

Youth and Inequality in Africa

By Gideon Rutaremwa, PhD¹ with William Muhwava¹

Background and context

Africa is experiencing significant changes and development transformations that will affect its future population and development prospects. These include the continuing high population growth, increasing urban growth, and migration. Africa's rapid population growth at a time when many other regions of the world are experiencing population decline presents an unprecedented opportunity as well as a challenge to accelerate the region's transformation to meet the needs of the large and growing youthful as well as the increasingly ageing populations. If properly harnessed through the provision of appropriate skills, training and quality educational and employment opportunities, Africa's youthful age structure will be the driving force in its industrialization drive and structural transformation. On the other hand, the consequences of inaction will be dire, and will exacerbate existing inequalities as well as undermine the stability and future growth of economies and societies (ECA and UNFPA, 2016).

Whilst youth has become a global issue, the situation of youth in Africa- characterized by embarrassingly high levels of unemployment and underemployment, exodus to other continents, involvement in violent political and social conflicts, etc., is critical and requires strategic regional and national action(ILO, 2016).

At the national level, several countries have initiated attempts to develop national youth policies. However, the policy deficiencies in youth development and the gap between the situation of youth in Africa and the realization of the potential contribution of youth towards the achievement of the objectives of development on the continent warrants deeper soul-searching, which would lead to better concerted efforts in developing our youth at all levels.

Africa is a continent of the young, with nearly 20% of the total population in the age bracket 15-24 (ECA and UNFPA, 2016). Any serious policy for social, political and economic development in Africa must recognize the importance of young people, especially in promoting social progress, reducing political tension and maximizing economic performance. The pace, depth and scope of any society's development depend on how well its youth resources are nurtured, deployed and

¹ Economic Commission for Africa
Social Development Policy Division
Population and Youth Section
E-mail: rutaremwa@un.org

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utilized. The youthful population structure can be attributed to the high fertility rate underlying the demographic momentum.

Northern Africa has the highest regional youth unemployment rate in the world, at close to 30 per cent in 2015, and there are no signs that it will fall significantly in the near future. Moreover, the unemployment rate masks the fact that the labour force participation rate in the region remains among the world's lowest, standing at 48.2 per cent in 2015 against a global average of 62.9 per cent. For the rest of the continent, youth unemployment rate stood at 11.1 per cent in 2015, up from 10.9 per cent in 2014. It is higher for young women (12.5 per cent in 2015) than young men (9.8 per cent in 2015). Youth employment growth remains below overall employment growth at 2.7 per cent in 2015 (ILO, 2016).

At the commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the World Programme of Action for youth, the UN Secretary General noted that the year 2015 represented an opportunity for transformation, and meant a year of global action and progress towards a more sustainable and equitable future. The UNSG further noted that young people around the world were disproportionately affected by economic crises and recession (United Nations, 2015b).

A youthful population has several potential advantages for national socio-economic development. The social advantages provided by youth include a greater degree of mobility, versatility, openness, adaptability and tolerance. In economic terms, youth provide dynamism in the supply of labour required for faster economic growth. Since youth consumption is generally related to basic needs, for example in housing, a youthful population also provides opportunities for mass production and hence economies of scale required for the development of local industrial and commercial enterprises.

The continent's youth demographic therefore provides a significant opportunity for growth, innovation and transformational change, but such gains can only be achieved by overcoming the significant challenges facing youth on the continent. With Africa's youth population increasing faster than any other region of the world, the continent's "youth bulge" has outpaced its economic growth and surpassed the capacities of institutions charged with providing basic services such as education and access to the job market. As a result, African youth represent 60 per cent of the continent's unemployed and are frequently hindered by social, economic and political exclusion. Such exclusion has had wide-ranging negative impacts on African youth, and has provided fertile ground for the increasing recruitment of youth into violent extremist groups (United Nations, 2016).

