

# Concept Note

## Africa Youth Conference- Unleashing the Potential of Youth: Prioritizing Investment in Africa Youth Within the Post-2015 Agenda

23 - 25 October 2018

### 1. Background, Context and Rationale

Africa has the youngest population with over 40% of the population below the age of 15, while about 20% of the population fall between 15-24 years age<sup>1</sup>. This is indeed the potential that exists to harness the potential of youth in the realization of Sustainable Development Goals.

African countries have experienced a steady economic growth over the past decade. However, this economic growth has been characterised by high rates of inequalities including those facing its youthful population. Specifically, for youth, little attention has been paid to creating employment opportunities for young people. According to the African Development Bank- AfDB, six of the 10 fastest-growing economies in the world are in Sub-Saharan Africa. Research shows that the youth unemployment rate in sub-Saharan Africa is expected to continue on its downward trajectory, which began in 2012, reaching 10.9 per cent in 2016 and decreasing slightly to 10.8 in 2017. Young women are even more affected as it is easier for men to get jobs than it is for women, due to the structural limitations that exist across societies and within sectors. Through its young people, Africa finds itself faced with an unprecedented opportunity. Every year between 2015 and 2035, close to five million more people will turn 15 years of age across the continent, while the rest of the world's population will grow older. As highlighted in the 2014 World Bank report on youth employment in Sub-Saharan Africa, only a quarter of the young people who enter the labour market each year over the next decade will find a salaried position, and only a small fraction of them will secure formal employment in "modern" enterprises, with the majority of young people remaining in the informal sector. Without concerted action, many African countries are likely to experience a backlash from the growing numbers of disgruntled and unemployed youth that are emerging. This could be associated with the increased youth participation in civil unrests and violent extremism. A World Bank survey in 2011 showed that about 40% of those who join radical movements say they are motivated by lack of jobs. As such development actions must not only consider the needs of the young people but also include young people in the development and decision-making processes.

### 2. Continental Youth Engagements

Across the continent, there has been an increased effort by the African Union, regional economic communities and the United Nations to engage the youth on policy and programme development, 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. 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 was also held informed by the Malabo Conference. 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 2014, 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

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<sup>1</sup> UNFPA The power of 1.8billion

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.

### **3. Youth and Sustainable Development Goals**

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted in 2015, is the international community's ambitious response to today's most pressing global development challenges and will guide our development priorities for an entire generation. Young people played a key role in shaping this agenda and experience first-hand many of the issues it seeks to address. Recent decades have witnessed significant advances in terms of human development, but deep challenges remain. Progress has been uneven, with many young people across the globe still experiencing interlocked forms of discrimination, limited political inclusion, high levels of poverty, and limited access to health, educational opportunities, entrepreneurship and decent jobs. The goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda are interconnected, aiming to integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental. Explicitly or implicitly, young people are deeply embedded within their fabric. Their knowledge, reach and innovative solutions are essential if sustainable development is to be realized. The youth act as agents of change in the realization of the agenda and will be indispensable to its achievement in the coming 15 years. The scale and scope of the ambition requires particularly strong partnerships at every level with young people, who are already engaged in making the SDGs a reality.

The SDGs present a huge opportunity for Leaving No Young Person Behind- accelerated achievement of Sustainable Development Goals through Addressing Youth and Inequalities: This is one of the principles of SDG implementation. We should ensure that no person including the youths and specifically young women and girls are left behind or denied universal human rights (SDG 5) and basic economic opportunities (SDG 8). African governments should track progress on youth investments at all levels of income, and by providing social protection to help youths build resilience to life's uncertainties. The Sustainable Development Goal 10 targets reducing inequality within and between countries. It focuses not only on income inequality, but also on discrimination and disadvantage generally. It calls for the social, economic, and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, or economic or other status. As such, the conference will focus on the following SDGs as they relate to the themes of the conference;

- I. SDG 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere;
- II. SDG 5- Achieving gender equality and empower all women and girls;
- III. SDG 8- Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all;
- IV. SDG 9- Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.

### **4. Purpose and Objectives of the Conference**

UN Women in Africa in collaboration with diverse stakeholders and partners propose to hold an Africa Youth Conference on ***Unleashing the Potential of Youth in Africa- Prioritizing Investment in Youth Development in the Post-2015 Agenda***. The purpose of the conference is to open up spaces for youth (young women and men, girls and boys) to contribute to development and decision-making processes on youth especially on Gender and Empowerment of Young Women (GEWE). The convening, which brings youth delegates from across Africa, is an African youth event, open to international youth, with an aim of offering a regional platform for young people and key stakeholders to share ideas, experiences and innovative approaches for effectively addressing youth challenges in Africa. It will also build consensus on their role in localizing and implementing Sustainable Development Goals. The Conference shall further inform the formulation of a framework for a Joint Regional Programme focusing on the youth in Africa. It is in our view that the

SDGs must put young people (specifically young women and girls) at the core of the targets and indicators to tackle youth challenges in Africa.

