

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.

Preparing for a public speaking engagement

Having a basic understanding of how to write, prepare for, and deliver a speech is essential in both your personal and professional life. This interactive checklist will guide you through the steps you need to take before delivering a speech. When you are done, you can save your checklist results and reference them as you continue to prepare.

[Download the PDF public speaking guide and checklist](#) and use the interactive planner below:

This form requires JavaScript to complete.

[Screendoor](#)

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](#)

[Applying for the Mandela Washington Fellowship: The importance of being a leader](#)

(Courtesy photo)

When South African Lee Mark du Preez first heard of the Mandela Washington Fellowship, he knew it was an opportunity for him to take the work he'd been doing in his community to the next level. Since his school years he'd been on the board of the Children's Home in his town of Pietermaritzburg, which helps orphaned, abandoned and abused children. He had also worked as an entrepreneur and consultant on South Africa's black economic empowerment initiative.

But when he applied for the fellowship in 2013, he was not among those invited to come to Washington. The next year du Preez applied a second time, and this time the outcome was very different as he was selected to be a 2015 Mandela Washington Fellow.

What changed between his first application and the second, and why did he become a better candidate the second time he applied?

He remained on the board of the Children's Home but doubled his efforts to get involved, giving more of his time and taking on more responsibilities. In addition, he became an advisory board member at the University of KwaZulu-Natal for Enactus, a global student organization that uses the power of entrepreneurship to create positive social change. Enactus teams from 1,600 universities in 36 countries compete for the best plan with the greatest impact. His chapter, du Preez said with no small amount of pride, has "won the championship in South Africa five times. We've never not made the semifinals."

He was also asked by the leader of his local chamber of business to create a youth leadership and business development program. "I became more involved in programs that run on a larger scale," he said, which he believes helped his application to stand out in a way it hadn't before.

"Absolutely keep trying," he said, when asked what he would advise applicants for the MWF who have applied and not been selected. "They must keep trying like I did. But they should also continue to develop and raise their profiles, so that by the time they do try again, they can be so good that it's almost impossible for them to be ignored."

[Applying for the Mandela Washington Fellowship: Pitching yourself in the personal essay](#)

Whether you're writing an essay to apply for admission to university, graduate school or the [Mandela Washington Fellowship](#), your job is the same: demonstrating to the decision-makers that you're the person to choose. That's the essence of a "pitch," whether in business meeting or a personal essay.

In the case of the Mandela Washington Fellowship, focusing on "how to write a personal essay is the

most important,” according to Edward Monster, public affairs officer in Malawi who reviews applications for the Fellowship. “Too many applicants used the essays to describe ‘big-picture’ problems in their country or region,” said Monster, “but failed to describe exactly what they as individuals were doing to confront the specific challenges in their communities.”

Emphasize outcomes

“Sometimes we focus on things we’ve done” — an initiative or a job we undertook — “but we don’t talk about what the result of that was,” said executive coach Patty Beach, who is a managing partner of Leadership Smarts. By describing the tangible benefits created by your previous work, you can overcome what Beach calls the “‘So what?’ factor,” which leaves the decision-makers uncertain whether your work had any measurable value or not.

Remember three things

Beach suggests thinking about three things before writing an essay: what you’re good at (your natural and cultivated talents), what you’re passionate about (the area to which you’ll direct your talents), and how what you’re applying for will help further your goals. “If you can effectively communicate those three things, you put yourself in the best position to be selected.”

Enough but not too much

Shawn Abbott, dean of admissions at New York University, has seen more than enough admissions essays to know what works when it comes to selling yourself to an admissions board. He suggests limiting your personal statement to one page. “Admissions officers are reading hundreds, if not thousands, of applications. We have to be able to read quickly, and you want to capture our attention. One page is enough.”

Think before you share

Abbott also advises giving thought to what parts of your worldview to emphasize in a personal essay. The Fellowship application emphasizes what you have done and plan to do to support your communities, so focus on your actions and outcomes. There may be different taboos for you to avoid for different types of applications, so think hard about what they might be before you put pen to paper.

My voice for Burkina Faso

Martine Nikiema (Courtesy photo)



My name is Martine Nikiema. I am a citizen of Burkina Faso, which means “the land of upright people.” It is a landlocked country sandwiched between Ghana, Mali, Côte d’Ivoire, Togo, Niger, and

Benin and is at the heart of the West African savannah.