Furthermore, where the appropriate mechanisms exist, youthful population can provide a support base for social security systems. Above all, development of a country depends on the creativity of its population. Youth are known to be more creative and innovative than the adult population, and in several areas of development such as in community development, peace building, IT, and

HIV/AIDS education youth are already playing catalytic roles in Africa. However, on the whole youth are generally marginalized in national economic, social and political structures.

Some existing Frameworks

Globally, youth concerns have been receiving increasing attention. The World Bank, for example, devoted its 2007 edition of the World Development Report to youth under the theme, "Development and the Next Generation"(The World Bank, 2007). There has been an increased effort by the African Union Commission to consult with the youth on policies and programmes that affect their lives, most notably, the Debate between Youth and Heads of State during the 17th Ordinary AU Summit held from 23 June -1 July 2011 in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, wherein a Summit Declaration on "Creating Employment for Accelerating Youth Development and Empowerment" was adopted. Building on this, a Youth Policy Dialogue on Accelerating Youth Empowerment for Sustainable Development was held from 5-6th May 2011 in Arusha, Tanzania, culminating in a wide range of recommendations from the five regions of Africa.

The African Youth Conference on Post-2015 Development Agenda was held at the United Nations Office in Nairobi (UNON), from 18th-20th November 2012, resulted in an African Youth Declaration on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (OA Youth Kenya, 2012). Notable areas of concern included the need for improved health services and sexual reproductive health; youth empowerment and employment; equitable access to quality education and enhancing appropriate access to technology; climate change, environmental sustainability and food security; good governance, peace and security; and finally, access to social justice and the protection of minorities and vulnerable groups.

The African Union Summit held in Khartoum in January 2006 by the decision of the Executive Council (EX.CL/Dec.273) underscored the need to restore hope and confidence to African youth and defined conditions that will enable them to play a greater role in African development. In July 2006, The AU Summit held in Banjul by the decision of the Assembly of the Heads of State and Government ((AU/Dec.13 (VII)) adopted the new African Youth.

It is 20 years ago since its adoption, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (UN Women, 1995) perhaps remains the most comprehensive global normative framework for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. While the "*The girl child*" is one of its twelve critical areas of concern, and many of the other areas are of critical importance to young women, including those on education, health, the economy and participation in decision-making, young women and girls have a critical stake in the full, effective and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action as such progress is instrumental to their equality, empowerment and enjoyment of all their human rights, everywhere. Translating the WPAY and the Beijing Platform for Action into practical reality could ensure inclusive, participatory and gender-sensitive youth development towards a sustainable future.

As part of ECAs past work, the Economic Commission jointly with its strategic regional partner, the Africa Union and in collaboration with other stakeholders in African development organised the fifth forum under the theme "*Youth and Leadership in the 21st Century*", from November 16-18, 2006 (ECA, 2006). The decision to devote the Fifth African Development Forum (ADF-V) to youth emanates from the frank acknowledgement by various stakeholders that political stability, social solidification, and economic prosperity lie in harnessing the capacities of the youth. Therefore, any serious policy for social, political and economic development in Africa must recognize the importance of young people, especially in promoting social progress, reducing inequality, political tension and maximizing economic performance.

In 2015 over 200 of the world's political leaders, including African leaders, made a declaration that ushered in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development offers a unique opportunity to foster investment and collaboration on youth employment. In particular SDG 8 and a series of aspirational targets recognize today's employment challenge and open a consistent pathway for focalized action on employment and entrepreneurship (United nations, 2016).

Though only Goal 8 of the SDGs (United Nations, 2016b) specifically mentions young persons, the remaining seven goals directly or indirectly relate to them. Africa's young people are tremendously important, however, older people including policy makers, appear not to know much about them- despite their numbers and despite the historical contribution of young people and youth movements to Africa's political history. Even the term 'youth' gives rise to confusion and conflicting images-some see youth as a threat to the established order while others focus on young people as the hope for the future. However, no young person is simply 'future potential' and a receptacle for learning. They are active and contemporary social, political and economic actors in themselves, and need to be sufficiently involved in Africa's development processes.