UN Women believes in the growth potential for Africa. This is because the projected increase in Africa's working age population during this century presents a window of opportunity, which if properly harnessed can be transformational and ensure inclusivity to the youth population including young women. In a study by IMF (2014), it is affirmed that Africa's growth can be substantially higher and low-income countries would benefit the most from this transition given that the magnitude of the dividend declines as economies mature. Further, the study agrees that the transition presents an opportunity, but also possess potential social risks where it is not properly managed, especially where the economy does not create jobs on a sufficient scale to absorb those joining the labor market. In fact, improving and increasing access to education has proven critical to improving the productivity of workers and supporting a transition to higher valued added sectors. In addition, IMF posits that structural transformation fostering a shift away from agriculture is conducive to harnessing the demographic dividend. Consequently, policies that eliminate inhibitions to private sector development but enable labor intensive manufacturing should be prioritized by African governments to position Africa and provide better opportunities for the youth in light of SDGs.

The conference provides a perfect opportunity to target inclusive and sustainable growth that devotes more attention to higher standards and to outcomes that improve the quality of young people's lives. The SDGs must put young people at the core of the targets and indicators aimed at poverty reduction, decent jobs, enhanced access to clean water and modern energy, quality education, urban development, sexual and reproductive health, healthcare and improved agricultural technologies.

Besides the SDGs, UN Women recognizes that the youth need to have the space to participate in the operationalization of African development agenda 2063 including local, national and regional interventions and policies, establish monitoring and review mechanisms and systems for holding African governments accountable. Young people need structured mechanisms for participation through decision-making especially in areas that have a clear impact in their lives. African governments must ensure a political commitment and adequate youth responsive investment and policy options to leverage on the Unleashing the Potentials of Youth in Africa.

The purpose of the conference is to open up spaces for young people (young women and men, girls and boys) to contribute to inclusive and equitable development and decision-making processes within the framework of Sustainable Development Goals. The specific objectives will be:

- i. To provide an inclusive platform for young people to engage in a dialogue with themselves and decision makers including government, CSOs and private sector to share ideas, experiences and innovative approaches for effectively addressing youth development challenges facing Africa.
- ii. To engage African countries and organizations including CSOs that will act as youth champions to push for the youth agenda in the localization and implementation of SDGs.
- iii. To inform development of a Joint Regional Programme on the youth in Africa with a keen focus on young women and girls in Africa.

## **5. Target Audience**

The United Nations defines "youth" as those between 15 and 24 years of age, while the African Youth Charter defines youth as those between 15-35 (African Union, 2006). The proposed conference will adopt the Africa Union definition as it targets governments and other

stakeholders outside the United Nations. The conference will bring together key stakeholders including African Youth, African governments, the United Nations family, Regional Economic Communities and Intergovernmental Authorities, Private Sector, CSOs, INGOs and development and bilateral agencies to discuss, agree and develop propositions, policy, programme and investment options for the youths.

## **6. Conference Themes**

The conference will focus on the following areas:

- i. Enhancing youth access, especially young women and girls to sustainable livelihood through social entrepreneurship
- ii. Youth engagement in governance/political participation leadership and decision making with a focus on ensuring access, active participation and decision making by young women; and
- iii. Youth action in preventing violence and other harmful practices against young women and girls.
- iv. Showcasing and documenting youth-led social innovations addressing development challenges facing Youth in Africa.

## **7. Methodology of the Africa Youth Conference**

- I. High Level Youth Policy Dialogue- There will be a High-Level Youth Policy aimed at informing policy and investment options in the youth. The youth will also come up with a statement/ declaration that could be used to inform the reporting on diverse regional and global reporting mechanisms- CSW 63 and Africa pre-gender summit 2019 but also shows a pathway for youth programming in Africa.
- II. A Youth led Steering Committee shall be established to plan and organize all activities related to the Conference with regional representations from Eastern and Southern, West and Central and Arab States. This will also ensure that the Conference, as envisaged, is youth led and for the youth.
- III. Holding intergenerational dialogues with the youth.
- IV. Consideration for diverse including plenary sessions, inspire expert breakout sessions, equip breakout sessions, conference/ knowledge exchange session and an innovation space/hub showcasing catalogued innovations and solutions

## **8. Conference Outcomes**

- I. The meeting will offer concrete policy-relevant, development-oriented and investment recommendations in relation to youth development in National and Regional development interventions for inclusive growth and achievement of Sustainable Development Goals.
- II. Highlight key issues that will feed into the discussions on young women and girls at diverse intergovernmental processes and the CSW 63.
- III. Inform development of a comprehensive Joint Africa Youth Programme in the long term.

**Resources**-Resources for the Youth Conference will be contributed by UN Women in Africa and diverse partners collaborating on the conference. Resources shall mainly be mobilized through direct support by participating partners including contributions towards conferencing, youth participation, logistics and travel, development of the programme document for the youth programme, communications efforts and knowledge management support. Annex 1 has the budgetary implication in detail.