



**ECOSOC  
YOUTH  
FORUM**

**#YOUTH2030**

**Economic and Social Council Youth Forum**  
*10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary*

**CONCEPT NOTE**

**Africa Regional Breakout Session**  
**Thursday, 8 April 2021**  
**9:40 AM – 11:10 AM (New York time)**

**Supporting the Culture of Innovation, Creativity and  
Entrepreneurship of African Youth to Build Forward Better  
for Sustainable Development**

IDENTIFICATION	
<b>Session title as per programme</b>	Africa Regional Breakout Session
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**BACKGROUND & KEY ISSUES**  
(approx. 750 words)

The theme for the Africa Regional Breakout Session, “**Supporting the Culture of Innovation, Creativity and Entrepreneurship of African Youth to Build Forward Better for Sustainable Development**”, draws inspiration from both the African Union’s theme for 2021, “Arts, Culture and Heritage: Levers for Building the Africa We Want”, as well as the overall theme of the 2021 ECOSOC Youth Forum, “A Decade of Action: Building a Resilient Recovery”.

Over the past year, the world has witnessed the emergence of the global COVID-19 health pandemic, coinciding with a global socio-economic emergency threatening lives and livelihoods. As of 4 March 2021, there have been 115 million cases of COVID-19 and 2.56 million deaths worldwide.<sup>1</sup> Almost four million cases have been confirmed in Africa, as have more than 100,000 deaths.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the pandemic has caused the global economy to contract by 3.5 per cent in real terms, according to the latest estimates by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Five hundred million jobs have been lost globally and trillions of dollars wiped from global balance sheets.<sup>3</sup> Economic growth in Africa is estimated to have declined by as much as 5.4 per cent in 2020,<sup>4</sup> and its countries have been left highly vulnerable to external

<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization  
<sup>2</sup> Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention  
<sup>3</sup> International Labour Organization Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work. Sixth edition Updated estimates and analysis, 23 September 2020  
<sup>4</sup> ECOSOC Recent economic and social developments in Africa, E/ECA/COE/39/11, 5 January 2021

shock. More than 26 million people were thrown into extreme poverty in Africa alone, according to the IMF, and this is likely to persist in 2021.

In spite of the many challenges, Africa has demonstrated a renewed innovative spirit to combat the pandemic. Of the thousand new or modifications of existing technologies that have been developed worldwide to target different areas of the COVID-19 response, World Health Organization (WHO) analysis reveals that Africa accounts for 12.8 per cent of the innovations, ranging from surveillance, contact tracing, community engagement, treatment, laboratory systems and infection prevention and control. Some examples that have emerged across the continent include: Msafari, a people-tracking application created in Kenya by FabLab; Wiqaytna, developed in Morocco, which notifies people who have been in contact with a person who tested positive for COVID-19; and Global Mama, from Ghana, which produces reusable masks and designs automated, contact-free and solar-powered washing stations using locally sourced materials.

The knowledge and hidden talent of Africa's young people have played a big role in building forward better for sustainable development, putting to use an inherent culture of innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship, even against the formidable backdrop of COVID-19. In this context, science plays a major role stimulating innovation-based growth. Science policy creates the framework and enabling environment that facilitates improvement in science education, research and university-industry partnerships, which contribute to a better standard of living and enable innovation. Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) programmes, particularly for girls, play a major role in building the capacities of youth by equipping them with the knowledge and skills that ensure the sustainability of the culture of innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship needed for sustainable development in Africa.

Young Africans, including youth groups, have engineered home-grown innovations to cope with the pandemic and adapted them to the African context relevant to the needs of African communities. In Africa, 57.8 per cent of new innovative technologies since the start of the pandemic have been ICT-driven, including WhatsApp Chatbots in South Africa and self-diagnostic tools in Angola, while 25 per cent have been based on 3D printing. Young people have been directly involved in innovating many of these technologies, which also include solar-powered automatic handwashing tools and mobile applications that build on Africa's rapidly growing connectivity.<sup>5</sup> Clearly, the energy, vitality and innovation on the continent lies with its youth.

WHO and the UN system recommend greater investment in ICT infrastructure, robotics, artificial intelligence, drones and mechatronics as well as putting the right policies in place to boost creativity and entrepreneurship and to bolster university-led research. Moreover, changes need to be made in the policy field to solidify the ecosystem of fertile ground for youth

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<sup>5</sup> "COVID-19 spurs health innovation in Africa", WHO Regional Office for Africa, 29 October 2020

innovation on the continent. There is a need to put people first – cultivating a showcase of talent, investing in creativity, resilience and resourcefulness, especially when it comes to young people.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing challenges faced by young people across Africa, including education, access to employment, the effects of climate change and the violation of human rights. The Breakout Session will be a platform to discuss and share good practices driven by youth leaders and youth organizations across the continent to build their resilience to the many changes caused or increased by the pandemic.

**SESSION OBJECTIVES**  
(approx. 100 words)

The Africa Regional Breakout Session of the 2021 ECOSOC Youth Forum will seek to:

- amplify and provide a platform for global support to the culture of innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship of young Africans, notably with respect to their contributions to countering the health and socio-economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and setting the continent up to build forward better;
- highlight the potential of youth to drive inclusive crisis response and development; and
- encourage and promote the need to increase youth representation and active participation in crisis response and development.

