampered by discrimination, lack of resources and economic opportunities, limited access to decision-making and gender-based violence.

I volunteered because I want to be that ripple of change that will close the gap and become part of a generation that makes a difference — a generation that changes obscure obstacles within society about women and girls through entrepreneurship, public innovation and leadership.

Olivier Nathacia wants to close

the opportunity gap for women
and girls

I have learned that service is important. More especially when you work with the community, you need to know how to serve people, communicate with them, have time for them, show them that you care. Most of all I learned what it means to be disciplined and be a people's person.

Through volunteering, I learned that leadership is not for the faint-hearted. I have learned what it means to connect and how to build a network that will transform this nation.

Most importantly, I learned that women and girls are strong leaders by nature — they thrive in every situation or circumstance. They vouch for justice, yet they need support in order to achieve whatever they want to accomplish in life. They need a platform to share their knowledge, to network and build each other up.

This experience through #Africa4Her has made me a creative leader and inspired me to continue with the journey I have embarked on.

I can now connect and communicate better. Being amongst women and girls all the time has changed my perception of how women deal and do things from different circumstances of their lives.

Service is important when you work with the community.

On August 28, 2015, we will once again host an event that focuses on young women and girls. The event will be about the importance of exercising and healthy living.

Although it is still hard for me to get all the support I need from government in order to make things happen within my community, I encourage myself to keep going because my passion is assisting young women and girls in every way possible.

More than 1,000 YALI Network members made an #Africa4Her pledge. They represent 47 countries, and 54 percent of them are men. If you made an #Africa4Her pledge and would like to share your story, please email us at YALINetwork@state.gov and use the subject line "#Africa4Her."

#YALIGoesGreen: What Action Will You Take ?

#YALIGoesGreen is a Network-wide initiative to spur climate change awareness and action.

There are many ways you can participate in #YALIGoesGreen:

- Take our new course, *Understanding Climate Change*, and earn your YALI Network Certificate.
- Raise awareness of climate change and its effects by teaching *Understanding Climate Change* in your community.

Like #YALILearns, #YALIGoesGreen is a Network-wide initiative to promote collaboration among YALI Network members. More tips on how to facilitate a #YALIGoesGreen or #YALILearns event can be found on yali.state.gov/learns.

Let's take action and help spread the word today!

Hosting a #YALIGoesGreen event

Want some ideas on how to facilitate and engage and audience during your #YALIGoesGreen event? Download this event facilitation guide (PDF) with a complete lesson plan!

Please remember that all #YALILearns and #YALIGoesGreen events are organized on the basis of educating your community with shared YALI Network resources. You should never charge a fee for a YALI Network event, and remind others if you see this occuring.

Promoting a #YALIGoesGreen event

Promote #YALIGoesGreen with these graphics:
Facebook Banner:

Profile photo:

Sharable graphics:

More on Climate Change

- Online learning spurs offline climate action
- It Started with a Challenge: One Month, 1,000 Trees
- Lifestyles of the Famous and Green
- #YALILearns: Air Conditioning, Aerosols and Agriculture
- YALI Network 2015: What a Year It's Been!
- #YALICHAT: Community Organizing and #YALIGoesGreen
- A Young African Leader's Perspective on COP 21
- What Climate Change Means for African Women

#YALIGoesGreen Tweets

ENGAGE WITH US:

Follow @YALINetwork

#YALICHAT: Wanjira Mathai Connects with the YALI Network on Climate Change

From November 17 to 19, YALI Network Online Course instructor and director of wPOWER hub Wanjira Mathai held a YALICHAT to answer questions from YALI Network members. One of the common themes addressed throughout the chat was how individual citizens can make an impact for good in their communities.

"Raising public awareness about the climate crisis and giving local communities practical actions they can take to mitigate and adapt is crucial — water harvesting, food security, tree planting are but a few," Mathai says. "Young people should be encouraged to plant trees in school, at home, at church. We want to create a culture of planting trees so that we do it because we know it is important for us. A national tree planting week would be a great idea; ideally, when schools are

closed (say around Easter). Public tree planting is great in that it will build solidarity nationwide. Tree planting is an everyday affair: When you are happy, plant a tree!"

