

# CONCEPT NOTE



## **2026 CAREER AND MENTORSHIP FORUM**

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS & DIPLOMACY

### **Youth in Diplomacy: Creating Pathways for Sustainable Inclusion**

Friday, 13th March, 2025  
CUEA Auditorium - Karen, Nairobi

## 1. Introduction and Background

Diplomacy, once perceived as the exclusive domain of seasoned statesmen and career diplomats, is undergoing a fundamental transformation. The complexity of contemporary global challenges ranging from climate change, migration, and cybersecurity to peacebuilding and international trade demands more inclusive, innovative, and adaptive approaches. In this rapidly evolving landscape, youth are increasingly recognized as essential actors in shaping the future of diplomacy, global governance, and international cooperation.

Despite their demographic significance, energy, and innovative potential, young people frequently remain excluded from substantive decision-making processes. Their involvement is often confined to tokenistic, youth-specific initiatives that operate parallel to, rather than within, mainstream diplomatic practice. This marginalization is exacerbated by significant gaps in the development of, and exposure to, the practical skills and competencies required for effective engagement in contemporary diplomacy.

Furthermore, a persistent perception limits awareness of diplomatic careers to traditional pathways, primarily through Ministries of Foreign Affairs. This overlooks the expanding ecosystem of diplomatic practice, which includes multilateral organizations, think tanks, civil society, media, corporate international relations, and digital platforms. The failure to integrate youth effectively into this broader landscape risks creating a generational disconnect, undermining the development of a robust talent pipeline and, consequently, Kenya's future diplomatic effectiveness and influence.

The 2026 Career and Mentorship Forum, themed **“Youth in Diplomacy: Creating Pathways for Sustainable Inclusion,”** is designed to address these systemic gaps. It will provide a structured, practical, and forward-looking platform for direct engagement between emerging professionals and experienced practitioners in diplomacy and global affairs.

This Forum will function as a capacity-building and orientation space. It aims to equip students of International Relations and early-career practitioners with a clear understanding of the requisite skills, ethical foundations, and diverse professional pathways in modern diplomacy. It will deliberately expose participants to both traditional and non-traditional arenas of diplomatic engagement.

## 2. Problem Statement and Rationale

Despite rising interest in international careers, three systemic barriers constrain many young professionals' potential:

- 2.1 The Practice Gap:** Academic training emphasizes theory over applied skills in negotiation, policy drafting, strategic communication, and multilateral procedure.
- 2.2 The Network Gap:** Young professionals have limited structured access to seasoned practitioners, diplomatic missions, and the "unwritten rules" of international careers.
- 2.3 The Pathway Gap:** Awareness of diplomatic careers is narrowly focused on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, overlooking vital roles in multilateral organizations, think tanks, development agencies, corporate international relations, and digital diplomacy platforms.

These gaps constrain both individual career development and the broader national interest, as countries require skilled professionals capable of navigating complex geopolitical, economic, and governance challenges. Development partners and diplomatic missions similarly benefit from stronger local talent pools that can engage effectively in policy dialogue, project implementation, and international cooperation. The consequence is a depleted talent pipeline, reducing Kenya's effectiveness in multilateral forums, negotiations, and diplomacy, ultimately diminishing its geopolitical influence and economic opportunities.

## 3. Objectives

The Forum seeks to:

- 3.1** Expand awareness of career pathways in diplomacy, foreign policy, development cooperation, and global governance.
- 3.2** Facilitate structured mentorship and intergenerational exchange between practitioners and emerging professionals.
- 3.3** Strengthen practical skills relevant to international careers, including policy analysis, negotiation, strategic communication, and research.
- 3.4** Build a sustainable multi-stakeholder network linking academia, government, diplomatic missions, development partners, and youth.
- 3.5** To generate actionable policy and institutional recommendations for talent development and youth inclusion in international relations and diplomacy.

## 4. Key Areas of Discussion

The one-day forum will be structured around three core thematic pillars:

- 4.1 Building Core Competencies for Contemporary Diplomacy:** Focusing on practical skill-building for policy, negotiation, and strategic engagement.
- 4.2 Mapping Diverse Diplomatic Career Pathways:** Exploring opportunities across traditional government roles, multilateral organizations, think tanks, civil society, and the private sector.
- 4.3 Fostering Inclusion and Architecting a Sustainable Talent Pipeline:** Discussing strategies and policies for meaningful youth integration into mainstream diplomatic processes.

