Women and Youth Entrepreneurship in Africa:

*The impact of entrepreneurial education on development*

**Monday, 13 June 2016, 10.00am-1.00pm**

**Trusteeship Council Chamber, UNHQ, New York**

**CONCEPT NOTE**

**Background**

Over the past decade, Africa has been among the world’s fastest-growing regions, with improved governance and economic reforms helping to galvanize annual growth of more than 5% on average. The continent is home to a third of the planet’s mineral reserves and a tenth of the oil, while foreign direct investment (FDI) in the continent has grown in the past decade, despite global stagnation.

In spite of this promising data, unemployment in Africa was estimated at more than 15% in 2015, with some countries reaching up to 30% -- a situation that has fuelled persistent poverty as well as economic migration due to the lack of local businesses able to generate employment opportunities.

While widespread unemployment on the continent has negatively affected virtually all segments of the population, it has most strongly affected women and youth. Gender gaps in employment are high, with women dominating informal sector employment and vulnerable work. In addition, African youth – both men and women – represent 60% of the continent’s unemployed, hindered by lack of employment opportunities and inadequate access to quality education and vocational training.

Recent developments, however, present new opportunities for transformative change for women and youth in Africa. 2015 marked the adoption of historic agendas for the continent at both the global and regional levels, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the African Union’s Agenda 2063, the continent’s 50 year transformative agenda for development, peace and security, and its First Ten-Year Implementation Plan.

Both frameworks seek to achieve inclusive growth and sustainable development in Africa, with particular emphasis on women and youth.

Goal 5 of the SDGs, for example, aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, while Goal 4 on inclusive and equitable quality education features specific targets related to increasing the number of youth who have relevant skills for entrepreneurship. In addition, Goal 8,
which aims for sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, features targets towards substantially reducing the proportion of youth that are not employed or receiving education.

Emphasis on women and youth can also be found in the African Union’s Agenda 2063 and its First Ten-Year Implementation Plan. Aspiration 6 of the Agenda explicitly calls for an Africa whose development is people-centred, relying on the potential offered by African people, especially women and youth, while the Agenda’s Ten-Year Implementation plan aims to achieve a 25% reduction in unemployment by 2023 and to specifically reduce youth and women’s unemployment by 2% per annum.

Entrepreneurship will be a key driver towards the structural economic transformation envisioned in both agendas, with the potential to create millions of jobs; generate innovations in fields such as technology, agriculture, and transportation; and serve as a vehicle for economic and social empowerment of African women and youth. In order to achieve these aims, action is required from all stakeholders, particularly through innovative partnerships between African stakeholders and development partners, as called for in both the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063. There is strong need for new enterprises with a strong social and environmental orientation on the continent, as well as for greater efforts to strengthen the capacity of African Universities to offer educational programs for entrepreneurs that suit the social needs and domesticate the implementation of both agendas, thus becoming long-term drivers of change.

As a reflection of the importance of entrepreneurial education for Africa’s development, on 17 May 2016, the African Union Commission, represented by its Chairperson H.E. Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the E4Impact Foundation, a partnership between the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart (Milan) and major Italian companies, and a leading Pan-African University Alliance for the training and coaching of impact entrepreneurs. In this groundbreaking agreement, the African Union and E4Impact agreed to collaborate on initiatives that promote inclusive quality education including entrepreneurship training, education for sustainable development and university capacity building. As a result of this agreement, the E4Impact Foundation will work directly with the Regional University Forum for Capacity Building in Africa (RUFORUM), a consortium of 55 universities from 22 African countries whose mandate is to contribute to the well-being of small-scale farmers and the economic development of African countries throughout the Sub-Saharan African region.

In this context, the Permanent Mission of Italy to the United Nations, the Permanent Observer Mission of the African Union to the United Nations, the E4Impact Foundation, the United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (OSAA), the Office of the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth, UNWomen and the Permanent Missions of Kenya and Ghana to the United Nations are organizing a high-level meeting on the theme “Women and Youth Entrepreneurship in Africa: The impact of entrepreneurial education on development”.

Objectives:

The event will analyse the development of entrepreneurship in Africa, with a special focus on women and youth, highlighting, inter alia, the work of the E4Impact Foundation and its partnership with the African Union. The event will specifically showcase best practices from the Foundation’s E4Impact Pan-African Initiative, the leading Pan-African university alliance for training and coaching a new generation of results-oriented entrepreneurs in Africa.
The event aims to:

1. Identify ways to support and sustain women and youth entrepreneurship in Africa

2. Engage Member States, United Nations system entities, African continental organizations, private sector, civil society and other relevant stakeholders, with the aim of galvanizing action towards the support of women and youth entrepreneurs in Africa.

3. Showcase concrete examples of “impactful” women and youth entrepreneurs in Africa

4. Encourage the exchange of ideas on how enterprises with a strong social foundations can accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the African Union’s Agenda 2063

**Participation:**

The event will feature the participation of Permanent Representatives of Member States to the United Nations in New York, Heads of United Nations system entities, Senior Officials of the African Union, women and youth entrepreneurs from throughout Africa, and high-level representatives of private sector and civil society groups.

More information about the event available at:  