



Side Event Draft Concept Note

Title: “YOUTH: DEVELOPMENT AND EMPLOYMENT”

Sponsor/Co-Sponsors: UNFPA, ILO, IOM, UNOSDP, UNV, AU, UNESCO

Date: 22 September 2008

Time: Morning/parallel event

Venue: Conference Room 7

Moderator/Chair, Panelists/Resource persons:

Deputy Executive Director of UNFPA (Moderator); Mme. Ndioro Ndiaye, Deputy Director General, IOM (Rapporteur); (Other panelists to be added in due course)

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Context

African youths are the key agents for Africa's present and future development. Research shows that young people aged 10 to 24 years represent about 33 per cent of the population in Africa, making them a critical social capital and a potential human force for the continent. However, it is also evident that not enough has been done to promote youth empowerment and participation/engagement to address Africa's development needs. In fact, African youths have been used as cannon fodder in times of war, are mostly unemployed or under-employed, are denied education, information and skills development opportunities and are used in illegal and criminal activities. They feel excluded from the social dialogue and decision-making processes on crucial questions affecting both their present and their future. Even in cases where regional and national policies reflect the importance of youth, implementation is often lacking. The responsible structures are universally under-funded and ill-equipped to address the multifaceted challenges faced by young people while youth organizations generally lack the capacity and resources to ably assist their peers. This has hindered the full development of their potential, including the

chance to become responsible citizens. HIV/AIDS and other sexually-transmitted diseases have not spared them as some 72 per cent of global HIV/AIDS deaths occur in Sub-Saharan Africa and many of the victims are youths.

Seeking a way out of these challenges, the African youth has been forced to take dangerous and risky measures such as migrating irregularly or illegally in search of better life and opportunities or greener pastures in other parts of the world. Migration has had both positive and negative impacts on the youths and their families. However, the channels that the youths take to migrate usually have an adverse effect on all. In recent years African youths have been witnessed taking dangerous and uninformed decisions which expose them to all sorts of risks. Their desperation has also made many fall prey to traffickers and smugglers who take advantage of their vulnerability.

An immediate challenge facing Africa is the need to create decent work opportunities to ensure that the number of unemployed youth is reduced. Youths are severely disadvantaged because they lack work experience, know how to search for jobs, access to social networks that provide job information and often do not have the skills demanded for the labour market. The number of unemployed young people in Africa grew by almost 30 percent between 1995 and 2005 and the youth unemployment rate reached 19.5 percent in 2005. The situation is worse for young women due to gender discrimination and cultural norms, in addition to limited access to education and training which also limit their job prospects, particularly in the formal economy.

In addition, in many post-conflict countries, the high number of youths who got caught up in the conflicts have emerged as ex-combatants. These youths are marginalized from the social, economic and political processes that shape their lives, livelihoods and futures, and they often lack access to basic services and facilities such as education and health care. Their reintegration into society, particularly through the creation of job/work opportunities and income generating activities should, therefore, be a priority. Also of concern is the plight of girls and young women who return from combat having suffered traumatic sexual abuse and who may have contracted HIV/AIDS. These female ex-combatants deserve priority in skills training programmes.

The African Union Constitutive Act and the African Union Commission Strategic Plan 2004 – 2007, which deal with the special attention that the youths require, underlines the importance of youth participation and involvement in the development of the continent. The AU's policy framework, expressed in the form of the African Youth Charter, is a continental framework that underlines the rights and duties of the youth and paves the way for governments to develop national youth policies, programmes and strategic plans for youth development and empowerment. With the adoption of the Charter at the Sixth Ordinary Session of the AU Executive Council in July 2006 in Banjul, the African Union took the lead in formally providing the leadership and political will to guide its Member States.

Furthermore, the AU, jointly with the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and other UN Agencies and International Organizations, organized the Fifth African Development Forum (ADF-V) under the theme "Youth and Leadership in the 21st Century" in November 2006 in Addis Ababa. The outcome document of that Forum was a consensus statement by the participants noting the central role of youth in economic, social and political development in Africa and their potential to contribute as current and future leaders. Outlining some of the key challenges in the African continents, the participants agreed on the need to strengthen youth capacity through education and skills development; information and communication technology; creating employment; addressing rural-urban drift and migration and promoting the participation of the youth in the diaspora; promoting entrepreneurship; and protecting their health and well-

being, especially, through promotion of sexual and reproductive health, including prevention of HIV infection.

Along those lines, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and its Universitas Programme, focusing on youth social inclusion, development of skills and employability through sport, in August 2006, published *Beyond the scoreboard: youth employment opportunities and skills development in the sports sector*. Two research studies subsequently contributed to professional training and lifelong learning opportunities and have encouraged training programmes in African countries. The organization also continued its Red Card to Child Labour campaign during the 2006 African Nations Cup and on the occasion of the World Day Against Child Labour, during the International Labour Conference, in June 2006. On its part, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) is implementing a Global Partnership Initiative for Urban Youth Development, in collaboration with governments, civil society, sports organizations, the private sector and media to foster peace and accelerate the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals through sports.

At the same time, on the basis of the recommendations adopted at the First UNESCO African Youth Forum (September 2007, Burkina Faso) by youth representatives of its African member states, national youth councils, youth organisations, networks and NGO's, UNESCO has elaborated a five-year Action Plan. In line with the World Program of Action for Youth, the principles of the New Partnership for Africa's Development, the commitment towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, the Action Plan consists of five axes of activities, representing a genuine opportunity to involve young people in national, sub-regional and regional development initiatives.