Youths are not typically conceived of as productive and constructive social actors, but rather as potential sources of political disruption, delinquency and criminality. Yet, pre-independence social and political movements were often led by young people who defined themselves as 'youth' to provide dynamic support to the leadership of the freedom and independence movements or in opposition to their elders who were supposedly content to be cronies of the colonial regimes. Some political parties were explicitly organized around youth.

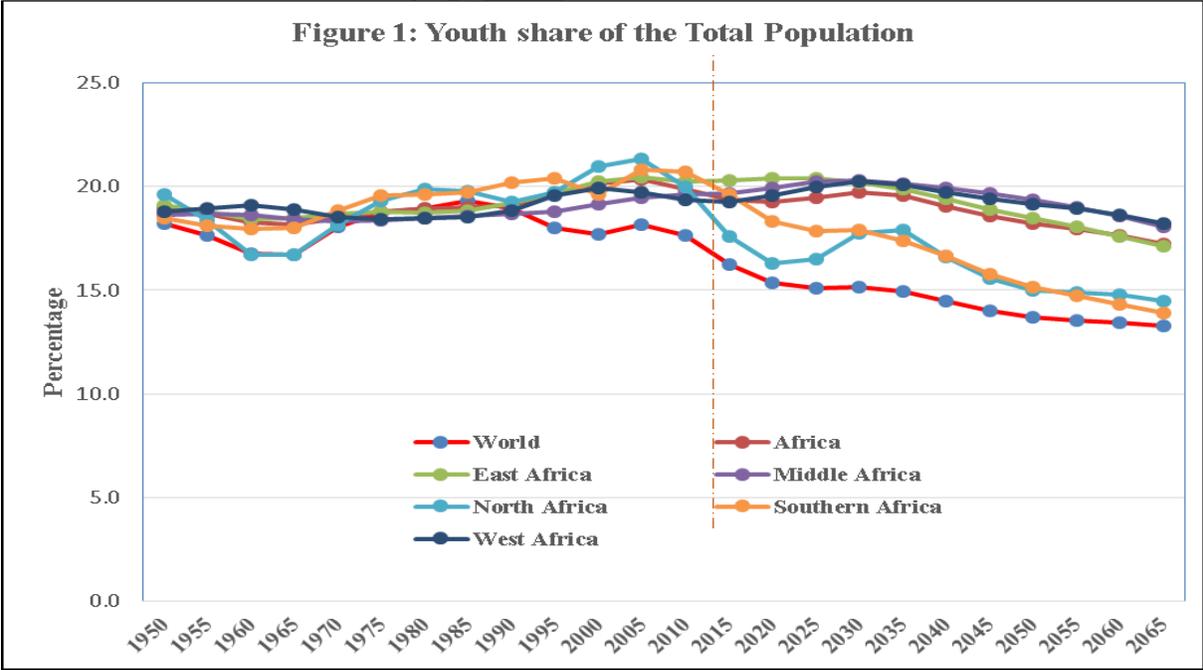
There is an acknowledgement by various African development stakeholders that political stability, social solidification, and economic prosperity lie in harnessing the capacities of the youth. The achievement of the 2030 Agenda over the next fifteen years will require strong partnerships between young people and all stakeholders to ensure that young peoples' challenges and

inequalities are addressed, that their contributions are appreciated, and that they are included at all levels of decision-making; it will require understanding the challenges, opportunities and priorities of different regional contexts; and it will require new commitments to action and investment in the Agenda by all stakeholders (United Nations, 2016a).

Youths share of the total population

The number of adolescents and youth aged between 15 and 24-years old in Africa will increase from 226 million in 2015 to 321 million in 2030. Increases in the number of young people will be particularly visible in several low- or lower-middle-income African countries, including Burundi, Mali, the Niger, Nigeria, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia, where the number of young people aged between 15 and 24 is projected to increase by more than 60 per cent between 2015 and 2030 (United Nations, 2015a).

