

The African Youth Forum on the Millennium Development Goals
"Working out of Poverty: A Decent Work Approach to Development"

Consensus Statement

1.0 Preamble

- We, participants of the second African Youth Forum on the Millennium Development Goals held January 20 – 28, 2010 aboard the 68th Global Peace Voyage of the Peace Boat, in partnership with the United Nations Millennium Campaign (UNMC) on the theme "*Working out of Poverty: A Decent Work Approach to Development*";
- Reaffirming the Declaration of the first African Youth Forum on the MDGs held in 2009;
- Noting the central role of youth in economic, social and political development in Africa, and their potential to contribute as current and future leaders;
- Recognising that the attainment of the strategic objectives of Decent Work provide a critical route out of poverty in Africa;
- Inspired by the provisions of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the African Youth Charter;
- Adopt this Consensus Statement in furtherance of maximising the contribution of youth to the achievement of a productive and sustainable future for young people in Africa.

2.0 Key Challenges of Youth, Decent Work and Poverty in Africa

- The Forum acknowledged that African youth have demonstrated their commitment and ability to act as agents of change and leaders in their own right, helping to push forward the development agenda on the continent, including meeting the MDGs by 2015.
- However, youth continue to face a range of challenges that constrain them from fulfilling their potential, covering the entire remit of social, economic, political and cultural issues present in African countries.
- It was specifically noted that poverty is the outcome of various economic and social processes; some of these relate to disadvantages and inequalities in the labour market and decent work deficits, in the rural and urban areas as well as in the formal and informal economies. Decent work calls for a well orchestrated combination of measures in the areas of employment promotion, rights at work, social protection and social dialogue. However, policies and actions to promote decent work and reduce poverty cannot be effective unless these are part of a coherent set of economic and social policies.
- The Forum stressed that governments, regional bodies, international partners, civil society, private sector and young people themselves have to enhance their efforts to provide the conditions and opportunities for youth to take up their rightful position in society. This is dependent on allocation of specific resources for youth. Lack of follow-up and coordination in the development and implementation of youth programmes within governments and at the continental level severely hinders the full utilisation of the capacities of youth.

- The Forum underlined that all stakeholders need to work collectively to ensure that youth are provided with leadership opportunities and are able to avail of them to the best of their abilities. Only if such partnerships 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 development, peace and prosperity

3.0 Recommendations of the African Youth Forum on the MDGs

In pursuit of achieving decent work for all especially young people in Africa, and in line with the voices of youth across Africa, the participants of the African Youth Forum on the MDGs provide the following recommendations:

Globalization, Growth & Poverty Reduction

The dividends of globalisation continue to elude Africa, particularly the ordinary citizens. Many African governments are still struggling to survive in the global economy.

Actions:

- African governments should take advantage of the vast markets within the continent and concentrate more efforts at trading among each other. This will not only retain revenue within the continent but will also result in less trade deficits and more productivity.
- African governments should 'domesticate' their economies and encourage the consumption of locally made goods as a means of boosting local production capacity and growing local industries, thereby making African products more competitive in the globalised market.
- Developed countries must make efforts to ensure that globalisation benefits developing countries through fairer trade regimes, more efficient foreign direct investments, better aid, and better access to information and communication technologies. Developed countries should fulfil their commitments to offer 0.7 per cent of their GNI.

Achieving Global Competitiveness: Economic and Social Dimensions; Expansion and Diversification of Exports

Sub-Saharan Africa faces the world's greatest challenges in accessing local, regional, and global markets. Among others, a lack of infrastructure and reliance on the export of raw materials (such as minerals and agricultural products) present significant challenges to expanding trade within the continent and with the world, and attracting investments into the continent.

Actions:

- Developed countries must remove all trade barriers such as taxes on imports, or tariffs, which make it difficult for products from sub-Saharan Africa to compete in important markets like the United States, Europe, and Japan.
- Developed countries must stop paying subsidies to their farmers, giving them an unfair advantage to sell agricultural products into developing countries' markets.
- International trade and investment regimes must be revised to eliminate prevailing unfair practices such as the mass transfer of skilled labour into poorer countries, thereby denying local experts the opportunity to compete fairly in the local labour market.

- African countries must cut down the level of imports and concentrate on local production driven by consumption of local goods and services.
- African governments should invest more in local industries as a means of achieving value addition to export products and boosting consumption of locally made goods.
- African governments should develop and implement strategic investment policies which should, among others, ensure checks and balances in the national investment sector, empower locals with appropriate skills to engage in long term investment projects, and promote youth employment.

Overseas Migration

African countries continue to suffer from the negative effects of migration of skilled labour which results mainly from poor remuneration and working conditions. Yet, if properly managed, the benefits accruing from this phenomenon could have positive implications for economic development across Africa.

Actions:

- African governments should enforce employment policies that are favourable to the working population as a strategy for retaining skilled labour.
- African governments should develop special taxation and remittances management systems to optimise the inflow of revenue generated through the international migration of skilled labour.
- The international community should develop a global strategy for managing the movement of skilled labour so that it fairly benefits both sending and receiving governments.

Gender Equity in a Globalised World

Gender disparities continue to grow in African countries, with girls and young women in particular suffering numerous disadvantages. Yet, when empowered and involved, women have the inherent ability to stimulate economic growth and social cohesion.

Actions:

- African governments should scale-up skills development programmes for women and girls as a means of economically empowering them to effectively engage in their national economies.
- African governments must undertake and enforce systemic adjustments to gender policies in public and private workplaces, paying attention to those bottlenecks which hamper the effectiveness and functionality of young women and girls.
- African governments should operationalise affirmative action for women participation in political leadership and other sectors of the economy. This would consciously ensure equity.
- Developed countries should invest in entrepreneurship and life planning skills programmes for young women and girls in African countries as a means of stimulating productive and sustainable livelihoods.

Effective Strategies for Addressing Child Labour

In many African countries, children under 18 years continue to engage in laborious activities in the farming, mining and fishing industries.

Actions:

- African governments should provide incentives to affected industries to replace the need for children's engagement in laborious work. Such incentives should be sector-specific and may include subsidies on mechanisation and equipment.
- African governments should provide incentives for children's education, including the provision of free primary education, school feeding programmes, capitation grants, and free school uniforms.
- African governments must regulate and standardise the work of domestic assistants to eliminate all forms of domestic violence, child labour, and domestic slavery.
- Developed countries should provide the needed financial support for African countries to implement the above-mentioned incentives.
- The International Labour Organisation should scale-up its technical support for African countries to undertake child labour prevention programmes

Measuring and Monitoring Decent Work

In many African countries the required capacity for measuring and monitoring of decent work are at best rudimentary or in some cases, non-existent. The lack of data on youth for example has hampered the understanding of the state of youth employment in many African countries.

Actions:

- African countries should upgrade their national statistical and research departments to meet internationally accepted standards by investing in the human and infrastructural aspects of those departments.
- Data collection on and measuring of youth employment should be particularly prioritised as a booster for efficient youth-focused programming at the national level.

4.0 Adoption

This Consensus Statement is collectively prepared and adopted by the participants of the second African Youth Forum on the MDGs as undersigned:

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