



CONCEPT NOTE SESSION 3

Youth on the rise: Youth Participation in Africa

ECOSOC Youth Forum 2015

**3 February 2015
Conference Room 4
United Nations Headquarters, New York**

1. Background and Context

The African population is estimated to be more than a billion people of whom over 60 per cent are young men and women under the age 35. The majority of African youth continue to face unemployment, underemployment, lack of adequate skills and access to education, access to capital, unmet needs for health-related information and services, including sexual and reproductive health, as well as those related to diagnosis, treatment, and care of those living with HIV. This situation is even more accentuated among the youth in rural areas, youth living in conflict or post-conflict contexts, and for young women. As a result, the greater proportion of youth in Africa do not have the opportunity to fully develop their potential and contribute effectively to the realization of an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena, as envisioned in the forthcoming African Agenda 2063.

In light of this challenge, during the 7th Ordinary Session of the Conference of Heads of States and Government, held in Banjul, Gambia, in July 2006, African Union Heads of States and Governments adopted the African Youth Charter (AYC)¹, a political and legal document which serves as the strategic framework that gives direction for youth empowerment and development at continental, regional and national levels across the continent. The AYC aims to strengthen, reinforce and consolidate continental and regional partnerships and relations. Furthermore, it gives priority to youth development on the African Union's development agenda, the most recent of which culminates in Agenda 2063, which will be put for adoption during the 24th Ordinary Session of the African Union Summit, in January 2015.

¹ As of April 2014, 36 Member States have ratified the Charter, 42 Member States have signed the Charter, and 3 Member States are yet to sign and ratify





In an effort to operationalize the AYC, the Executive Council of the Assembly of Heads of States and Governments of the African Union met in January 2009 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and declared the years 2009 to 2018 as the Decade on Youth Development in Africa. Some progress has been made since then, including through the establishment of national youth parliaments and an increasing number of appointments of youth into executive positions.

2. African Youth on the Rise

There has been an increased effort by the African Union Commission to consult with the youth on policies and programmes that affect their lives, most notably, the Debate between Youth and Heads of State during the 17th Ordinary AU Summit held from 23 June -1 July 2011 in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, wherein a Summit Declaration on “*Creating Employment for Accelerating Youth Development and Empowerment*” was adopted. Building on this, a Youth Policy Dialogue on Accelerating Youth Empowerment for Sustainable Development was held from 5-6th May 2011 in Arusha, Tanzania, culminating in a wide range of recommendations from the five regions of Africa.

More recently, an African Youth Conference on Post-2015 Development Agenda was held at the United Nations Office in Nairobi (UNON), from 18th-20th November 2012, resulting in an African Youth Declaration on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Notable areas of concern included the need for improved health services and sexual reproductive health; youth empowerment and employment; equitable access to quality education and enhancing appropriate access to technology; climate change, environmental sustainability and food security; good governance, peace and security; and last but not least, access to social justice and the protection of minorities and vulnerable groups.

We are also in the midst of the African Women’s Decade, 2010 – 2020, which aims to advance gender equality through the acceleration of the implementation of the global and regional decisions and commitments on gender equality and women’s empowerment. At the Young Women’s Forum convened on the margins of the 22nd African Union Summit in 2014, young women and girls from 14 countries came together and produced a statement, “[Future Young Women and Girls Want](#),” which put forward concrete policy recommendations for improving the situation of young women and girls in Africa.

With these pressing issues forming the foundation of youth concerns across the continent, the African Union Commission, during its consultations with various stakeholders in the formulation of Agenda 2063, met with the youth of Africa on 1-3 November 2013 in Tunis, Tunisia on the occasion of the 8th Edition of the Africa Youth Day, under the theme “*Youth United in Action for Agenda 2063*”. Deliberations sought to shed light on the important perspectives of youth in the framing of Agenda 2063, for the next 50 years, bearing in mind that the youth are the main players and partners for an inclusive and sustainable development





of the continent. In August 2014, the youth of Africa met during the 6th African Youth and Governance Conference in Lusaka, Zambia, under the theme “*Investing in Africa’s human capital for peace and development*”, to further consolidate their concerns and positions on pressing matters of concern to them, testifying to their momentum to be heard on matters that affect their lives.

From the foregoing, it is evident that the African youth are on the rise. With the current ongoing negotiations on the post-2015 development agenda and the forthcoming Africa Agenda 2063, it is important that the positions of the African youth are heard loud and clear. Towards this end, and in light of the ECOSOC Integration segment on “*Achieving sustainable development through employment creation and decent work for all*”, to be held from 30 March - 1 April 2015, this ECOSOC Youth Forum, with the theme “*Youth on the Rise: Youth participation in Africa*”, will create an excellent opportunity to connect with the youth of Africa, coordinate their various activities, and create the space for active youth participation and youth policy formulation at the global arena. Furthermore, the recommendations from this session will richly contribute towards the Integration segment, which will address social, economic and environmental issues- the main pillars of sustainable development.