The purpose of this article is to amplify the voices of my fellow countrymen and women who are fighting for democracy and the rule of law. Six months ago, I was privileged to be one of the Mandela Washington Fellows and to participate in the 2015 Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI) representing my country. It was a real honor for me to be selected from a pool of over 30,000 continental applicants to travel to the United States and participate with other young leaders in YALI.

In the weeks following the announcement of the Mandela Washington Fellows, I wondered why I had been selected, since I never saw myself as a charismatic leader.

Last June I left my country to begin a new chapter in my life that would include big challenges, each of which I was determined to see as an opportunity. On the plane, I looked in tears at my country and our people. The biggest question that sprang to my mind was how and when my country would see the needed social changes it craves: food for children, better education and justice for all, human rights, and gender equality. I am optimistic because my people are hardworking and brave, and because I believe in a better future. Every day my people do their best to to improve their living conditions. But it takes good leadership to make these changes happen. How can they reach these objectives if there are not good leaders to guide them?

I spent my first six weeks at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire, learning business and leadership skills. That period made me look back on my past life and what I have done in my community, fighting for better education by helping children in rural areas get light through solar energy. After six weeks, I finally understood that leadership does not necessarily mean taking huge action, but rather taking any action that changes the lives of people for the better. And good leadership is a determining factor in the process. A leader is a team player and a good listener who gives people a chance to speak and hears their voices. He or she is able to inspire others and guide them to continue their journey with more hope for success. I started at that moment to believe in myself, but I also realized that I still have a long journey to be an effective leader. My main objectives became:

- Empowering hopeless youth who no longer believe in justice.
- Inspiring females to continue their education in order be a change-maker in their community.
- Getting donations and support to provide solar lamps to children in remote areas.

Upon completing my course at Dartmouth, I travelled to Baltimore to participate in an internship with Bithgroup Technologies, a renewable-energy developer. During my six- week internship, I continued working on my objectives. I was in a hurry to return home and share my experience with my family, friends, and community, and to start my dream of being a good leader.

Citizens of Burkina Faso protest against 
the recent coup in Ouagadougou. (© AP
Images)

On September 16, 2015, less than a month before elections, a military coup changed the situation in my country. The president, the prime minister, and two other ministers were arrested by the

presidential guard (RSP). The citizens of Burkina Faso protested to denounce this anti-democratic and terrorist act — fighting by using their voices for peace, human rights, and democracy.

Their relentless resistance against the oppressor finally won them the much-needed victory they longed for for over half a century. Despite the death of 15 people and the wounding of 200 more, this victory is a watershed in the democratic process of my country. It will help heal many years of military brutality and impunity, as well as gross abuses of human rights. My country has regained its sovereignty and dignity. Today I am proud to be a citizen of Burkina Faso. I am even tempted to call it — like the United States — “the land of the free and the home of the brave.”

This victory is obviously not to the advantage of some regional powers and leaders who continue to torture their people. The military in most African countries do not serve their people but are at the service of the elites. The army in Burkina Faso gave an example of patriotism when they fought back to protect their citizens against the presidential guards. They will go down in history as paragons of an authentic national army on the African soil.

I am grateful for the opportunity I was given by the U.S. government to learn skills of leadership and be part of the solution for the transformation of African societies and particularly of my home and beloved country, Burkina Faso. I know it is incumbent upon us, the next generation, to be an example for all countries facing challenges. Our future depends on us, we the people; our destiny is in our hands, and we cannot allow anyone to destroy it.

I can use my voice to educate, inform, and defend our interests and to show the world the true meaning of democracy. Each population has the right to choose their leaders through legitimate elections. I raise my voice to say to nations that believe in democracy and the rights of individuals and countries to determine their own destiny: This is the time to take action. Time for more freedom, more democracy, and more justice. We, the people of Burkina Faso, are ready to face anything to reach our goals. I raise my voice to ask you to stand with us for justice.

The views and opinions expressed here belong to the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the YALI Network or the U.S. government.