## 5. Expected Outcomes

By the end of the Forum, participants will:

- 5.1 Possess a clearer, more nuanced understanding of career trajectories in international relations, encompassing both traditional institutions and emerging diplomatic spaces.**
- 5.2 Be better positioned to pursue entry-level and early-career opportunities with improved awareness of required competencies and strategic approaches.**
- 5.3 Have established and strengthened professional connections with experienced practitioners and peers, creating a foundation for ongoing mentorship and collaborative learning.**
- 5.4 Have acquired practical skills and applied knowledge directly relevant to effective performance in modern diplomatic practice.**

## 6. Tentative Program

The tentative program for the 2025 Career and Mentorship Forum is as shown below:

TIME	ACTIVITIES
8:00 – 8:30	Arrival and Registration
8:30 – 10:00	Opening Ceremony Organizing Partners
10:00 – 10:45	Graduation Ceremony 2026 Young Diplomats Fellows (YDF) Graduation
10:45 – 11:00	Photo Session All Participants
11:00 – 11:30	Tea/Coffee Break
11:30 – 13:00	Panel Session 1 Reforming Diplomatic Institutions for Youth and Gender Inclusion
13:00 – 14:00	Lunch Break
14:00 – 15:30	Panel Session 2 Diplomacy Beyond the Foreign Service: Perspectives from NGO, Private Sector, and Think Tank Spaces
15:30 – 16:00	Closing Ceremony Organizing Partners
16:00 – 17:00	Refreshments, Networking and Departure

### 7. Participants

The 2026 Career and Mentorship Forum will convene a diverse group of approximately 500 participants, including:

- 6.1 Senior government officials and policymakers.
- 6.2 Seasoned diplomats (active and retired).
- 6.3 International Relations scholars and thought leaders.
- 6.4 Representatives from think tanks, civil society organizations, and multilateral institutions.
- 6.5 Career development advisors and professionals.
- 6.6 Early-career professionals and junior diplomats.
- 6.7 Advanced undergraduate and postgraduate students in relevant fields.
- 6.8 Media representatives specializing in international affairs.

### 8. Conclusion

The 2026 Career and Mentorship Forum represents a strategic, high-impact investment in Kenya's future capacity for global engagement. By deliberately building human capital, strengthening professional networks, and advocating for more inclusive policies, the Forum will contribute to a more effective diplomatic corps, better-informed foreign policy processes, and a resilient ecosystem for international cooperation. This initiative is a critical step toward securing Kenya's proactive and influential role on the world stage for generations to come.

## 9. Organizing Partners

### International Relations Society of Kenya (IRSK)

IRSK is the professional body for the international affairs and diplomacy fields in Kenya. The Society serves as a forum for the exchange of ideas, networking, and programmatic initiatives among those involved in the study, teaching, and practice of international relations and diplomacy. IRSK works to promote policy dialogues on international affairs and diplomacy between various parties, carry out pertinent and substantial research, and engage in conversation and collaboration with various actors at national, regional, and international levels.

### Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA)

The Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA), established in 1984 in Nairobi, Kenya, is a premier private institution dedicated to academic excellence and moral leadership. Rooted in Catholic values, it offers diverse programs across faculties such as Theology, Law, Education, and Business. CUEA emphasizes research, ethical leadership, and community service, addressing societal challenges and promoting social justice. With additional campuses in Eldoret and Kisumu, it fosters holistic education for local and international students.

### The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS)

KAS is a German political foundation, present in over 100 countries around the globe, and has been active in Kenya since 1973. The KAS cooperates with governmental institutions, political parties, civil society organizations, and academia, building strong partnerships along the way. The Foundation seeks to intensify political cooperation at the national and international levels through the promotion of productive diplomatic engagements and shared democratic values.

### International Relations Students Association of Kenya (IRSAK)

The International Relations Students Association of Kenya (IRSAK) is a student-led organization that unites and mentors International Relations students across the country. It provides a platform for engagement in international relations and offers mentorship and capacity-building through partnerships, equipping members with the knowledge and skills needed for their professional careers.