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KENYA COUNTRY OFFICE

International Youth Day 2026: Different Contexts, Common Aspirations

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Cantwel is part of a new generation of young changemakers bridging the digital divide in Nairobi's informal settlements. An AGCCI 2025 Cohort 2 graduate, she founded Build and Bloom Africa, a free digital literacy programme that equips children in Mathare with essential computer and digital skills, empowering them, especially girls, to thrive in an increasingly digital world.

"This day reminded me that we can all be in different spaces, doing different work, yet still moving toward the same goal. The theme, 'Different Contexts, Same Aspirations,' captured that perfectly. Whether we're in a classroom, a community centre, or a boardroom, young people across contexts are united by shared dreams for a better future."

Cantwel Njeri, AGCCI Cohort 2 (2025)

International Youth Day, observed annually on 12th August, recognizes the role of young people as essential partners in building a more just and sustainable world. International Youth Day highlights the challenges youth face while also promoting their contributions to development and peace. Each year focuses on a specific theme to drive global attention and action, with governments, organizations, and young people organizing events, campaigns, and dialogues worldwide.

The 2026 International Youth Day theme, ***"Different Contexts, Common Aspirations,"*** recognizes that although young people come from diverse geographical, cultural, socio-economic and educational backgrounds, they share common aspirations for good health, meaningful employment, dignity, safety, inclusion, participation and opportunities to thrive.

Young people in Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs), and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) often face a unique combination of structural challenges that shape their pathways to education, employment, and participation in society.

Sharon, an alumna of the African Girls Can Code Initiative (AGCCI) 2025 Cohort 1, is championing digital safety and cybersecurity among young people in Kenya. While pursuing a Bachelor of Education in Mathematics and Chemistry, she is also advancing her cybersecurity expertise and leading digital safety initiatives through the Google Coursera programme.

"Young people are active innovators and solution-builders today, not just leaders of tomorrow. International Youth Day represents a celebration of resilience, agency, and the power of youth leveraging technology and education to drive community-level impact. Youth should step boldly into spaces where they feel underrepresented"

Sharon Mbola, AGCCI Cohort 1 (2025)

Limited economic diversification, geographic isolation, infrastructure gaps, climate vulnerability, and constrained access to quality education and digital connectivity can restrict opportunities for many young people. In many contexts, youth unemployment and underemployment remain persistently high, while access to mental health services, social protection, and youth-friendly institutions remains limited.

At the same time, young people in these countries are powerful agents of change rather than passive beneficiaries. Across communities, youth are leading local climate action, building social enterprises, advocating for inclusive governance, strengthening cultural resilience, and leveraging digital tools to connect their local realities with global conversations. Their leadership and resilience demonstrate that youth in LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS are not only confronting challenges but also actively shaping sustainable and inclusive futures. While the 2026 IYD theme highlights the daily reality of specific country groups, its relevance is fundamentally universal.

The experiences of youth in LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS reflect broader global dynamics that affect young people everywhere.

International Youth Day highlights the contributions of young people to sustainable development while drawing attention to the challenges they continue to face. The 2026 theme acknowledges that while youth come from diverse geographical, social, economic, and cultural backgrounds, their aspirations remain remarkably similar. It also emphasizes the importance of global solidarity, collective solutions to shared challenges, and youth-led innovation. Around the world, young people are stepping forward to address issues such as unemployment, digital exclusion, mental health, climate change, and inequality. Their efforts demonstrate resilience, creativity, and the determination to build inclusive and sustainable societies. African Girls Can Code Initiative (AGCCI) alumnae are among those translating ambition into action, using technology and innovation to tackle challenges in their communities.

UN Women Kenya
UN Gigiri Complex, UN Avenue, Block M, Ground Floor
P.O. Box 30218 00100, Nairobi, Kenya
Tel: +254 20 7624331

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