One of the main concerns for YALI Network members was the role the government plays in addressing the problem at hand: While citizens of each country can do their part, governments should promote clean energy solutions and encourage industries to do the same.

"What many governments want to believe is that economic growth and clean energy are incompatible," Mathai says. "They are compatible. In fact, some of the world's economic leaders are prioritizing clean energy because they know it will be good for people, planet and profit — the triple bottom line."

Governments are beginning to implement solutions to improve air quality. New Delhi, for example, is creating an organized mass transit system to encourage people to use public transit more frequently.

"I was impressed when I visited New Delhi recently and heard that the government just got tough on emissions," Mathai says. "Some of the interventions they introduced included public awareness campaigns around health impacts of air pollution and pollution checks to ensure that only road-worthy vehicles are on their roads."

Network members were particularly interested in deforestation. According to Mathai, at a practical level, destroying forests has short-term benefits but serious long-term consequences.

"We have to begin to see all these impacts from a systems perspective. When we destroy our forests and landscapes, we destroy their ability to support life and replenish rivers and underground aquifers. We are told by the U.N. that we need a forest cover minimum of 10 percent for sustainable development. Most of our countries have decimated our forests with little or no reforestation taking place. The function these forests used to play is stopped, and so the services it provided cease. So floods and famines (which become droughts) have become more frequent."

In addition to discussing the role the government plays, another concern addressed in the chat centered around the issue of clean water. According to Voice of America's Straight Talk Africa, 350 million to 600 million people in Africa are projected to be exposed to water stress due to climate change.

"For most of our countries, restoring the degraded landscapes and riverine forests with indigenous vegetation is an important investment," Mathai says. "In the meantime, we must work on ways of harvesting water when it rains. We must find ways to harvest the water from our roofs, particularly in agricultural areas where it can be used during the dry season, and also learn techniques for in situ water harvesting. There is a lot we can learn from counties like Israel and projects like we have seen in Ethiopia (watch "Ethiopia Rising") where terraces, check dams, gabions and many other water harvesting techniques have been employed in addition to tree planting and farmer-managed natural regeneration of trees."

We protect what we care about. In order for action to be taken, something has to be at stake. Here is some advice straight from Mathai to the YALI Network on how to speak to your community about climate change:

“The best way to explain climate change to others is to engage them in activities that demonstrate what it means and also take them to beautiful places that they might experience environmental beauty. You know the saying: “We protect what we love.”

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5 tips for building a successful advocacy campaign

Join #YALIGoesGreen this month. Learn how to get involved at yali.state.gov/climate

Are you trying to get the word out — either for a candidate or a cause you feel passionate about? Social media is great, but when online supporters turn into offline volunteers, your advocacy campaign reaches a new level.

Aisha Satterwhite of Blue State Digital, a leading digital-strategy agency, said, “Every group thinks its problems are different, but they’re often the same.” She said often a group uses conflicting messages for the same campaign, or a message that is so vague it won’t mean anything to people.

These five tips will help you match your message to your intended audience and motivate them to get off the sidelines for your cause.

Know how your audience communicates

Do the people you’re trying to reach respond to email? SMS texts? Will radio, print and other traditional media be most effective? For many advocacy campaigns, time spent knocking on doors produces better results than a hundred emails.

Macala Wright, a digital marketing strategist, suggests nonprofits with limited budgets take advantage of free resources to learn about online audiences. For instance, Google Analytics can tell you what country visitors to your website are from, where on your site they’re going and what devices (mobile, desktop, tablet) they’re using. “That’s information any organization can use to make informed decisions on how they’re messaging,” Wright said.

Figure out your messaging strategy

A good advocacy campaign has a core message, Wright said, and how you present that message determines how far it spreads. “There are three good ways to make your message appealing: humor, inspiration and enlightened education,” Wright said. “People share things that make them happy or make them want to learn more.”

Spur your audience to act

Know what it is you want your audience to do, and make sure the audience knows it too. Perhaps it is as simple as sharing your post on Facebook. Sign a petition? Attend a meeting? Vote for a candidate? If you're asking for donations, Satterwhite advises that you "think what it would take for you to actually take money out of your pocket and give it to someone. How would you want them to approach you?"

Move people toward engagement

How engaged is your audience? This chart shows how influence can be increased by gradually increasing engagement. (Source: Blue State Digital, State Dept.)