According to United Nations (2015c), there were 1.2 billion youth aged 15-24 years globally in 2015 of which 226 million were from African continent. By 2030, the target date for the Sustainable Development Goals, the number of youth is projected to have grown by an additional 7 per cent, to nearly 1.3 billion and it is projected that the number of youth in Africa will have risen by 42 per cent. There is therefore urgent need to respond to the needs of this growing youth population, especially on the African continent. While the rest of the world is getting older, African population remains young with a sustained high youth population share observed in Figure 1. All the regions of the continent exhibit youth share of the total population higher than the global average.



Source: ECA using UN DESA data (2015)

The pattern shown in Figure 1 suggests that the share of the youth population is lower in North Africa compared to the rest of the regions of the continent. Projections indicate that Southern Africa region will mirror the scenario in Northern Africa by 2030, while the rest of the regions will have sustained higher youth proportions, especially in West and Middle Africa. The large youth proportions can be explained by the continued high fertility rate on the continent, especially among the youth population. Because of Africa's delayed demographic transition from a high to low birth and death rate regime (except for most Southern African countries), its youth population (and labor force) share will remain large for an extended period.

Demographic changes in Africa are complex and have profound implications for transformation and development at all levels – local, national, regional and global. Population dynamics, especially fertility and mortality are intertwined in a complex web of relations with health, education, the economy, environment, etc. One set of such demographic changes is related to the changing age structure, because of reduced child mortality and lower fertility, two phenomena that are directly related to women's empowerment. This demographic change leads to a rise in the working-age population, particularly the young working-age population between 15-24 years old.

African Union Member States have expressed the need to harness the demographic dividend as a means to boost economic and social development (ECA, AUC, & UNFPA, 2014). The potential has been recognized in the ICPD beyond 2014 Declarations, placing the demographic dividend at the center of development. In addition, the African Union adopted the theme of "*Harnessing the demographic dividend through investments in the youth*" for 2017.

Agenda 2063 is set to be Africa's blueprint for an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena. The vision, amongst others, is premised on the ability of Africa to harness one of its biggest assets - its youthful population, for the next 50 years. The returns are expected to be accelerated economic growth, induced by a change in the population structure and by the contribution of healthy, educated and skilled youth to economic development because of their higher employment and increased incomes.

With an estimated population of 2.8 billion by 2063, of which over 60 per cent will be under the age of 25, Africa's potential demographic dividend is especially important in the context of the post 2015 development agenda because today's African children aged 10 will be adults of 25 in 2030 (the target year for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)). Africa is set to have the largest cohort of young people and their success have the potential to define development trajectories for the continent in the immediate future.

Countries with large youth populations have enormous potential for economic growth and structural transformation, given the right investments in human and social capital for youth development. With almost 9 out of 10 of the world's young people live in less developed countries, this potential can lift millions out of poverty and improve livelihoods. For countries to realize the demographic dividend, a demographic transition must first occur. This transition begins as fertility and mortality rates start to fall leading to a larger working age population than the population that is dependent and younger. The dividend comes when resources are freed for economic development, and for greater per capita spending on higher quality health and education services. A virtuous cycle begins where capabilities and opportunities continuously expand.

Africa's youth population is currently large, a result of the region's high fertility and improved child survival. For instance, 15-24-year-olds represent over 19 per cent of the region's total population. For the continent, the number of children under 18 will increase from 547 million next year (47%) to nearly 1 billion in the next 35 years. Depending on how it is managed, this youth bulge is either a development opportunity or a security risk (ECA and UNFPA, 2016). To be an asset, young Africans must be productively employed. Otherwise, this bulge might instead become a source of socio-political instability. International migration can serve as a demographic valve for the youth bulge. Though early analysts have worried about the losses from 'brain drain', new studies raise the converse possibility of 'brain gain' in which international migrants, aided by the growing ease of global communication, contribute new ideas and additional resources to their home countries (De Haas, 2012).

