

UN Women Young Women’s Regional Consultation on Beijing +25

Context

The African development Bank has predicted that Africa’s general economic outlook continues to improve and is on a steady growth. Additionally, Africa has the world’s youngest population and it is growing rapidly. At present, young people aged between 15-24 years constitute 19.4% of the total population, while children under 15 years are nearly 41% of the total population. Goal Keepers 2018 report predicts that by 2050, Africa’s young population will increase by 50% i.e. by 2050 Africa will have the largest number of young people in the world (ages 0 – 24). By sheer numbers alone, the choices, opportunities and constraints of young people will continue to play a major role in shaping Africa’s development¹. Growing population and economic outlook for the continent presents an opportunity for the continent to improve its productivity and innovation consequently reducing poverty and improving the quality of life for its people.

The youth play an important role in the implementation and review of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This huge population serves as a determining factor in the growth of the labor force and pressures on economies in terms of job creation². The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063 underscore the importance of promoting rights of young people and meeting their needs, in all their diversity. Engaging young people is central to the successful implementation of the transformative agenda in Africa. Accordingly, achieving these aspirations requires an understanding of the needs, interests, challenges and potentials of Africa’s youth³. With the right policies and investments and the engagement of young people in nurturing their own potential, the largest generation of young people in human history can become the problem-solving producers, creators, entrepreneurs, change agents and leaders of the coming decades⁴.

Despite this positive and promising outlook, Africa continues to experience a myriad of challenges such as poor governance, low employment rates, conflict and war, poor health care and increasing number of people living below the poverty line. Moreover, there is limited investment in the youth, as well as their empowerment and involvement in decision making processes. The African youth account for 60% of all African unemployed, according to the World Bank. Young women feel the sting of unemployment even more sharply. The AfDB found that in most countries in sub-Saharan Africa and all of those in North Africa, it is easier for men to get jobs than it is for women, even if they have equivalent skills and experience.

The case for young women and girls

To ensure that the promise to “leave no one behind” is realized, the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda must address the needs of all young women and girls, especially those facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and marginalization, including, but not limited to: sexual and gender diversity, disability, HIV/AIDS status, rural location, ethnic minority status, class and income, and living in conflict and post-conflict settings.

¹ <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Youth/UNEconomicCommissionAfrica.pdf>

² World Youth Report

³ <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Youth/UNEconomicCommissionAfrica.pdf>

⁴ UNFPA The power of 1.8billion

When considering the opportunities and scope for achieving gender equality and sustainable development, the poorest and most vulnerable groups of young women and girls must be prioritized. Young women and girls are further and disproportionately affected by numerous challenges that global youth face due to inequalities that stem from gender-based discriminatory social behaviors and norms. Yet young women around the globe possess the collective power to change their lives, their communities and the world we live in. Just as they face daily challenges, young women are continuously developing innovative, effective ways to improve their lives by bringing together their wisdom and creativity.

Evidence suggests that both income and gender inequality in Africa remain the highest in the world and are declining slower compared to other regions⁵. It is widely reported that gender inequality is more often than not, at the expense of women and girls. This translates to women and girls having limited access to economic opportunities, social services and decision-making processes. Gender inequality in the economic, social, civil and political spheres amounts to discrimination against women and constitutes a violation of their socio-economic, civil and political rights. There have been many recent advances on women's empowerment on the African continent, including many changes in laws to promote equal rights for women. Though these accomplishments, more needs to be done to achieve gender parity.

Beijing +25

1995 was a critical moment for the world's stance on gender equality and the empowerment of women which resulted in Adoption of Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) during the 4th Conference on Women held in Beijing, China. The conference outcome promised to transform the lives of women across the globe by implementation of reformed policies that called to an end on marginalization of women. Further, the accountability framework of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action requires member states to meet every five years to review its implementation. The year 2020 marks the 25th anniversary of the BPfA, and to commemorate the occasion, the sixty fourth session on the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 64) of the United Nations (UN) will undertake a review and appraisal of progress made thus far. The accountability framework assists in identifying areas that members states have improved on for reporting on the same. it also helps for remapping and re-strategizing to ensure that member states adhere to the agreed BPfA commitments.

UN Women and Oxfam have invested in the youth and recognize that young people are best placed to suggest solutions to the issues that affect them and their communities. At a recent Africa Youth Conference organized by UN Women and supported by other UN Agencies in Africa and Civil Society Organizations, the youth outlined that failure by African governments to carry out an all-inclusive approach in their development agenda has caused Africa's realities to continue. Moreover, the youth decided not to accept the narrative and descriptions of them as those that are passive and not concerned about their role in society and committed to contribute to the development and realization of progressive strong economies and societies. Young people have a range of experiences, thoughts, ideas and perspectives, and should be continuously involved in the structure and decision-making processes at all levels in order to ensure that policy decisions,

⁵ IMF (2016). "Inequality, Gender Gaps and Economic Growth: Comparative Evidence for Sub-Saharan Africa". Working Paper WP/16/111, June.

programs and services delivered with them, should be appropriate, relevant, supportive and responsive to their needs.

Young Women's Regional Consultation on Beijing +25

UN Women in collaboration with Oxfam International and UN ECA will host a Young Women's Regional Consultation on Beijing +25. The objective of the meeting is to ensure youth ownership of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action by engaging the new generation of young women leaders and activists on gender equality and the empowerment and rights of women and girls. The meeting will also seek to address whether this generation of young African Women appreciate the 12 Critical areas of concerns as outlined in BPfA and reflect on what has been achieved, and what remains to be done in order to realize the promise of Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action for young women and girls. The meeting will draw youth from the entire of Africa and those in diaspora with an aim to address the question of why African Governments should be concerned about the youth and their understanding of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action to ensure that the African girl child realizes her full potential even when surrounded by innumerable challenges.

The overall aim of the meeting is: To provide a platform for intergenerational dialogue between African youth, especially women and men between the ages of 15 – 24 years, and Africa's leadership on their understanding, contributions and recommendations on Beijing Platform for Action. This will later be presented at the UNECA led Africa Regional consultation on Beijing +25.

Other Objectives include,

- To identify mechanisms that were put in place or that need to be developed to ensure the meaningful participation of young people in the achievement of the SDGs
- To initiate dialogues between young women and men on masculinity, feminism and patriarchy

Target Audience.

The meeting will target young women and men delegates drawn from across Africa. They will be from government, parliament, civil society, academia, traditional and religious institutions.