Convincing someone to "like" your organization's page on Facebook is easy; convincing him or her to host an event at home to raise funds for your organization is hard. These are examples of the bottom and top rungs of what media strategists call the ladder of engagement. By gradually asking more of your audience as it engages with you — to opt in for email updates, to make a small donation, to attend a live event, to knock on doors for your cause — you can convert an online bystander into an enthusiastic worker for your cause.

Test your messages

Both Satterwhite and Wright stress the importance of trying different approaches and learning from the results. For a social media posting, Wright advises trying the same message starting off with a question ("Have you thought about where your food comes from?") and then again with a compelling fact ("Processed foods make up 70 percent of your community's diet.")

"Whatever has better traction in terms of share, engagement and reach," said Wright, is the approach to use. But she said you must always try new things, because digital behaviors move very rapidly."

YALI Live: How to Fail Forward

Learning from your past mistakes is a key part of entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurs Dante Disparte, CEO of Risk Cooperative, and Saran Kaba Jones, CEO of Face Africa share their knowledge during this video event. Watch below!

Biographies of Speakers:
Dante Disparte is the founder and CEO of Risk Cooperative, a strategy, risk and capital

management firm. Mr. Disparte is a specialist in strategy and risk reduction through the design and delivery of comprehensive risk solutions of worldwide scope. He is credited with designing the world's first card-based life insurance program for the United Nations. Previous work in sub-Saharan Africa with Landover, also provides Mr. Disparte with comprehension of the challenges working within the African business community.

Saran Kaba Jones, the Founder and CEO of Face Africa, a community development organization working to build and strengthen water, sanitation and hygiene infrastructure and services in remote communities across sub-Saharan Africa. Born in Liberia, Saran's organization has raised over $500,000 for water, sanitation and hygiene projects from organizations like JP Morgan Chase, Coca Cola, Chevron, and more. The organization website is http://faceafrica.org/.

How Taxes Are Spent: 'Every Citizen Has the Right to Know'

Udamen Ilevbaoje at budgIT. Photo courtesy Udamen Ilevbaoje.

People with little knowledge of financial management can get lost when they try to understand their government's budget, says Nigerian YALI Network member Udamen Ilevbaoje.

That is why in 2011 Ilevbaoje joined BudgIT as a volunteer. BudgIT is a nongovernmental group in Lagos dedicated to improving transparency and accountability in government. It focuses on presenting government budget data to the public in easy-to-understand tweets, infographics and interactive applications. It has since expanded from Nigeria into Liberia and Sierra Leone.

"We believe that in a democracy, every citizen has the right to know how his/her taxes are expended in the delivery of public infrastructure and services," BudgIT states on its website.

"Equality and open access to governance is entrenched in democracy and its institutions," says Ilevbaoje, now BudgIT's project officer. "Our work is to make this information available and get citizens in organized form to demand delivery of public services."

Ilevbaoje says that Nigeria presents its national budget to citizens in overall numbers but not in details such as how much funding is available for neighborhood projects like rehabilitating a school, repairing potholes in roads or purchasing buses to get people with disabilities to a rehabilitation center.

BudgIT's Tracka service allows citizens to research and track budgets and public works projects. They can also give feedback to the government and to their communities. With existing social media tools, the platform brings together people with common interests to share documents, videos, photos

and comments. It uses live online meetings on Facebook to discuss topics like how funds are being used in Ebola relief.

Clients learn about financial management and open dates at BudgIT offices.
Photo courtesy Udamen Ilevbaoje.

Its Fitila service uses graphics to highlight illicit financial flows in and out of a country. That can help save national budget losses from tax evasion and corruption.

Having won several prestigious international awards, BudgIT recently partnered with the Kaduna state government to help it develop open data and become more transparent.

“I use civic advocacy to drive improved service delivery,” Ilevbaoje says.

“Service to the community is critical to a functional society. … I believe I can do this for a better society.

“I am inspired by the work of my lead partner, Oluseun Onigbinde, who took it upon himself to lead the advocacy to ensure that the schools are built. His personal example of accepting responsibility teaches me a lesson of taking the lead to solve problems at all times.”

Nigeria's election: What went right?

