

AFRICA WEEK 2017



Concept Note

High-Level Event:

Briefing by Africa's Regional Economic Communities to
UN Member States and UN system entities

Theme:

**Regional and Economic Integration in Africa:
How to Effectively Involve Africa's Youth across
National Borders**



ECOSOC Chamber
United Nations Headquarters, New York
Wednesday, 18 October 2017, 3:00 pm – 6:00 pm



I. Introduction and Background

This year's briefing aims to deepen analyses and knowledge-sharing on the important role the youth can play in the context of Africa's regional and economic integration¹. Answering the question on how to effectively involve Africa's youth across national borders will provide the narrative for the youth development and regional integration nexus, taking into account vulnerability, poverty and conflict, population growth and distribution, rapid urbanization, and gender-related issues, among others. As the continent puts in place the foundations for the successful implementation of its Agenda 2063 as well as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Heads of State and Government have dedicated the year 2017 to "*Harnessing the Demographic Dividend through Investments in Youth.*" The demographic dividend framework focuses on investments to advance empowerment, education and employment, linked to effective data systems to understand the projection and composition of the population.

Regional integration continues to be one of the cornerstones of Africa's economic development as well as the continent's efforts to ensure sustainable peace across Africa. Hence, the Regional Economic Communities' (RECs) commitment to integrating economies remains unwavering, even if the efforts so far have proven uneven across regional blocs. Nonetheless, real progress has been achieved as per the principles of Abuja Treaty, and the African Union's Agenda 2063 and its First Ten-Year Implementation Plan. Building on the opening up of borders to achieve regional integration is one of the key enablers of sustainable development. In this respect, it could help the continent leverage its demographic dividend and provide opportunities for its youth development. Encouraging cross-border integration that facilitates intra-African migration is an integral objective of the African Union. It could also be a key policy lever to enhance Africa's sustainable economic growth by ensuring access to high quality goods and services and contributing to Africa's financing for development, thereby providing job opportunities for the youth.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, the African Development Bank, the United Nations Population Fund, the International Labour Organization, UNICEF, UNESCO and the World Bank, as well as the NEPAD Agency, have established programmes to accompany the transformative vision of the continent. African youth development underpins the regional integration backbone of this vision. The investment in its youth is not only a response to the youth unemployment crisis on the continent, but it will also help improve the living conditions of people in Africa while providing the much needed human capital to transform Africa's renewable energy, agricultural and industrial sectors and to achieve regional economic integration.

Africa aims to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063 by adopting a people-centred approach and leveraging, among others, her enormous potential for realizing a demographic dividend. This will require increased collaboration from the public and private sectors and civil society to educate, empower and employ Africa's youth, and to provide them with the opportunity to migrate across borders for better jobs and skills development, and entrepreneurship opportunities.

¹ The theme of the briefing was prioritized collectively by the African Regional Economic Communities during their consultative meeting with OSAA on 2 July 2017 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia at the margins of the AU Summit.

II. Rationale

Africa has an enormous potential to realize a demographic dividend. However, it needs to create jobs at a much faster pace in order to absorb its growing labour force. If Africa is to turn the youth bulge into a demographic dividend, it must capitalize on the energy of its youth by engendering a structural, economic, social, environmental and political transformation that can propel the continent to prosperity.

Regional reports and policy research show that migration has profound policy implications for youth development on the continent, and in this light the youth themselves should benefit from Africa's regional and economic integration². Nevertheless migration across national borders has not been adequately mainstreamed into sub-regional development plans and strategies. This inhibits effective planning and policy-making, as well as appropriate responses to Africa's youth inability to leverage the benefits of regional integration. In addition, neither the policy-makers nor the public are sufficiently sensitized to the migration challenge and impact on African youth development. Research is needed to deepen and sharpen the knowledge and awareness of the issues and concerns in order to bridge the gaps between policy and action.

As African Governments strategize on ways to tackle youth unemployment by harnessing its demographic dividend through investments in health, education, the empowerment of young people, women and girls, infrastructure and the underlying foundation of peace and security, the rationale for involving its youth in regional integration is underpinned by the following priorities:

