



**High Level Meeting on Africa's Development Needs: State of
Implementation of Various Commitments, Challenges and the Way
Forward"
22 September 2008**

**Summary Report
Side Events**

Title: Youth: Development and Employment

Date and Venue: Conference Room 7

Organizers: UNFPA, IOM, UN-OSAA, UN-DESA, ILO, UNV, UNESCO and UNOSDP

Chair: Ms. Purnima Mane, Deputy Executive Director, UNFPA (Moderator)

Panellists: Hon. Mr. L. E. S. Kadam'manja, Minister of Youth Development and Sport of Malawi; H.E. Mr. Olivier Belle, Deputy Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations; Ms. Onyeka Obasi, President, Friends of Africa International; Mr. Nouréini Tidjani-Serpos, Assistant Director-General, Africa, UNESCO; Ms. Ndioro Ndiaye, Deputy Director-General, IOM (Rapporteur)

Summary Discussions

The issue of youth development and employment is increasingly urgent across the African continent as increasingly, governments recognize that African youth have the potential to contribute to peace, political stability and sustainable development to their continent. However, despite being the fastest growing labour force in the world, African youth are disproportionately marginalized. Youth in Sub-Saharan Africa face a particular lack of opportunities in health, employment and education sectors, compounded by the consequences of armed conflict, and often turn to migration as a coping mechanism. The lack of opportunities is particularly severe for young girls.

Opening the discussion, **Ms. Purnima Mane, Deputy Executive Director, UNFPA (Moderator)**, highlighted the continued marginalization of the youth. This is exacerbated by low enrolment rates and high drop-out rates in schools. Young people face serious health problems, including rising HIV infection rates, which are increasing at a faster pace than treatment can be scaled up. Women's HIV infection rate is twice that of men. Armed conflict also has serious consequences for the youth, promoting their alienation and hampering their ability to participate in development. It is essential to ensure that the

youth of Sub-Saharan Africa take their development into their own hands. The African Youth Charter is a vital component in this regard.

Hon. Mr. L. E. S. Kadam'manja, Minister of Youth Development and Sport of Malawi highlighted the need to protect the health of Africa's youth and ensure sexual and reproductive health and HIV prevention among them. He pointed that 52 per cent of the population lived below the poverty line. Youth in Africa are affected by unemployment, early pregnancy, and HIV, among other things. In Malawi, 60 per cent of adolescent girls aged less than 19 years get pregnant. With regard to HIV, six per cent of young people aged 20-24 are infected. A large proportion of those infected are female.

The government has prepared a policy document on young people which addresses unemployment, youth economic empowerment, health and youth participation. UNFPA played a critical role in developing that Youth Policy. The country also has a plan of action for scaling up adolescent sexual and reproductive health through funds received from the Global Fund. Efforts are also being undertaken to develop standards for the provision of youth friendly services. The country's poverty reduction strategy paper (PRSP) has ensured the adequate inclusion of young people, who are defined as those aged 10 to 24 years. As a result, investments in vocational and technical as well as other employable skills will be included in the PRSP.

Mr. Olivier Belle, Deputy Representative of Belgium to the UN and President of the Commission on the Status of Women noted that the youth are the key agents for future economic development. Their development begins with education, particularly at the primary level. The government of Belgium is considering the adoption of a Belgian strategy on primary education for Africa.

It is essential to promote equality, but if it is not implemented, the concept is not very useful. There are many people that do not benefit from access to equality: adolescent girls, HIV infected adolescents, children in conflict and children from minorities. There is also need to focus on efficiency. Mr. Belle also posed several questions regarding the issue of appropriate education policy: What is a good return for education?; Is education a good machine for the economy?; and, Is it enough? He further stressed that equal access to education for boys and girls is very important as is access to quality education

Turning specifically to the issue of gender, he asserted that the MDGs will not be reach without investment in women. Implementation is a key factor in this regard. The Commission on the Status of Women has always requests national governments to implement its recommendations. In relation to education for women, it is a fact that women tend to drop out from high school more than men. Governments must, therefore, implement better policies at the national level and must take the gender dimension into account in planning. It is also necessary to eliminate discrimination in training for employment and the development of skills. Policies must ensure that girls have the opportunity to enter the job market. In Belgium gender inequalities in the work force is also a problem. It is harder for women to reach equality with men. Real change will not

arrive with new policies alone, there needs to be a change in mentalities. Girls need to be empowered and it is essential to ensure more gender sensitive policies in education and employment.

