

**ECOSOC Youth Forum 2017**  
**Concept Note**

**Regional Breakout Session**

**Africa<sup>1</sup>**

**31 January 2017**

**9.30 am – 11 am**

**Conference Room 12**

**United Nations Headquarters, New York**

**1. Background and Context**

In a rapidly changing world, the centrality of youth action in shaping present and future opportunities cannot be over emphasized as youth are the current and future active citizens of the world. The theme of the youth dividend and youth bulge is increasingly centre-stage in the socio-economic and environmental discourse and with more than sufficient reason; according to the United Nations there are 1.2 billion youth aged 15-24 globally as of 2015, accounting for one out of every six people (17%) worldwide. This is predicted to increase to one out of every four people, which means there would be 1.3 billion youth by 2030.

This global trend has particular pertinence to Africa, because Africa has the largest concentration of young people in the world. According to the United Nations, 226 million youth aged 15-24 lived in Africa in 2015 representing nearly 20% of Africa's population, making up one fifth of the world's youth population. If one includes all people aged below 35, this number increases to a staggering three quarters of Africa's population. Moreover, the share of Africa's youth in the world is forecasted to increase to 42% by 2030 and is expected to continue to grow throughout the remainder of the 21st century, more than doubling from current levels by 2055.

Africa's youth population presents immense opportunities for the continent while other world regions face an aging population with subsequent issues such as high health costs for elderly care and high demand for skilled and qualified labour. This is where the concept of the demographic dividend comes in, which describes the process by which countries benefit from acceleration in economic growth as a result of a higher proportion of economically

---

<sup>1</sup> The 2017 ECOSOC Youth Forum Regional Breakout Session on Africa is co-organised by the United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (OSAA) with the following partners: the Pan-African Youth Union; the African Union Youth Programme; the NEPAD Agency; the African Development Bank (AfDB); the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA).

active people compared to dependents. From a demographic perspective, the demographic dividend occurs as follows: “As a country’s total fertility rate (TFR, the average number of children per woman) drops, the proportion of the population under age 15 begins to decrease relative to the adult working-age population (generally ages 15-64 – the child dependency ratio).”<sup>2</sup> This means that smaller families become the norm which frees up income for families to invest in health, education, and well-being of each family member. On a larger scale it means a country has a window of opportunity (for as long as the child dependency ratio continues to decrease) for rapid economic growth if the right social and economic policies are developed and investments made. Once people ages 65 and older begin to represent an increasingly larger proportion of the population then this signals the end of the first demographic dividend.

While Africa’s demographic structure presents great opportunities for a demographic dividend, it presents risks as well. Unemployment or underemployment, and lack of social security, educational opportunities and inclusive governance can drive youth to informal or even criminal activities; making them susceptible to recruitment efforts of terrorist organisations; or lead youth to attempt illegal migration. Policy makers warn that a youth population without opportunity can lead to political instability or even conflict. Large urban centres, the destination for many youth looking for opportunities, face increasing difficulties in managing mega slums that continue to grow. In other words, “unless political leadership offers young people something to live for, social stresses such as unemployment can make them an easy prey to those who offer them something to die for”.<sup>3</sup>

Whether Africa’s youth bulge will be a boon or a ticking demographic time bomb will depend on the extent to which African Governments implement sound policies and invest in human capital sectors such as tertiary education, vocational training, skills development, agriculture and food security, health, labour intensive job creation and encouraging entrepreneurship, as well as peace and security. Effective policies and measures are critical to harness the benefits of the potential demographic dividend. In addition, African Governments need support from a wide range of international partners and stakeholders as the Sustainable Development Goals will not be achieved without the active engagement and contribution of Africa’s youth to identify their priorities, partner with development actors to foster robust implementation of the various development priorities.

In this light, the first steps towards implementation progress has been registered at both regional and global levels, with the formulation of two ambitious, holistic Agendas; Agenda 2030 for sustainable development and the African Union Agenda 2063 with its corresponding First Ten-Year Implementation Plan. Both agendas bring youth issues into sharp focus. In particular, Aspiration 6 of Agenda 2063 states that Africa wants “An Africa, whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth.” Furthermore, the theme of the 28<sup>th</sup> African Union Summit in January 2017 calls for “*Harnessing Demographic Dividend through investments in the Youth*”. All

---

<sup>2</sup> Gribble, James N. and Jason Bremner (2012), *Achieving a Demographic Dividend*, Population Bulletin 67, no.2.

<sup>3</sup> Atta-Asamoah, Andrews, Senior Researcher for the Institute of Security Studies in South Africa, “Head to head: Is Africa’s young population a risk or an asset? BBC World, 29 January 2014.

major development activities across the continent will focus on harnessing youth potential to drive forward Africa's transformative agenda. This is coupled with the declaration of the decade 2010-2019 as the Africa Youth Decade to accelerate youth empowerment and development.