**EXPECTED OUTCOMES**  
(approx. 100 words)

The Breakout Session will provide a platform to discuss the roles and contribution of young people in Africa to ensuring a resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and achieving the Decade of Action for sustainable development. It will serve: (i) to exchange experiences and approaches and share good practices, success stories and lessons learned; (ii) a means for youth to leverage their voices and agency in driving transformative action to accelerate the realization of the aspirations of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Agenda 2063 of the African Union and Security Council resolution 2250 on youth, peace and security; (iii) identify opportunities, gaps and challenges as well as find solutions for building forward better; and (iv) make concrete recommendations to inform relevant stakeholders, including UN agencies, Governments and other partners, on the importance of involving youth in crisis response and recovery plans.

With the use of discussion questions to sharpen focus on the theme and the active participation from African youth representatives and stakeholders, the session will generate a wide array of contributions and policy recommendations that will feed into ongoing processes such as the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) and the Africa Day at the HLPF.

**APPROACH USED TO GENERATE CONCRETE CONTRIBUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**  
(approx. 200 words)

The virtual event will be structured as an interactive session, featuring youth representatives from Africa and beyond and moderated by a prominent African youth representative. Youth representatives will speak to discussion questions prepared for the session and share experiences and lesson learned, and this will be followed by questions received from the audience. The showcased examples of meaningful youth actions will provide a set of good practices for possible replication and adaptation in other relevant contexts.

The event is open to all and especially encourages the participation of African youth. It will be webcast through UN Web TV to allow a wide range of participants to follow.

**OVERALL STRUCTURE AND FLOW**  
(approx. 300 words)

The event will be structured as an interactive session, with participation from youth representatives from Africa and beyond and moderation by a prominent youth leader.

The moderator will provide a short introductory statement and state the guiding questions for the interactive session. She will ensure that participants can share examples of challenges, successful innovations and key recommendations.

The session is designed to be highly interactive, with no prepared statements, so that all participants may be engaged.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**  
(approx. 300 words)

In order to maximize and amplify the contributions of all participants in the 2021 ECOSOC Youth Forum Africa Regional Breakout Session and generate contributions and concrete

actionable recommendations from African youth to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and AU Agenda 2063, participants are encouraged to consider the following guiding discussion questions:

- What are the transformative and innovative interventions that African youth can make to scale up action to achieve the Decade of Action?
- What are key policy measures to support the culture of creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship in Africa?
- What are the major challenges that impede the achievement of the SDGs and Agenda 2063 priorities in Africa?
- How can African countries harness innovative technologies developed by the youth and bring them to scale to build forward better?
- What foundational support from Governments or elsewhere do young people in Africa need to unleash new innovative approaches to end poverty and fight economic and social disenfranchisement?
- What roadblocks do African youth, including youth movements and volunteer involving organizations, encounter when trying to bring creative ideas that would benefit society?
- How can young people in Africa access funding necessary to develop products and services that can contribute to the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda?
- What must be done to ensure that girls have equal opportunities to participate in the culture of innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship in Africa?
- What role has science played in facilitating the culture of innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship of African youth?
- What can young people do to ensure that their voices, experiences, expertise and ideas are heard in climate action?
- What partnership initiatives can increase the number of young people involved in peacebuilding efforts?

#### **PREPARATORY EVENTS (approx. 200 words)**

Pre-consultations on the session theme through an online survey.

#### **SUGGESTED READING**

- [Seventh session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development: summary, key messages and Brazzaville Declaration](#)

- [The African Youth Charter](#)
- [The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#)
- [The African Union Agenda 2063](#)
- [Agenda 2063-First Ten-year Implementation Plan 2014-2023](#)
- [African Continental Framework on Youth Development](#)
- [African Union Plan of Action for the African Decade for Technical, Professional, Entrepreneurial Training and Youth Employment \(2019-2028\)](#)
- [United Nations World Youth Report 2020](#)
- [Youth and Volunteering \(Knowledge Base Platform\)](#)
- [Global Technical Meeting 2020: Reimagining Volunteering for the 2030 Agenda](#)
- [UN Handbook on Youth, Peace and Security](#)

#### ADDITIONAL DETAILS

The Africa Regional Breakout Session will be co-organized by the United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (UN-OSAA), the International Trade Centre (ITC) and the Africa Regional Youth Caucus, with additional co-organization from UNESCO, UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa, United Nations Volunteers (UNV), Child Solidarity Group, the Association of Young Professionals of Water and Sanitation of Senegal (AJPEAS) and the Africa Youth Advisory Board on Disaster Risks Reduction.

Participants in the event will include a wide range of African youth representatives, Ministers and other senior Government officials, senior officials of United Nations system entities, the private sector, civil society and academia.

The ECOSOC Youth Forum's focus in 2021 on the Decade of Action responds to one of the United Nations Secretary-General's key priorities, enhancing United Nations partnership with Africa, especially through the African Union. The Decade of Action calls on all sectors of society to mobilize to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular youth to generate an unstoppable movement pushing for the required transformations. The Secretary-General has urged coordinated global action to set the world back on track towards peace, stability and opportunity against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic, with a view to achieving the SDGs and the Aspirations reflected in the African Union Agenda 2063.