

Building Capacity to Assess National Youth Policies in Africa:
Five Country Experiences

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Opening Statement

Delivered by Ms. Julie Larsen
on behalf of Mr. Johan Schölvinck
Director, Division for Social Policy and Development, DESA

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure and an honour for me to address this workshop on behalf of Mr. Johan Schölvinck, Director of the Division for Social Policy and Development in New York. I would like to begin by extending a warm welcome to each of you to what is expected to be three days of interesting discussion, learning and collaboration regarding the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of national youth policies.

Many of you have undertaken difficult travel arrangements to be here this week. We are grateful for your commitment and we look forward to your contributions to the workshop. Each of the countries represented here has recently developed or revised their national youth policy and is working towards its full implementation. There is much to be learned and gained from the sharing of your experiences.

We are pleased to have joined with the Economic Commission for Africa's Centre for Gender and Social Development in organizing this event. Particular appreciation is due to Mr. Sher Verick, ECA's Focal Point on Youth, and his dedicated colleagues who helped to make this workshop possible. Their collaboration is much appreciated. We are also pleased to be able to hold this workshop in Addis Ababa and to utilize the excellent facilities provided by the United Nations Conference Centre.

I am also grateful that our colleagues from the African Union Commission, Dr. Raymonde Agossou and Mr. Darafify Ralaivao, are able to join us. As some of you are aware, the Heads of State of the African Union adopted the African Youth Charter in July 2006, further advancing the region's commitment to effective policies and programmes for young people. This provides an excellent opportunity to reinforce national youth development efforts. We are grateful that the Commission is able to join us to share further information about the *2007-2015 Plan of Action to Accelerate the Signing, Ratification and Implementation of the African Youth Charter*.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Division for Social Policy and Development works to promote social development through various means, including:

- working with Governments in the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Commission for Social Development to promote a socially - inclusive approach to development;
- strengthening national capacities to implement intergovernmental decisions and recommendations;
- promoting empirical research and participatory approaches to information gathering;
- supporting and collaborating in the activities of the international development community and the organizations of civil society; and
- producing reports and publications on a wide variety of issues related to social development and social integration issues.

Through internationally-agreed plans and programmes of action, including the *World Programme of Action for Youth*, Governments of all countries have established frameworks to consider the specific situation and concerns of different social groups who often face exclusion or particular problems of integration in their societies. Young people are among the groups who face the biggest challenges.

Too often, the formative years of African youth are characterized by exposure to deep-seated poverty, limited access to quality health care, education, and opportunities for decent employment, poor governance, and widespread deficiencies in the provision of basic needs such as food and water, sanitation, and fuel. These challenges are even more severe for particular subgroups of the youth population, including girls and young women, those living in rural areas, those living in regions suffering from on-going conflict, and those who have been infected or affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic that continues to devastate parts of the continent.

Your governments are addressing these challenges by revising existing youth policies and establishing new strategies that aim to increase the support available to young people to fully participate in their societies. You are on the front lines of efforts to improve conditions for the young people of your countries. We expect this workshop to increase the capacity of all of us to advance progress in the implementation of the national youth policies and programmes.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank you for taking time out of your busy schedules to join us this week. I know that it was not easy for some of you to be here and I appreciate the effort you made to participate. I am confident that your discussions over the next few days will expand your expertise to effectively respond to the needs and aspirations of the young people in your countries. I very much hope that you will contribute your views and experience fully and use every opportunity to learn from one another. I wish you an interesting and productive meeting.

Thank you.