A woman from the Hausa tribe, with a red mark on her thumbnail indicating she has already validated her voting card, waits at a polling station located in Daura, Nigeria. (© AP Images)

Nigerians earlier this year elected new legislative leaders and President Muhammadu Buhari, who defeated incumbent Goodluck Jonathan by 2.5 million votes.

The results were remarkable for reasons that transcend the individual candidates’ careers. It was the first peaceful transition of power to an opposition party in Nigeria’s democratic history. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry called it a “decisive moment for democracy.”

Other African nations with upcoming elections — such as Côte d’Ivoire, Mali and Guinea — are studying what went right in Nigeria in hopes of replicating the process. Here’s what they are finding:

Emboldened youth

Kingsley Bangwell, who runs a group called Youngstars, credits a rise in youth activism in the years just prior to the election for creating a more engaged electorate. Students protested corruption in Nigeria's oil industry in 2012 and the Boko Haram insurgency in 2014. Young people, said Bangwell, grew confident in their ability to "organize around an issue and get the government to listen."

Youth "drove the campaign of President Buhari," according to Samson Itodo, founder of Youth Initiative for Advocacy Growth and Advancement. Notably, Buhari was not the youngest candidate — he was almost the oldest. But young voters supported Buhari because they wanted to see "what someone who has … the political will to fight corruption can do to improve livelihoods," Itodo said.

Social media

Between 2011 and 2015, voters took to social media in droves. Before the March election, Nigerian rappers Banky and M.I participated in Twitter chats to raise voter awareness, and both sides used social media to reach young people.

Enough is Enough, a coalition promoting good governance, hosted a concert to which attendees gained admittance by showing their voter cards. The coalition promoted the show on social media with ads encouraging voter registration. "People can be apathetic," said Yemi Adamolekun, director of Enough is Enough, "so the idea was to use music and comedy to get them to participate."

Youngstars built a media campaign called "Vote Not Fight," which reached 62 million people with its message of nonviolence. The speaker of the house and the chairman of the national election commission joined thousands of others in signing on as "peace ambassadors" at the Vote Not Fight website, and the artist 2Face contributed a "Vote Not Fight" video.

Credible oversight

A woman registers to vote in Lagos, Nigeria. (© AP Images)

Attahiru Jega, chairman of Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission at the time of the recent election, had overseen the 2011 general election, and that election had been called "significantly more transparent and credible" than the three preceding ones by a global monitoring group.

Jega gained trust in 2011 by compiling an entirely new voter registry. He required voters to be accredited at the polls prior to voting. This year, Jega's commission introduced permanent voter cards with biometric information embedded in them. Polling stations had readers to verify voters' identities.

While a six-week postponement of the election in February raised concerns about corruption, Jega reassured voters. A popular #iStandwithJega Twitter hashtag trumpeted his credibility. In the end, Jega enjoyed trust from both the ruling and the opposition parties … and a lot went right.

Applying to be a Mandela Washington Fellow: Answers from the Experts

Britta Bjornlund and Todd Haskell from the U.S. Department of State answered hundreds of questions about the 2016 Mandela Washington Fellowship during a recent #YALCHAT. We have selected some of the most popular questions from YALI Network members to highlight below.

Q: How does the Fellowship help me for my future career?

If you are selected, the Mandela Washington Fellowship will provide you with the opportunity to develop your skills at a U.S. college or university with support for professional development after you return home. We encourage you to link the academic sessions, leadership sessions, site visits, and networking opportunities of the Fellowship to your future career goals.

Q: What does the selection process look like?

A: The Mandela Washington Fellowship selection process is a merit-based open competition. After the application deadline, all eligible applications will be reviewed by a selection panel. Following this review, chosen semifinalists will be interviewed by the U.S. embassies or consulates in their home countries. If advanced to the semi-finalist round, applicants must provide a copy of their international passport (if available) or other government-issued photo identification at the time of the interview. Finalists and alternates will be notified by their U.S. embassy or consulate of their selection.

Q: What does the application mean when it says “must be proficient in English?” What is the yardstick to measure that?

A: Can you speak, read, and write fluently in English? This is an intensive program conducted in English so all Fellows will need strong English language skills to make the most of the Institute and Summit. Semi-finalists will be interviewed in English at the U.S. embassy or consulate.

