



THE PRESIDENT
OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

24 July 2015

Excellency,

I have the honour to transmit herewith a Summary of the key messages and proposals from the High-Level Event on the Demographic Dividend and Youth Employment which I convened on 1 June 2015, at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sam K. Kutesa', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the left.

Sam K. Kutesa

All Permanent Representatives and
Permanent Observers to the United Nations
New York

High-level Event on the Demographic Dividend and Youth Employment

United Nations Headquarters, New York, 1 June 2015

President's Summary

Introduction

The President of the General Assembly convened a High-level Event on the Demographic Dividend and Youth employment on 1 June 2015, in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Secretary General's Envoy on Youth. The purpose of the Event was to provide an opportunity for Member States and other stakeholders to consider practical ways in which the international community can work in partnership with Governments in countries with a large youth population to enable the necessary investments needed to reap the demographic dividend, including through employment opportunities and decent work.

The one day event, which consisted of a High-level opening plenary session with high level representatives and two interactive panel sessions, discussed key issues surrounding the topics of demographic dividend and youth employment namely: "how to harness the demographic dividend" and "what policies and measures are needed to create opportunities for youth employment", respectively. Interventions from the floor followed both interactive panels, with a closing segment concluding the Event.

Key messages

The following key messages, recommendations and initiatives emerged from the High-level Event under the broad themes of health, education, empowerment, employment and cross cutting issues:

Health

Participants emphasized the importance of addressing high fertility rates, especially where there is still large unmet need for services through universal access to family planning and reproductive health services. Many speakers underscored the need to safeguard freedom and rights so that families can choose; thereby reducing unintended pregnancies and the spread of sexually transmitted infections, including Hepatitis B and HIV.

Participants noted that preventable maternal mortality, newborn deaths, adolescent pregnancies, and violence against women and girls are all problems that need to be addressed and which are usually compounded in circumstances of humanitarian crisis and conflicts.

Education

Participants underscored that investment in human capital development is one of the most critical ways to achieve the demographic dividend. Speakers emphasized the importance of quality education, training and skills development. They stressed the need for ensuring access

to both universal and quality education, reducing skills gaps and matching education, skills training and over all career guidance with the specific and evolving needs of the diversified labour market.

Speakers further acknowledged that investments in health and education are critical for the demographic dividend and youth employment. It was further noted that investing in the education of young girls is an investment in the future of families and it empowers societies.

They stressed the need for stronger and systematic partnerships between universities, the private sector and governments to increase access to knowledge and technology. They also called for use of new analytical tools to look at responsiveness of universities to job markets in order to support governments get snapshots of emerging and dying professions, and to empower students to make good training choices.

The importance of broadening access to high-level science journals to enhance quality access to knowledge and the latest scientific developments and theories for all students and life-long learners was also emphasized. Governments were encouraged to collaborate, including under the aegis of the United Nations on this subject with a view to addressing this and other related issues such as the question of intellectual property rights.

Furthermore, participants stressed the need to explore diversified means of financing for education. In particular, they called for increased partnerships between Governments and the private sector in developing a business model for financing post- secondary education and support university students to participate in innovation hubs, including start-up incubators. They pointed out that such innovations could be fundamental for business development, stimulation of entrepreneurship, and expansion of employment opportunities in communities.

Speakers drew lessons from urban youth initiatives which support young people, particularly those who have traditionally been excluded, to develop skills through short-term supplementary educational opportunities. Participants noted that both inter-sectoral and multi-sectoral approaches have been key to the success of such initiatives, which involve training for adults who interact with the young people with a goal of fostering leadership.

Participants further stressed the importance of coupling training with social skills, values and attitudes that are essential for keeping a job and sustaining good performance. They also stressed that while education and skills development is important to enhance employability of young people, training should also incorporate respect of human rights and dignity of people. Vocational and technical training were also emphasized.

Speakers also underscored the need to encourage and incentivize more Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) learning that focuses on practical applications.

Empowerment

Participants noted that gender based violence including sexual violence, remains a serious risk for young women and girls, with devastating effects on their prospects for productive learning, self-confidence, and meaningful employment. They also noted that early marriages impact negatively on young women and girls, offering limited chances for a better future. As such, they underscored the importance of young women's empowerment, education and employment including mentoring and role models as essential means to breaking the invisible barriers to their engagement, mobility, and opportunities. They also highlighted the need to provide equal opportunities for women and girls including finding ways to help fight invisible barriers, including in respect to employment and educational opportunities.

It was further highlighted that youth leadership and participation are absolutely essential as direct means of empowerment, but also to ensure that developments in all sectors are meaningful and provide youth with the chance to express themselves and be part of crafting and monitoring solutions. Participants called for increased participation of young people in decision-making, which in turn ensures and promotes inclusive development. Member States were encouraged to include young people in national delegations to UN meetings to ensure that their voices are heard.

Several participants shared their country experiences and perspectives, with legislative quotas as useful empowerment tools for inclusion of women and youth in politics. In this regard, they pointed to the need for a diversity of quotas that offer long term, stable work for youth and women in fully accessible work places.