[#YALI Network Events Across Africa](#)

Aspiring entrepreneurs in Kigali, 
Rwanda (Courtesy photo)

In the two months since we launched #YALILearns, there has been a flurry of activity among #YALINetwork members organizing and sharing events in our Facebook face2face group. Dozens of meetings and hundreds of people have shared their knowledge and connected with other young African leaders across the continent.

Papy Sibomana got together a group of prospective young entrepreneurs in Kigali, Rwanda, to teach business and entrepreneurship using the YALI Network Online Courses. There was also discussion of the #YALINetwork and its benefits for younger entrepreneurs and an overview of the Mandela Washington Fellowship application process.

Discussing the activities of the Regional Leadership Center at a meeting in Addis Ababa. (Courtesy photo)

In Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Frehiwot Negash joined with Yigrem Ashenafi, Asmeret Gebre, Edie Zachs and Helina Stiphanos to organize a #YALILearns event and even created a separate Facebook group.

“It was so inspirational,” Frehiwot said. “We look forward to our next monthly event.”

Zakariyyah Freeman Musa, a Nigerian working in Kenya, connected with the U.S. Embassy in Tanzania to develop a #YALILearns event at the American Corner in Zanzibar. Thirty people discussed the YALI Network Online Courses on leadership and took the quiz to get their certificates.

YALILearns meeting in Harare (Courtesy photo)

Southern Africa was particularly active, including Vincent T. Mabotja’s event in South Africa to discuss xenophobia and another that involved a march against corruption. In neighboring Zimbabwe, several events took off.

“#YALILearns is an amazing tool to seeing people grow and develop ideas into actual projects and livelihood,” said Kelvin Tinashe Mutize after a networking event he organized with #yalicreatives in Harare.

Munya Bloggo, a 2015 Mandela Washington Fellow, teaches business in Gweru, Zimbabwe. (Courtesy photo)

Munya Bloggo shared another Zimbabwe event, this time in the central part of the country where several Network members used the YALI Network Online Courses to discuss business planning and modeling at the American Corner in Gweru.

“We had a feisty discussion with students on how we can apply the lessons to a local context,” Munya said, before adding a competitive element to #YALILearns. “I think when it comes to advancing education, Zimbabweans go at it like it was the Olympics.”

Just north, in Zambia, Patience Chisanga shared her expertise at a multi-day event.

“I spoke to 25 young talented and exceptional filmmakers about redefining entrepreneurship, the importance of turning art into a business, the basics of developing a business idea, a business plan,

and how to deliver a business pitch to investors,” she said.

YALINetwork members take a quiz on 
leadership for a YALINetwork certificate
at a meeting in Zanzibar, Tanzania. (Courtesy
photo)

To the west, Ruddy Kielo Lingela held an event that utilized the YALI business lessons in Lubumbashi, #DRC, at the American Space there.

“More than 20 young entrepreneurs were present,” he said. “I was much impressed (with the audience). All the participants arrived 30 minutes before the launch of the meetup. The Congo is changing my friends.”

Over in Ghana, Oxford Bonsu put together a group of 320 undergraduates at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology for an event.

A huge YALILearns event in Ghana saw 
320 people show up for a meeting
organized by Oxford Bonsu. (Courtesy photo)

“I used resources from YALI Learns to engage the students, and there was a positive feedback,” he said. “#YALILearns is a sure way to give back to your community and to empower young Africans to make real difference.”

If you want to hold your own [#YALILearns](#) event, you do not need any special tools or experience, just a willingness to gather people together and share knowledge. Use our courses or your own material, but please do share the results with us on our [#YALILearns feedback page](#).

Patience Chisanga, a 2015 Mandela 
Washington Fellow, teaches about
filmmaking at a YALILearns event in Lusaka,
Zambia. (Courtesy photo)

[Watchful eyes keep elections fair](#)

An election observer at a polling station 
in Nairobi during Kenya’s 2013 election
(© AP Images)

The surest way to get fair elections, according to experts, is to have as many eyes as possible on every step of the process. With several countries in Africa holding presidential elections in October and November, citizen groups that monitor elections will play important roles in assuring that the [results are fair and credible](#).

The Global Network of Domestic Election Monitors ([GNDEM](#)) represents 190 watchdog groups in 75 countries on five continents. In 2012, the organization launched the [Declaration of Global Principles for Nonpartisan Election Observation and Monitoring by Citizen Organizations](#) in a ceremony at the United Nations. The document spells out standards for citizens who work to keep elections fair.