Education and Skills Development

The key for the future of any country and any institution lies in the talent, skills and capabilities of its people. With talent shortages projected to become more severe in much of the developed and developing world, it will be imperative to turn our attention to how these shortages can be met in the short term and prevented in the long term. For the individual, as well as for societies and economies, investing in human capital is critical; even more so in the context of shifting population dynamics and limited resources. In this century, industrial requirements will be increasingly based on the link between technology and knowledge and their application in both products and processes. Therefore, the key seems to lie in the link between innovation as a driver not only of productive processes but also of the mode and operation of societies. Knowledge accumulation and application have become major factors in economic development and are increasingly at the core of a country's competitive advantage in the global economy.

The ability of a society to produce, select, adapt, commercialize, and use knowledge is critical for sustained economic growth and improved living standards. Knowledge has become the most crucial factor in economic development. Today, economic growth is as much a process of

knowledge accumulation as of capital accumulation. In OECD countries, investment in the intangibles that make up the knowledge base - research and development (R&D), education, and computer software - is equaling or even exceeding investment in physical equipment. The previous lead from education to employment has become intertwined with skills required by labour markets that rapidly change. This paradigm shift from education to skills provided is a critical component of improved job creation and human welfare. In Africa, the thrust towards industrialization and structural transformation are more critical in this 21st century than ever before. The unskilled, skilled workforce requirements of an industrialization process linked to structural transformation is dependent on the explicit link among knowledge, technology and the education system.

Since 1990 Africa has made noteworthy progress in increasing enrolment in primary school cycles. By 2014 over 68 percent of the twenty-five countries for which data were available achieved a net enrolment rate of at least 75 percent in primary education. Of these countries, about 44 percent (Tunisia, Algeria, Rwanda, Zambia, Mauritius, Cape Verde, Benin, Congo, Cameroon and South Africa), recorded a net enrolment rate over 90 percent. Between 2000 and 2012, four of the twenty-five African assessed (Niger, Burkina Faso, Guinea and Mozambique) experienced an impressive increase in net enrolment of over 30 percent. It is also important to note that the minority of countries that have net enrolment rates less than 75 percent denote remarkable progress in terms of effort and performance from their initial position.

The preponderance on primary schools in Africa in conformity with previous development agendas has had the effect of providing numeracy and literacy skills which have restricted 'employability'. On the other hand, secondary education enrolment in Africa has increased from 29 percent in 1999 to 49 percent in 2014. This is an important channel through which young people acquire skills that improve opportunities for good jobs and how lower secondary school extends and consolidates the basic skills learned in primary school. High quality secondary education that caters for the widest possible range of abilities, interests and backgrounds is vital not just to set young people on the path to the world of work, but also to give countries the educated workforce they need to compete in today's technologically driven world. In addition, in Africa Technical and Vocational training (TVET) remains on the margins of educational systems and skill acquisition for industrial processes. The skills emanating from educational systems are an important driver of inadequate employment participation particularly for youth.

Indeed, informal employment seems to be the characteristic for young people's job placement. The majority of people in Africa have informal jobs not by choice but because of structural barriers and limited opportunities in the formal labour markets. Thus, the informal economy is the major source of employment on the continent accounting for nearly 70 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa and 62 percent in North Africa. The informal economy also accounts for the largest share of the working poor with mostly no social security (unemployment benefits) and limited access to public services.

Building skills for youth, labour productivity and ensuring equitable access to productive resources will be central building blocks to creating decent jobs and enhancing the social development agenda in Africa in line with Agenda 2030 and Africa Vision 2063. Therefore, more attention should be placed at improving the quality of education and skills upgrade to foster job creation and reduce socio-economic inequalities. Given the structural impediments in Africa's economy, there is a need to institute labour markets reforms to improve labour productivity and competitiveness in both the formal and informal economy. African youth are increasingly acquiring higher education and skills acquisition for employment. Secondary education enrolment expanded from 25% in 1999 to 53% in 2013. Enrolment in tertiary education in Africa, has grown at almost twice the global average and faster than any other region in the world. An estimated 59% of 20-24-year olds will have had secondary education in 2030. All the same, unemployment rate among youth with secondary education and university graduates remains high in many countries.