Employment

During the discussions, speakers noted that the problem of youth unemployment represents one of the most important challenges for many countries, particularly in Africa. They noted that while young people should be at the forefront of development and global change, many young people are forced to sit on the margins of society due to unemployment; something that they are no longer contented about.

Participants noted that the youth constitute a large proportion of national populations but are not fully integrated into productive employment. Moreover, millions of young people join the labour market every year while lacking professional experience, access to credit facilities and are trapped in poverty. They also pointed out that as a result, many young people have resorted to unproductive and nefarious activities, including drug abuse, prostitution and violent extremism. Some speakers associated youth unemployment with high HIV/AIDS prevalence among young people, and to political instability in their countries and regions.

Participants emphasized the need for on-the-job experience schemes such as internships and apprenticeships. They pointed out that while it is important to create job opportunities, young people should not be exploited as free labour. In this regard, initiatives such as internships should not be used as a new way of exploiting young people. Instead, countries should ensure

social protection systems to eradicate poverty and reduce persistent inequalities, while ensuring that the youth are fully aware of their rights.

Further, participants expressed support for the Sustainable Development Goal on promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all and acknowledged the call for a global strategy on youth employment. They underlined that there should be strategies and indicators at national, regional and global levels to track progress in the implementation of the new post-2015 development agenda.

Speakers stressed that tackling youth employment in the post-2015 framework requires political will, solidarity, collective efforts, joint initiatives, innovative partnerships and new ways of working together. In this regard, they called for increased private sector engagement to support business development programmes, empowerment of micro, small and medium enterprises, better access to capital and credit, micro-credit initiatives and dedicated funding mechanisms.

Participants underlined the importance and potential of the agriculture sector in employment. They stressed that access to land, mechanized farming and access to national and international markets would go a long way in ensuring employment, both for local farmers and young people. They also pointed out that industrialization and value addition to natural resources and agricultural products would contribute to expanding employment opportunities and transforming economies.

Private sector leaders in the IT sector expounded on the potential that technology, connectivity, and innovation can do to harness the demographic dividend and create employment for the youth. They emphasized the potential of mobile phones and online platforms, including for entrepreneurship. They also noted that the high prevalence of cybercrime and security challenges reflects the problem of growing IT skills without meaningful work opportunities.

Youth Voices on Employment

A youth representative conveyed the following key messages, emanating from interactions among young people on the important subject of youth employment:

- Promote policies and measures that address unequal work systems - by enabling physical access, measures that consider women, girls and young people's security and safety at the workplace, provide affordable child care, allow parental leave (both maternity and paternity leave), offer after school programmes which enable parents to work, etc.
- Invest in youth employment which is not focused on accumulation, competition, and exclusion which fuels unemployment, leading to unfulfilling jobs, and exploitation.

- Ensure the new transformative development agenda, with sustainable development goals as its integral part creates conditions that will ultimately lead to transformative employment that is long-term, stable and sustainable. In this regard, make efforts to ensure that the wide cross section of job opportunities that will arise as an outcome of the global transition to low carbon economies are offered to young people who have traditionally been excluded and marginalized from such opportunities.

Cross Cutting Issues

Participants emphasized the importance of putting the youth at the center of national development policies and of having in place national youth policies and structures that are aimed at identifying their potential and creativity and empowering them to excel in their endeavours.

Speakers stressed that national policies should create an enabling environment for domestic and foreign investments. They underlined that foreign direct investment should be targeted towards the informal economies and that global decisions and investments should favour utilization of natural resources to empower young populations, especially in developing countries.

Participants noted that large populations in developing countries impinge on the realization of the demographic dividend. As such, measures to reduce population growth should be encouraged, including through repositioning of and investing in family planning services.

Participants also underscored the importance of eliminating economic and social inequalities to reap a demographic dividend; which calls for a multi-sector approach as well as community based approaches. The need to enhance the role and expertise of the private sector in order to tap into their support and resource for youth development was therefore stressed.

They underlined the importance of macroeconomic and regional integration initiatives. In particular, establishment of regional watch dog bodies that would ‘publicize and celebrate the best employers and name and shame the worst’.

The importance of South-South and Triangular Cooperation was highlighted and speakers called upon the UN System, including UNFPA, ILO and other partners to support efforts towards harnessing the demographic dividend.

Conclusion

The Event addressed a number of key questions and problems attributed to the slow demographic transition in developing countries, and what can be done to speed up the transition and create conducive conditions for a demographic dividend. Drawing lessons from countries that have already attained the demographic dividend, the Event also addressed ways in which countries can make better use of opportunities at their disposal, and how countries can be supported to create and promote decent jobs for youth.

Overall, participants underlined that young people constitute a group that is now recognised as a critical demographic entity; and whose interests should be prioritized and included in order to reap the demographic dividend and sustainable development. It was emphasized that young people need and deserve a world in which they are valued, protected, free from discrimination, exclusion; and in which leaders recognize their needs and work to fulfil them. The demographic dividend is about empowering a generation of young people to thrive in a changing world, which in turn could enhance the progressiveness and resilience of countries and societies.