The document matters because monitoring doesn't work without a careful plan. "You can't monitor everything," said Michelle Brown of National Democracy Institute (NDI), a nonprofit organization that supplies technical assistance to GNDEM's local watchdogs. "They have to focus," Brown said. "They have to figure out what are the salient issues that could have the biggest impact."

A woman registers to vote using a  fingerprint reader in Lagos, Nigeria. (© AP Images)

NDI helps the monitors create checklists for use in the field. Groups such as NDI train both long-term observers, who monitor how electoral boundaries are established, voter registration and ballot qualification, and short-term observers, who focus on election-day procedures.

What does it look like when election monitoring is thorough? "Nigeria is a great example," Brown said. Four prominent civil-society groups representing diverse interests came together to form Project Swift Count to monitor the 2015 Nigerian general election. "They did a very good job of early outreach and making people aware of who they were," Brown said. "They had a nationwide network, really nice pre-election reports, and then, in a very timely way, released their election-day findings."

Volunteering your time to help groups that monitor elections is a great investment in fair elections in your country. Contact these organizations in [Cote D'Ivoire](#), [Guinea](#), [Mali](#), [Tanzania](#) and [Uganda](#) to see how you can help.

[Comment mobiliser l'électorat ? Un ancien de la campagne d'Obama partage ses tuyaux](#)

« Motiver les électeurs à voter est nécessaire, mais ce ne doit pas être une fin en soi », souligne Lex Paulson, ex-militant coordinateur pour la campagne de Barack Obama en 2008, aujourd'hui professeur de théorie du plaidoyer à Sciences Po Paris. Pour mobiliser l'électorat et remporter le scrutin, un candidat doit « établir un dialogue avec les gens ».

Les élections présidentielles approchent au Burkina Faso, en Côte d'Ivoire et en Guinée, et elles soulèvent avec elles des problèmes récurrents : le désenchantement des électeurs et le risque de violences post-scrutin.

Lors d'une discussion en direct avec des jeunes issus de ces trois pays, Lex Paulson a partagé des outils concrets pour mobiliser la population et améliorer la démocratie.

« L'acte de voter n'est pas seulement de choisir un leader. C'est un droit fondamental. »

Voter est un principe démocratique qui nous rappelle que le gouvernement nous appartient, pas l'inverse, explique Lex Paulson. « Il faut dire aux gens que seuls ceux qui ont voté auront un poids électoral - c'est-à-dire qu'ils pourront ensuite demander à leur candidat de rendre des comptes et de tenir ses promesses. »

Comment mobiliser les électeurs avec un petit budget ? Paulson suggère d'avoir une stratégie bien ciblée :

- identifier des électeurs potentiels, aller à leur rencontre avec un message très clair, qui fasse le lien entre le candidat et des problèmes concrets rencontrés par les habitants au quotidien ;
- mobiliser les nouveaux électeurs (les jeunes, les personnes marginalisées...etc.) ;
- cibler les événements et les lieux de rassemblement (marchés, parcs, mariages...etc.).

Construire et animer un réseau

Mais pour Paulson, il n'y a rien de tel qu'un électeur motivé qui, à son tour, va mobiliser d'autres électeurs.

Pour cela, l'équipe de campagne du candidat doit établir un dialogue. « Il ne s'agit pas seulement d'organiser un concert où les gens vont s'amuser, explique-t-il. Il faut leur demander de donner leurs coordonnées pour pouvoir ensuite les contacter, communiquer avec eux et leur permettre d'exprimer leurs idées. »

Exploiter les ressources gratuites à votre disposition

Paulson recommande d'utiliser les réseaux sociaux et de créer un site web : « Vous devez communiquer régulièrement pour entretenir le dialogue, et ponctuer chaque message avec un appel à l'action. Tous vos messages doivent compléter et renforcer vos activités sur le terrain. »

Il encourage également les militants à se servir des moyens les plus répandus en Afrique, tels que les SMS, la radio, et bien sûr, la rencontre en personne avec les gens.

