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**AFRICAN POSITION ON YOUTH DEVELOPMENT**

**JUNE 2010**

## **PREAMBLE**

**The African Union envisions and its striving for an integrated African economic social, cultural and political development agenda: A prosperous Africa at peace with itself and its partners. The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) initiative integrated into the AUC process which makes a new beginning, aims to enable the continent to not only reduce poverty but also propel it to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The AU also aims '*inter alia*' to enhance its leadership role for the promotion of peace, security and good governance. These and other efforts are to be driven by Africa's own citizens, whom the AU hopes would become a healthy, skilled and dynamic force able to compete in the global marketplace.**

Clearly a new emergent and integrated Africa can be fully realized only if its demographic advantage "large population of youth" is mobilized and equipped to help drive Africa's integration, peace and development agenda. This vision emanates from the belief and conviction that a strong and accountable leadership and successful integration needs to be anchored on participation of the key segment of the population of which the Youth are an essential pillar.

Against the foregoing and in light of, the great potential, dynamism, resourcefulness, resiliency, and aspiration of African youth, the continent continues to face daunting challenges of maximizing benefits from this critical social capital by for example, adequately investing in its growth and enrichment.

The African Population is estimated to be more than 1 billion people of which 60% are youth. The greater proportion of this percentage does not have the opportunity to fully develop its potential and contribute effectively to the realization of the declared Vision and the Mission of Africa's leaders. Consequently the majority of African youth continue to face; unemployment, underemployment, lack of skills, relevant education, access to health-related information and services including those related

to diagnosis, treatment, and care of those living with HIV and above all prevention of new HIV infections among them. Along with other groups such as women and the disabled, the youth bear the brunt of internal and external crisis, be it those related to financial, food and energy crisis amongst others. In addition, many disadvantaged youth are unwittingly conscripted into armed struggle, used to settle political scores and are exposed to various negative media that erodes their positive heritage-leading them to delinquency, drug abuse, and other risky behavior. Furthermore and as is well known, most youth that migrate to foreign countries or even within continent, in search of greener pastures also face exploitation and mistreatments among other things.

Obviously, the Vision and Mission of the African Union and the NEPAD goals of Africa's renaissance would be realized not only through economic growth but also deliberate efforts to accelerate social development that gives high priority to youth empowerment and development.

At **national level**, there is full recognition of the dire challenges and great opportunities the youth presents and most African countries are making efforts to involve young people in political and decision making processes, as reflected in the establishment of national youth parliaments and youth appointment in executive positions and consultation with young people on policies and programmes that affect their lives.

At **regional and continental level**, Youth networks have been established including the Pan African Youth Union to serve as a channel for youth engagement and for conveying youth perspectives for integration into national, regional and continental policies strategies and programmes.

It must be noted that most African countries have youth related policies and programs. The same is the case with the Regional Economic Communities. At continental level among other things, the African leaders have collectively taken the following actions:

- **Adopted and approved** the African Youth Charter (2006) which as of date 37 countries have signed and 21 have also ratified. The Youth Charter is a comprehensive framework that addresses the rights and obligations of young people. It also constitutes the social contract of the State and the Youths that responds to the priority needs regarding their development and empowerment.
- **Also adopted** the plan of Action of the second decade of Education (2006-2015) to emphasize the need for higher, quality in African Education at all levels.
- **Declared** the years **2009-2018 as the Decade for Youth Development** and approved a Plan of action to implement the priority activities identified during the Decade. This is in harmony with International consensus on the International Year of Youth 2010 through 64<sup>th</sup> UN General Assembly Resolution 34/134

The International Youth Year 2010 declared by the United Nations General Assembly (UN GA) offer an excellent opportunity to undertake National, Regional and International activities in favor of promoting dialogue and mutual comprehension, particularly through effective participation of Governments and young Africans in the United Nations Conference on Youth.