Main issues and challenges

The demographic profile of the African youth presents a unique opportunity to make significant progress in meeting Africa's development needs. Investment in human resources capital plays a key role in shaping prospects of the African youth in the labor market. Sport, as one tool for peace and development, can contribute significantly to the international, national and local efforts by helping equip the children and youth with information, skills, personal and social resources, and support to make key life transition successfully. Creating opportunities for productive employment is also a direct instrument for achieving Africa's development needs. For Africa to achieve these, there are a number of issues and challenges that need to be addressed:

- There is a need to prioritize youth education and skills development, employment in national policy making as a central concern in economic and social policies. In most African countries youth issues are looked at separately and the challenge has been to integrate youth matters at the macro level. In most sub-Saharan countries well over 50 per cent of the youth live on less than \$2 a day.
- Effective engagement of the youth in Africa's development requires them to be healthy, especially through promotion of sexual and reproductive health and prevention of HIV infection. Half of all new HIV infections occur in youths aged 15-24.
- Issues of gender-based discrimination against women and young girls is another major limitation to youth participation in Africa's development by preventing good education and decent employment and exposing them to early marriage and all its complications. Early marriage increases the likelihood of too early pregnancy, maternal morbidity and mortality, and reduced employability and decent employment among young girls.

- Africa's development agenda should create an environment for youth participation in socio-economic and political development – at the national, sub-regional and continental levels. A conducive environment that fully protects the youth needs to be established.
- African governments need to adopt national policies that enhance youth employability, with an emphasis on existing labour market demands. Investing in sectors with high employment potential for young people in their countries of origin and abroad is critical.
- It is evident that the youths are agents of change and have the energy, drive, exuberance, self-motivation and will to make a difference as future leaders. However, if they are to live up to the expectations, responsibilities and challenges of tomorrow, they have to be engaged and be given opportunities now and not tomorrow.
- African governments are faced with the challenge of minimizing the negative impact of migration (irregular/illegal migration and its consequences). In that regard, countries need to come up with creative and innovative ways of promoting legal migration, including youth exchange programs, volunteerism, labour migration, etc. which expose the youth to the culture and socio-economic situations of other countries and, at the same time, reduce the risks that come with illegal migration.
- Tapping into the resources of the African diaspora is one area the African Union has identified as a priority. For that, there is a need for measures to maximize the positive impact of migration. Incorporating such issues into national economic and social development policies and strategies is a starting point. In addition, policies that encourage voluntary return/sequential visits by young migrants will allow the youth to bring back not only their financial and social capital but also the skills and know-how acquired in their host communities.
- The weak institutional capacity of governments to effectively address Africa's development challenges is a major constraint. Without the right human and financial resources in place, it will not be easy to develop the right strategies and programs and implement them effectively.
- The labour skills mismatch is prevalent in most countries. Hence the vocational training systems need to be reformed in order to address the challenge of providing youth with skills that meet labour market requirements
- Employment opportunities need to be created for young people in public works and community service programmes. When they are well designed and targeted, they benefit the youth. However, they do not offer long term employment but they provide youth with work experience that facilitates their entry into the labour market.
- Given the limited job opportunities in the formal economy, self-employment is an alternative for young people. However, specific entrepreneurship programmes are more likely to be effective if they are embedded in an enabling environment that is conducive to youth entrepreneurship. Substantial resources need to be allocated to youth programmes to provide access to credit, training, business development services and mentoring.
- Numerous African countries are threatened by a “muscle drain”, analogous to the “brain drain”. Some countries are not in a position to guarantee their best athletes economic benefits commensurate with their talent. These athletes often develop their careers abroad. This phenomenon is making its way through all sports and it favors ambiguous and even illegal dealings. It undermines the development of sport and the economy.
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Possible Questions to guide an interactive discussion

- How can we ensure the constructive involvement of the youth in Africa's development agenda
 - Effective participation in the debates and decision-making processes in the development of the continent
 - Sustainable cooperation between government officials and youth organisations at national level
 - Build the capacity of youth organisations to participate in the development of policies at national, sub-regional and regional level
 - Consolidate and reinforce youth networks and encourage cooperation among peers and the dissemination of best practices and
 - Promote the African Youth Charter and highlight its importance as a regional commitment to youth participation
- How best can we empower the youth in key strategic areas: education and skills development, poverty eradication and socio-economic integration of youth, sustainable livelihoods and youth employment, health (RH), governance, peace and security, law enforcement, sustainable development and protection of the environment.
- How can the health of the African youth be protected, especially preventing sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.
- How can Africa eliminate gender-based discriminations against girl-child education and early marriage along with all the associated consequences, including maternal morbidity and mortality and reduced employability or decent employment.
- What are the responsibilities of the youth to their own development and to the development of their countries and the Continent?
- What have been the obstacles and challenges to involving the youth in Africa's development agenda?
- What is the best approach and strategy to utilize the resources and skills of the youth?
- How can Africa produce competitive youth groups?
- Do governments have the right youth policies in place to guide youth programs?
 - The lack of information, relating to both national and international labour markets, to facilitate decision making on the part of youth seeking employment is problematic, how can this be addressed?
 - How can young people be supported in coping with the transition from school to work and from informal to mainstream employment?
- How best can African countries integrate youth employment activities into general employment generation policies and strategies, and more importantly, into the design of Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRSs)?
- What is the best approach to limit the "muscle drain"?