Q: Is it important to have a recommendation letter?

A: The Fellowship is looking for the next generation of leaders in Africa. It is up to each candidate to decide what documents best reflect your background, interests, capabilities and potential.

Q: I do not have a passport yet. Am I eligible to apply?

A: Yes! If you are selected, you will need to acquire a passport.

Q: Is the YALI program also helping Young African Leaders to be involved in the implementation of democracy in Africa

(in countries where democracy is not fully applied)? If yes, what are the different tools given to them (to the Young African Leaders) to be fully involved in the implementation of democracy in Africa?

A: One of President Obama's top priorities in Africa is to strengthen democratic institutions. Progress in democratic governance will most certainly lead to gains in virtually every other sector. The Mandela Washington Fellowship provides young leaders the opportunity to learn leadership skills that Fellows can take back to their countries and put into action. We encourage returning Fellows to tailor the many opportunities for mentoring, professional development, and community service to support their particular goals, whether that is in public management, civic leadership, or business and entrepreneurship. To learn more about what each of these three tracks entail, please visit https://youngafricanleaders.state.gov/category/washington-fellowship/.

Q: I would like to know how the YALI Regional Centers and the Mandela Washington Fellowship are connected, are those who attended YALI regional eligible to apply to the Mandela Fellowship?

A: The YALI Regional Leadership Centers and the Mandela Washington Fellowship are two key components of President Obama's Young African Leadership Initiative. You can read more about the initiative at youngafricanleaders.state.gov. Those who have attended a program at a YALI Regional Leadership Center, or who are applying to one, are still eligible to apply for the Mandela Washington Fellowship.

Q: I would like to ask whether Mandela Washington Fellowship follows the people that do the training after they have gone back home? What is the result of the training after long period of time this training had been taking place in America? Why isn't this program in another language to benefit everyone if it is important for a leadership democratically?

A: When Fellows return to their home countries, they bring back new skills and new enthusiasm, and can take advantage of professional development opportunities, including professional practicum experiences in companies and organizations in Africa, mentoring relationships, resources to speak at conferences, regional networking conferences, and entrepreneurship grants. The Fellowship hopes to inspire a multiplier effect — that returning Fellows share with their friends, family and colleagues what they saw, learned, and perhaps taught others in the U.S. so that this experience grows. We understand that there are a range of languages across Africa, but because the institutes are being held in the United States at American colleges and universities with American professors and U.S. leaders, the course work will all be in English. We hope that some of you who might be less skilled in English will be able to participate in future years.

Q: There's a question on my application that asks if I have been to the U.S. before. If you haven't been, does that harm

your chances of being selected?

A: Not having visited the United States does NOT harm your chances of being selected. There is no requirement to have traveled to the United States in the past.

Q: Hi, I am a citizen of Sudan currently living as temporary resident in Kenya. Am I eligible to apply for the Mandela Washington Fellowship?

A: Yes. Applicants must be currently residing in a country in Sub-Saharan Africa AND be a citizen of a country in Sub-Saharan Africa (it can be a different country) to be eligible. Applicants must be a citizen of one of the following countries: Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cabo Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Republic of the Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Applicants must also currently reside in one of the above countries. If you are a citizen of one of the above countries but residing in a country not listed above, you are not eligible.

Q: Do the YALI Network online courses determine your eligibility for selection?

A: No, you do not need to have completed online courses to be eligible for the Fellowship, and members of the YALI Network do not have increased chances of being selected.

Q: How many Fellows will be selected from each country?

A: The Mandela Washington Fellowship does not use country quotas to make Fellow selections. The process takes a variety of factors into account to inform the final selection. The Fellowship anticipates including Fellows from each country in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2016, as it did in 2014 and 2015. The final selection for 2016 will incorporate diversity in all senses of the word. Opportunities are open to people regardless of their race, color, national origin, sex, age, religion, geographic location, socio-economic status, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity. The Fellowship is committed to fairness, equity, and inclusion. Final numbers from any given country will also take into account the country's population, the number of applications received, and other contributing factors.

Make sure you also check out the following links that also provide useful information about the application process:

2016 Application Instructions (PDF)
2016 Application FAQ
Tips from a MWF
Common Questions