3. Objectives

The Forum will build on some of the issues raised at the 2014 session on African youth, including the challenges associated with conflict, peacebuilding and health in the region. It will discuss ways to embed youth participation in regional, national and local governance processes, in particular in those countries emerging from conflict. It will also examine some of the key methods through which African youth have been engaging on Post-2015 development efforts to date, and examine how they can effectively continue to play an active role in its implementation and monitoring. Moreover, the Forum will foster discussion, information sharing and knowledge building on how to better address gaps in employment creation in Africa, with a particular focus on decent jobs for young people, including jobs that promote sustainable development and social inclusion of the African youth. In a moderated discussion, speakers will share experience, exchange views and engage with the audience in an open discussion on the topic.

4. Issues at stake

- a) Increase, strengthen youth participation, commitment, leadership and partnerships**





- Lack of adequate institutional mechanisms to foster youth participation in decision-making processes and the need for greater support of youth-led organizations and initiatives to enhance their contribution to society;
- Need to encourage African governments to adopt and domesticate the World Programme of Action for Youth in line with their national priorities;
- Need for the effective implementation of inclusive and gender-sensitive national youth policies;
- Need to create effective platforms at national and regional levels to help transform young people's ideas into concrete actions for positive change;
- Need to strengthen networks and partnerships among Governments, youth-led organizations, academic institutions, civil society, private sector, media and the African Union Commission, to enhance commitment and support for the implementation of holistic youth development activities;
- Need to enhance the participation of young men and women in governance and political processes.

b) Increase awareness, commitment and investment in youth

- Foster discussion, information sharing and knowledge building amongst youth to better support implementation of youth policies and programmes.
- Need to promote greater understanding of inequalities, including gender inequality, amongst youth and effectively address the needs of the most disadvantaged youth to preserve national unity, particularly in conflict-affected and post-conflict countries;
- Address the skills mismatch between the demand and supply in the labour market through an education system that equips young people to become job creators and not job seekers.

c) Increase intercultural exchanges and understanding among youth

- Promote youth interactions, networking and partnerships across cultures at local, national, regional and continental level;
- Empower and support youth, including young women, as agents of political, cultural and social inclusion to support peacebuilding;
- Remove visa restrictions to facilitate movement of youth and facilitate exchange of skills, culture and community interactions so as to create stronger links among youths in the continent.





d) Increase employment opportunities and decent jobs for youth in Africa

- Youth employment crisis and the post-2015 jobs challenge;
- Gender disparities in the context of youth unemployment and decent work;
- Create decent work opportunities for all youth and improve the quality of jobs and rights at work;
- Foster youth entrepreneurship and innovation;
- Assist youth in the transition to the formal economy.

e) Support young people's participation to peacebuilding, violence reduction and inclusive governance

- Address young people's exclusion from peace mediation, peace negotiation and peacebuilding processes, by creating opportunities for their meaningful participation;
- Support young people's peacebuilding initiatives, and involve hard-to-reach young people including those disproportionately affected by conflict (such as young people from minority and indigenous groups);
- Nurture young people's skills in leadership, mediation, negotiation, conflict resolution, life skills and positive social norms;
- Involve young women proactively in all peacebuilding initiatives;
- Institutionalize young people's participation and representation in local and national governance processes.

5. Questions for the audience

- The existing coordinating structures for youth development in Africa are invariably weak, both politically and in terms of resources. What can be done about this, particularly at a time when negotiations are ongoing on the transition from MDGs to SDGs?
- How can governments put greater emphasis on the development and implementation of national youth policies and how can they invest more on the youth?
- How can governments promote skill development? Are there ways to combine vocational training with formal education? How can ICTs be harnessed for quality youth education? What lessons can we draw from existing programmes and policies using ICTs for youth employment and education?





- How can governments put youth unemployment and underemployment at the centre of policymaking? What are the main challenges/obstacles to finding a decent job in African countries?
- How do youth share information about health issues and how can this be disseminated in parallel to life skills development? What experiences and lessons could be learnt from youth-led initiatives? What coping mechanisms exist for youth living with HIV/AIDS?
- Young people suffer disproportionately from the impact of conflict, as well as from post-conflict violence. Young women are particularly at risk of sexual and other forms of gender-based violence. But young people are also essential contributors to the recovery process of their countries and to establishing inclusive and fair foundations to new societies. How can young people's contribution to sustainable peace be recognized, promoted and supported?
- How can governments and various stakeholders ensure inclusive and gender-sensitive youth development in Africa and promote young women and girls' participation in the post-2015 agenda?