« Vous êtes les ambassadeurs de paix. »

Les périodes électorales sont chargées d'émotions, et les résultats peuvent provoquer la colère. La violence, même, parfois. « C'est à vous de montrer l'exemple, insiste Lex Paulson. Rappelez aux gens que l'élection n'est pas la fin. Elle sera suivie par une autre élection. Entre chaque élection, vous pouvez agir. »

Pour anticiper ce genre de problèmes, « nous nous rendons dans les zones où il y a eu des violences dans le passé et nous discutons avec la population », explique un participant de Côte d'Ivoire. «

Nous organisons un grand carnaval où tout le monde va porter un t-shirt blanc et où les responsables des partis politiques vont être présents, continue un participant de Guinée. Et nous diffusons des spots à la radio, lus par des enfants, sur l'importance pour chacun d'avoir une élection pacifique. »

3 questions et réponses :

Comment les acteurs de la société civile peuvent-ils favoriser la participation des femmes aux élections ?

« La question des femmes ne doit pas être séparée de tous les autres enjeux politiques », répond Lex Paulson. Les leaders de la société civile doivent chercher comment les enjeux tels l'emploi, l'éducation, la santé ou la sécurité touchent les femmes, de manière à pouvoir argumenter précisément lors des discussions avec d'autres associations. « Et chaque association, quelle que soit sa problématique, doit avoir un espace dédié au recrutement des femmes », recommande-t-il.

Comment inclure les personnes handicapées du début jusqu'à la fin des élections ?

Il faut commencer par faire une évaluation des barrières, physiques ou juridiques, qui empêchent les personnes handicapées de participer au processus démocratique, puis proposer des réformes. « Avoir des demandes concrètes va vous aider à susciter l'intérêt des candidats et des partis politiques, assure Lex Paulson. « Et n'attendez pas qu'on vous invite pour prendre part aux débats qui ont lieu pendant les élections. Les personnes handicapées doivent commencer par faire valoir leurs droits elles-mêmes. »

Comment lutter contre la fraude électorale ?

Les membres de la société civile doivent être solidaires et agir en partenariat avec les ONG qui se préoccupent des questions de transparence, telles que le NDI, le Carter Center ou l'IRI. Et surtout, il faut prendre des notes. « Il ne suffit pas de dire qu'il y a eu des fraudes ou que l'élection a été mal gérée, prévient Lex Paulson. Il faut penser comme un avocat et rassembler les données et les témoignages. »

Que pouvez-vous faire?

Les gens autour de vous savent-ils à quel point il est important de voter? Quelles initiatives concrètes allez-vous entreprendre pour encourager les gens à voter dans votre quartier? Partagez sur Facebook:

[**Applying to be a Mandela Washington Fellow: Tips from a 2014 Fellow**](#)

Nigerian entrepreneur Adepeju Jaiyeoba meets President  Obama. (White House/Pete Souza)

The 2016 Mandela Washington Fellowship application is now open! Adepeju Jaiyeoba, a 2014 Mandela Washington Fellow, has put together the following tips for YALI Network members on preparing a great application.

Story of change

What's your driving force? What motivates you to do the work you do? What's your story? Do not spend a paragraph on this. Trust me, a line is more than sufficient.

Understand the questions asked

Don't be too quick to provide answers to the questions. Understand the questions asked, as every question is aimed at discovering certain things about you as an individual and leader.

Demonstrate practical knowledge of the needs of your community

Let your writing show you understand the problem of your community. Connect the problem to real-life stories and situations to drive home your point and let your solution not be in doubt.

Emphasize that you are a leader who takes initiative

Communities across Africa have varying challenges. In your own little corner of the world, before the opportunity to apply for this fellowship, tell about how you have been helping your community solve pressing problems.

Proofread your application

Every year, thousands of applicants apply for the Mandela Washington Fellowship. The applications are not scored by robots or machines — they are scored by human beings, which is why you should really proofread your application and rid it of errors so you do not turn off the markers.

Don't confuse the marker

A lot of times we are involved in a series of businesses as well as running different NGOs, which in many cases are unrelated. For example, you could be selling fabrics, be into waste management, run an NGO on climate change and still want to keep girls in school. Completing the application may be a real challenge to you as you may want to put all of your various aspects into the application. This may only end up confusing the marker. Let there be a sequential flow in your thoughts and writings so you don't get the marker scrolling up to check your name and be sure he's still scoring the same application he started out with.

Visit yali.state.gov/apply for more tips and information on preparing a great application.