- **Paradigm shift and approach:** A change of attitude towards young people and by young people in Africa is essential. In spite of many initiatives that have been put in place, much remains to be done. Stereotypes and attitudes of both young people and the general population can slow progress towards youth development in Africa. Analysing youth education and employment issues should therefore take into consideration historical, psychological and political dimensions. Understanding the context in which programmes and policies are set, and whether the beneficiaries will appreciate them, is crucial. This requires the proactive involvement of all stakeholders, starting with the youth, and including civil society organizations, faith-based organizations, the private sector and Governments, among others.
- **More ambitious policies:** Policies should favour a broad-based, inclusive and sustainable growth that expands the opportunities for Africa's youth. Such policies should give the youth a living wage and an education that will provide equal opportunity to compete in a globalized world.
- **Proactive measures to unleash youth potential:** In an era of regional integration and rapid globalization, African Governments should take proactive measures that harness the potential and competitiveness of their young people in the global economy. These measures will vary from one subregion to another and will include, but not be limited to: enhancing infrastructure; capacity building to address skill shortages in the region; reforming immigration policies to favour youth employment and entrepreneurship across national borders; promoting policies of inclusion; and the right to vocational education.

² ECA Assessing Regional Integration in Africa VII

- **An integrated approach to solving youth development issues related to addressing education and employment:** Currently youth development efforts, including skills development, are fragmented. A new school of thought and innovative solutions to address education systems, school-to-work transitions, hard and soft skills development and youth employment are required to change the *status quo*. Regional integration is the key to achieve positive outcomes for Africa's youth development, such as youth skills development, best practices and knowledge sharing as stipulated in the African Youth Charter.
- **Better stakeholders engagement and more efficient partnerships:** Governments, regional bodies, international development partners, civil society, the private sector and the youth need to work together to ensure that the youth are provided with opportunities to fulfil their potential, including in leadership roles. Once empowered to move freely across the continent, the youth will become a catalyst for the economic and social transformation of Africa. Only if such partnerships, supported by appropriate financing, are created and sustained, with the youth at the helm of all efforts, can African countries accelerate development and put the continent on a path to peace and prosperity while leveraging the continent's demographic dividend.

III. Overall Objectives

In the context of advancing the implementation of Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the briefing will provide a platform to share the knowledge and needs of the various stakeholders, including the Member States, youth, RECs, the private sector, and civil society organizations; to devise means of engaging the African youth across national borders based on the principles of African regional integration; and to build impactful partnerships.

IV. Specific Objectives

- I. Focus on the role of the RECs as implementing agencies to achieve the desired regional and economic integration. It will highlight persistent challenges and the role of the international community in supporting the RECs in this regard.
- II. Provide an opportunity for Member States and UN entities as well as other relevant stakeholders to directly engage with the RECs to deliberate on ways to complement each other and bring most impactful solutions to youth issues through and by the RECs.
- III. Create incentives for the private sector, Governments, development partners and donors to collaborate, strengthen and scale up responses for significant impact on African youth matters and regional integration in Africa.
- IV. Identify opportunities related to inclusive employment and entrepreneurship, strengthening human capital, and creating sustainable labour market linkages by making use of three strategic intervention areas: integration, innovation and investment³, particularly for the youth in Africa.

³ AfDB "Jobs for Youth in African Strategy" 2016-2025

V. Guiding Questions

- I. What are the measures taken by the various RECs to effectively integrate the youth at all levels of policy making and the development landscape and to mainstream youth matters in their development blue prints?
- II. Given the vast population of young people in many African countries and the need for a demographic transition to occur in order to open the window of opportunity that could lead to the demographic dividend, what specific measures are being taken to ensure that this transition does occur? And what specific measures are in place to ensure that African countries fully leverage the opportunity to realize a demographic dividend?
- III. How can national Governments be assisted by RECs to curtail and effectively discourage illegal migration and re-absorb the survivors of illegal migration productively into society as well as to promote regular, safe migration with emphasis on intra-African migration?
- IV. What are the steps taken by RECs in support of productive job creation, decent work and promoting sustainable economic growth and development for youth across national borders?
- V. What role can the United Nations system play to further support and strengthen the role of RECs in their capacity as building blocks of regional integration, as well as to foster the robust implementation at regional and national levels of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063 and its First Ten-Year Implementation Plan?

VI. Format and featured speakers

The briefing will specifically highlight the role of the RECs as implementing agencies to achieve the desired regional and economic integration with a focus on fully realizing the potential of the continent's youth. It will highlight persistent challenges and the role of the international community in supporting the RECs in this regard.

The briefing session will be co-moderated by the Acting Special Adviser on Africa and the African Union Commission Chairperson's Technical Advisor on Regional Integration. Featured expected speakers will include the chief executives or senior representatives of the RECs (CEN-SAD, COMESA, EAC, ECCAS, ECOWAS, IGAD, SADC and UMA); the United Nations Deputy Secretary-General; the Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund; and other senior UN officials.