ANNEX

6. Suggested reading materials

Reports

- Common African Position on the post-2015 development agenda; The draft African Union Agenda 2063
<http://summits.au.int/en/21stsummit/events/final-press-release-21st-ordinary-session-summit-african-union>
<http://www.uneca.org/post2015>
- The African Youth Declaration on post 2015
<http://www.whiteband.org/sites/default/files/African%20Youth%20Declaration%20on%20Post-2015.pdf>
- The African Youth Decade Plan of Action 2009-2018
<http://summits.au.int/en/17thsummit/news/african-youth-decade-2009-2018-plan-action-accelerating-youth-empowerment-sustainabl>
- "A million voices: the world we want"
<http://www.worldwewant2015.org/millionvoices>,
<http://www.unfoundation.org/assets/pdf/un-development-group-report.pdf>





- Research undertaken by the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, including the 2012 study on “African Youth: Fulfilling the Potential?”
<http://www.moibrahimfoundation.org/downloads/2013/2012-facts-and-figures.pdf>
- Ibrahim Index of African Governance, Harmonization of Governance, Peace and Security Statistics
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ibrahim_Index_of_African_Governance,
<http://www.moibrahimfoundation.org/interact/>
- “The African Youth Report 2011: Addressing the youth education and employment nexus in the new global economy”, UN Economic Commission for Africa, 2011.
http://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/publications/african_youth_report_2011_final.pdf
- “African Economic Outlook: Promoting Youth Employment”, African Development Bank, OECD, UN Economic Commission for Africa, United Nations Development Programme http://www.africaneconomicoutlook.org/en/in-depth/youth_employment/
- “UNDP Youth Strategy 2014-2017: Empowered youth, sustainable future”, UNDP, March 2014 <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/youthstrategy/>
- “MDG Report 2013: Assessing Progress in Africa toward the Millennium Development Goals – Food Security in Africa: Issues, Challenges and Lessons”, by UN Economic Commission for Africa, African Union, African Development Bank, United Nations Development Programme.
http://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/publications/mdgreport2013_eng.pdf
- “Africa at work: Job creation and inclusive growth”, McKinsey report by David Fine, Arend van Wamelen, Susan Lund, Armando Cabral, Mourad Taoufiki, Norbert Dörr, Acha Leke, Charles Roxburgh, Jörg Schubert and Paul Cook, August 2012
http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/africa/africa_at_work
- Guiding Principles on Youth Participation in Peacebuilding:
<https://www.sfcg.org/guidingprinciples/>

Articles

- “A vision of an integrated Africa” , by Maged Abdelaziz and Ibrahim Mayaki, Africa Renewal, December 2013, <http://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/december-2013/vision-integrated-africa>





- “Reaching for new heights”, by Munyaradzi Makoni, Africa Renewal, December 2013, <http://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/december-2013/reaching-new-heights>
- “Africa’s food policy needs sharper teeth”, by Masimba Tafirenyika, 2014 Special Edition, Africa Renewal, <http://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/january-2013/africa%E2%80%99s-food-policy-needs-sharper-teeth>
- “Denting youth unemployment through agriculture” by Busani Bafana, 2014 Special Edition, Africa Renewal, <http://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/special-edition-agriculture-2014/denting-youth-unemployment-through-agriculture>
- “We need more agribusiness in Africa”, by Carlos Lopes, 2014 Special Edition, Africa Renewal, <http://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/special-edition-agriculture-2014/we-need-more-agribusiness-africa>
- “A common vision for agriculture-led growth”, by Glenn Denning, 2014 Special Edition, Africa Renewal, <http://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/special-edition-agriculture-2014/%E2%80%98-common-vision-agriculture-led-growth%E2%80%99>
- “Despite climate change, Africa can feed Africa”, by Richard Munang and Jesica Andrews, 2014 Special Edition, Africa Renewal, <http://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/special-edition-agriculture-2014/despite-climate-change-africa-can-feed-africa>
- In sub-Saharan Africa, primary school teacher shortage on the horizon, by Tsigue Shiferaw, Africa Renewal, April 2014, http://www.un.org/africarenewal/sites/dr7.un.org.africarenewal/files/Africa_Renewal_April_2014_en.pdf
- “As it plans its own future, Africa engages with the world”, by Tim Wall, Africa Renewal, April 2014, <http://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/april-2014/it-plans-its-own-future-africa-engages-world>
- "Africa's youth: a "ticking time bomb" or an opportunity?", by Kingsley Ighobor, Africa Renewal, May 2013, <http://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/may-2013/africa%E2%80%99s-youth-%E2%80%9Cticking-time-bomb%E2%80%9D-or-opportunity>
- "Africa's greatest assets are its young people", by Ahmad Alhendawi, Africa Renewal, May 2013, <http://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/may-2013/africa%E2%80%99s-greatest-assets-are-its-young-people>
- Statement by young women and girls at the African Union Summit on Agriculture and Food Security, January 21 – 31, 2014, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia:





<http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2014/1/statement-by-young-african-women-and-girls-at-au-summit>



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