Despite, the conducive policy environment created at the country, regional and continental levels, major challenges still exist. These challenges are a result of multiple factors including the development stage of most African countries and the gaps inbetween policies, strategies and their effective implementation. This is not backed by adequate budgetary allocation to support and scale up effective and evidence-informed youth programmes

### **1.1 Key challenges:**

1. Inadequate investment in quality and competitive education and skills for the youth and especially those with special needs;
2. Limited access to youth friendly health information and quality services including those related to planned parenthood;

3. prevention of new HIV infections and diagnosis, treatment and care for those living with HIV;
4. Non-availability of productive employment and self-employment for a good majority of young people; consequently the exclusion of the critical mass which is indispensable social capital required both for economic growth and social development.
5. Limited opportunities to learn, utilize, develop and apply modern technology;
6. Rare opportunities to civic participation, governance and education that engenders human rights; issues of equity, equality and the relevance of social inclusion;
7. Gender inequity and inequality particularly in tertiary education, representation in key institutions i.e parliament, and sectoral ministries;
8. Inadequate availability of comprehensive and age appropriate sexuality education for in and out of school youth coupled with high level of sexual exploitation and gender-based violence in many countries.
9. Inadequate absorptive capacity of academic institutions including those of higher and technical learning.
10. Poor access towards financial and other resource in ensuring youth development;
11. Poverty among the youth remain a great challenge.

*The following opportunities exist for advancement of youth development agenda in Africa.*

### **1.2 Opportunities:**

- Harnessing the benefits of the demographic dividend presented by the large population of youth by Increasing investment in their development could enable the continent to attain its growth and development objective as demonstrated in South East Asian countries;
- The African Youth Charter, the approval of the African Union Youth Volunteer Corps and the Plan of Action for the Decade; all of which provide a framework

for harmonization with country level policies and programmes and which pave the way for implementing agreed upon priorities;

- Africa's commitment towards good governance, economic and social integration facilitates a meaningful contribution from the highly mobile and globally aware young people. This Business acumen of young people- if tapped contributes to Africa's economic
- Current efforts towards the promotion of peace and security through advocacy for; dialogue and reconciliation among conflicting parties; avoidance of undemocratic change of government; and the establishment and contribution for the operation of the AU peace keeping force. Establish and strengthen a directorate of youth development within the AU to ensure effective coordination, monitoring and evaluation of youth development interventions.

### **1.3`Key Priority Areas for action**

The following interventions are intended to address the challenges facing young people in Africa:

1. Incrementally increase in investment for Youth development, empowerment including the preparation of adolescents for positively emerging into enabled youth, which requires priority investment in health, education, and employment creation;
2. Accelerating the implementation of the African Youth Charter, the Plan of Action for the Decade and provide the necessary mechanism and adequate resources for their implementation
3. Operationalizing the African Youth Volunteer Corps at continental and country level in the identification, training and deployment of African Youths for placements
4. Establishing an effective mechanism for coordinating and evaluating the implementation of the above (1, 2 and 3);
5. Establish the Africa Youth Trust Fund through effective resource mobilization, with a mechanism for management and oversight for implementation;

6. Strengthening the technical and institutional capacity of (a) academic and technical entities so that they could in turn enable youth to meet the current and future development demands including the utilization and application of modern technology (b) of selected African networks such as the PYU; (c) the African Union Commission so that it could effectively monitor and evaluate the implementation of the Youth Charter as well as the Plan of Action for the Decade and the AUYVC
7. Appropriately resource and scale up comprehensive age-appropriate sexuality education for in and out of school with the aim of preventing unwanted pregnancies, new HIV infections, substance usage, harmful cultural practices, gender-based violence, and preparing youth for a gender equitable and mutually respectful relationships and families.
8. Expand access to quality sexual and reproductive health services including those preventing mother to child transmission of HIV and ensuring safe motherhood and planned-parenthood for all young Africans.

#### **1.4 CALL TO ACTION**

*Clearly, the implementation of the African Youth Charter, and the Plan of Action for the Decade (2009-2018) and the African Youth Volunteer Corps cannot be implemented fully without international collaboration. Thus, this African position on youth presents an opportunity for coordinating and harmonizing national, regional and international efforts geared at the realization of Africa's objective pertaining to youth development and empowerment.*

*Therefore, Africa calls on its international Partners for full support in the implementation of priority areas mentioned in this position paper.*