Ms. Onyeka Obasi, President, Friends of Africa International, said that without absolute and genuine institutionalized engagement of young people in development alternatives, regional and national initiatives and strategies geared towards poverty and its related consequences in Africa will not succeed. The African Youth Charter represents a major milestone for the cause of African youth and there is need for countries to ensure its signatures and ratification in order to move forward with its implementation as an integral part of improving the lives of young Africans. The charter could be used as a reference document in the formulation of national youth policies across Africa and beyond.

Consistent with the African Youth Charter, Friends of Africa International convened the first annual Pan African Youth Leadership Forum in Accra in 2007 to give young people a voice and equip them with the right skills and knowledge base in order to effectively and meaningfully participate in development alternatives in Africa.

Mr. Nouréini Tidjani-Serpos, Assistant Director-General, Africa, UNESCO said that UNESCO maintains strong partnerships with youth via different structures, such as its associated schools programme and UNESCO Clubs. It gives Africa and gender priority with specific interventions for Youth in its medium-term Strategy (2008-2013). UNESCO is preparing to launch an Action Plan for Youth Empowerment in Africa (2008-2012). Through its National Commissions, it contributes to the dissemination of the African Youth Charter. Joint action among agencies, programmes of the United Nations, the African Union, regional economic communities, national authorities and the civil society, is the key to achieving true partnership and dealing with major challenges facing African youth. For that, UNESCO's interdisciplinary action is well placed in terms of availability of knowledge and expertise for the reinforcement of capacities of the African youth.

For quality education and training programmes for youth for the elimination of illiteracy, in particular among girls and young women in accordance with the Dakar Action plan, it is necessary to develop an education based on the values of tolerance, respect for human rights, intercultural dialogue and on the culture of peace. It is also necessary to integrate African cultural values in school programmes, so as to ensure that they form part of the education of young people. For youth to play their roles as future pillars of regional integration in Africa, youth associations should be reinforced and the creation of consolidated regional and sub-regional networks supported. Teaching and rendering of the general history of Africa should also be made accessible to the youth in order to raise pan-African consciousness.

In the discussion that followed, participants highlighted the ways in which young people's participation in Africa's development can be enhanced, including through the provision of opportunities for internship both at the country level and across boundaries.

The representative of UN Volunteers pointed out that volunteering is one of the main channels for youth participation and can be very successful in enhancing employability. To address volunteerism strategically in national policies and programmes, lessons learned from past experience need to be kept in mind. A representative of the Global Youth Action Network (GYAN) advocated for more publicized and improved access to youth programmes, as well as access to information and communication technologies for the youth. Junior Achievement stressed the role that entrepreneurial training can play in empowering young people.

Mrs. Ndioro Ndiaye, Deputy Director-General IOM and Rapporteur, summarized the key messages from panelists and discussion as follows:

- Focus on young people should be as a matter of rights and demographics as the future of Africa is in their hands. Africa has vast human resources that can be harnessed for Africa's socio-economic development however they face a number of challenges including poverty, lack of education or employment opportunities, as well as access to necessary health services including those for HIV/AIDS.
- As a coping mechanism to a number of these challenges, African youth have sought migration either within or out of Africa. Though migration can have negative impacts, especially when undertaken through irregular channels, governments in Africa are beginning to acknowledge migration's link to development and poverty reduction. If managed well, African youth can tap into migration's development impact through remittances and transfer of knowledge and expertise through circular migration or diasporas.
- One of the challenges of Africa's development agenda has been in implementation and operationalization that invites youth participation. Implementation capacity, both in terms of human and financial resources, is a necessary element for achieving Africa's development goals.
- Achieving gender equality means a focus on adolescent girls' education and employment with policies that stress equality in access and quality of education.
- The African Youth Charter should be the basis for advancing the rights of young people to education, decent work, HIV prevention, sexual and reproductive health services, and empowerment for the participation of young people.
- Invest in education and focus on the cultural values of Africa in the context of achieving human rights. Develop curriculum on history.
- Youth employment should be included at the heart of macro economic policies as well as national development agendas, including PRSPs, MDGs and the UNDAF. There should also be investment in programmes that provide social protection. Tax policy, inflation and prices are all linked to decent work opportunities.
- It is critical to have an inter-sectoral approach with involvement of ministers responsible for education, health, employment, youth and sport, and women.
- Tap into the entrepreneurship of young people, their dynamism, but also look at skills that will make them better as entrepreneurs, parents, spouses and workers.
- A strong knowledge and information base as well as networks is key to comprehensive policy intervention, on the ground action, and the promotion and protection of the rights and welfare of youth.