## **2. Objectives**

Consistent with Sustainable Development Goal 1 of the 2030 Agenda and Aspiration 1 and 6 of the African Union Agenda 2063, the regional break out session on Africa sets out to craft recommendations to create opportunities for youth through the implementation of the SDGs and A2063 while addressing poverty in all its forms in particular among the vulnerable population, youth and women, in Africa. The regional break out session on Africa will present its recommendations to the plenary session of the ECOSOC 2017 Youth Forum.

Following the adoption of Agenda 2030, Agenda 2063 and its First Ten-Year Implementation Plan, and as mandated by Paragraph 90 of Agenda 2030, the ECOSOC Youth Forum's regional breakout session on Africa will provide a platform for young people around the world with emphasis on young Africans to engage with member states, the private sector, academia, civil society, philanthropic organisations, and the Diaspora to discuss and share ideas and identify means for the effective implementation of Agenda 2030 and 2063 as well as to find solutions to challenges facing youth, including poverty, unemployment and underemployment, gender inequality, peace and security, human rights, environmental degradation and climate change and usually lack of high level recognition of their efforts and support.

Specifically, the session will garner input from the African youth dimension to inform the work of the 2017 ECOSOC Youth Forum and High Level Political Forum on SDG implementation. In addition, the discussion will aim to:

- Identify concrete policies that can foster youth engagement in the implementation of SDGs 1, 2, 3, 5, 9, and 14 of Agenda 2030.
- Outline the responsibility of young people in the attainment of the 2030 Agenda 2063.
- Provide guidance for effective youth engagement at all levels of decision making as well as to foster inclusivity.
- Raise continued awareness of the SDGs and the goals of Agenda 2063 to increase advocacy for collective action.
- Promote networking and exchanges among young people.

## **3. Format**

The event will be structured as an interactive session, featuring youth representatives from Africa and beyond and co- moderated by two prominent African youth representatives. The event is open to all and especially encourages the participation of African youth.

The meeting will be webcast to allow a wide range of participants in particular youth in Africa to follow the regional break out session on Africa.

## 4. Guiding Questions

In order to maximise the contribution of all participants in the Regional Breakout Session on Africa during the 2017 ECOSOC Youth Forum, participants are encouraged to consider the following guiding discussion questions:

- What specific policy measures can be put in place to harness the demographic dividend in Africa?
- How can youth engagement in governance and societal reform be strengthened?
- How could the educational system be improved to ensure that youth acquire needed skills for Africa's labour market and sustainable development?
- What is the role of vocational and educational centres to impart African youth with skills required in productive jobs and improving youth employability?
- How can the private sector expand support for skills development, job creation and building partnerships through entrepreneurship?
- How can young people play an effective role in strengthening health systems – particularly to respond to the needs of vulnerable populations?
- What policy measures can enable young people to surmount current societal structures to take on leadership roles in working towards “the future we want”.
- How can entrepreneurship be promoted to support young African entrepreneurs?
- What role should the UN system and multi-lateral funding organisations play in supporting Africa's youth dividend?

## 5. Suggested reading materials

### Frameworks

- The African Youth Charter  
[http://www.un.org/en/africa/osaa/pdf/au/african\\_youth\\_charter\\_2006.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/africa/osaa/pdf/au/african_youth_charter_2006.pdf)
- The African Youth Decade Plan of Action 2009-2018  
[http://www.un.org/en/africa/osaa/pdf/au/african\\_youth\\_decade\\_2009-2018.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/africa/osaa/pdf/au/african_youth_decade_2009-2018.pdf)
- The African Union Agenda 2063,  
<http://www.un.org/en/africa/osaa/pdf/au/agenda2063.pdf>
- 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development  
[http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E)
- African Development Bank Strategy for Jobs for Youth in Africa 2016-2025  
[http://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Boards-Documents/Bank\\_Group\\_Strategy\\_for\\_Jobs\\_for\\_Youth\\_in\\_Africa\\_2016-2025\\_Rev\\_2.pdf](http://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Boards-Documents/Bank_Group_Strategy_for_Jobs_for_Youth_in_Africa_2016-2025_Rev_2.pdf)

### Reports

- “Global Employment Trends for Youth 2015”, International Labour Organization  
[http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms\\_412015.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_412015.pdf)
- “Youth Employment in Sub-Saharan Africa” (2014), The World Bank  
[http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2014/04/04/000442464\\_20140404115619/Rendered/PDF/840830v20REVIS0110Report0ER0English.pdf](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2014/04/04/000442464_20140404115619/Rendered/PDF/840830v20REVIS0110Report0ER0English.pdf)
- “Africa Agriculture Status Report 2015: Youth in Agriculture in Sub-Saharan Africa”, Alliance for Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA)  
<http://www.agra.org/download/560b8d8d1aa45/>
- African Youth Report 2011, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa  
<http://www.uneca.org/publications/african-youth-report-2011>