Education curricula in different sectors such as agriculture, health, mining, and engineering, are not attuned to the demands of the labour market. Some sectors like agriculture are unable to attract sufficient young people willing to pursue higher education and research. In addition, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), a critical aspect for industrialization, is at the margins of Africa's educational policy. TVET students represent only 3% of the school age population in Africa as against 19% in South Korea, 18% in China, 16% in Indonesia, 13% in Singapore and 18% in Thailand. Given these inter-related challenges, the problem of youth unemployment needs to be addressed within the framework of an interdisciplinary, multi-sectoral, and multi-stakeholder approach.

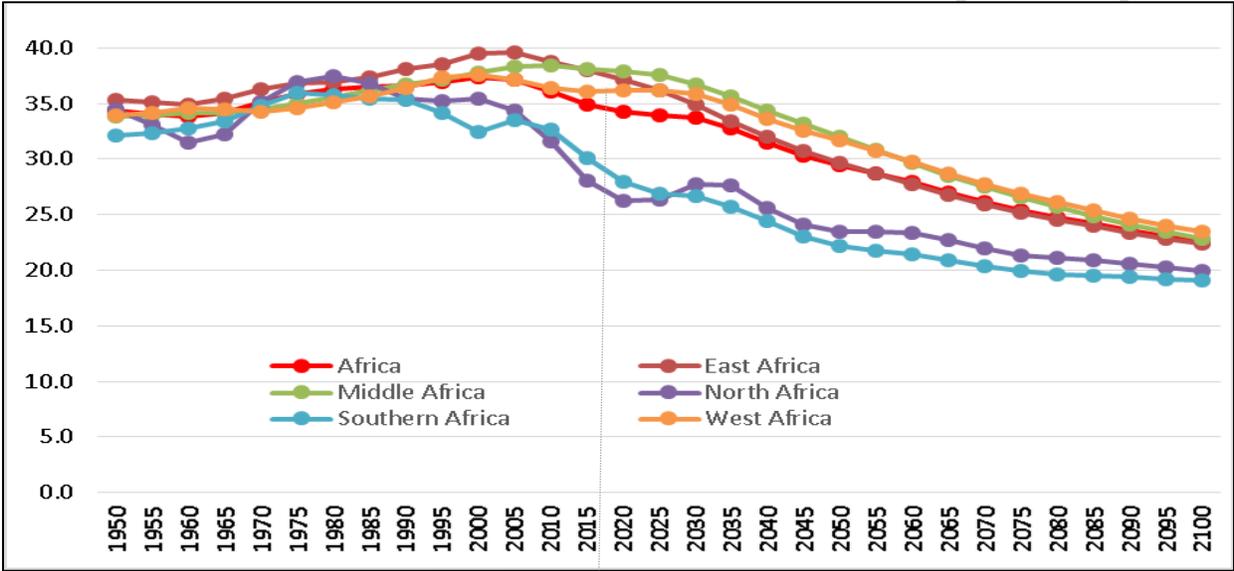
Employment

Although the young constitute two fifths of Africa's working age population, they make up three fifths of the continent's total unemployed (AfDB, 2012) . Youth unemployment remains a major concern on the African continent. Despite Africa's remarkable GDP growth over the last 15 years, youth unemployment is estimated at about 14 percent (World Bank 2011, 2016). Indeed, these figures mask pervasive under-employment, low wages and job insecurity (Page, 2012). Even more problematic is that unemployment is at times higher among the most educated. Data from the most recent 101 DHS surveys in the region show that unemployment average 33% for men with secondary degrees (with figures going as high as 55% in some cases), compared to an average unemployment rate of 9% among those with no schooling, and 18% among those with primary schooling only (DHS 2016).

The youth population as a ratio of the working age population is useful as a measure of labour market dynamics. In this report, we use the youth-to-working-age-population (ages 15-64) ratio as a proxy for the youth labor force share. Figure 2 shows that with exception of Northern and

Southern Africa, the youth-to-working age population ratio will on average continue to be substantial. However, considerable regional variation exists (Figure 2), notably in Eastern, Middle and West Africa, the youth proportion of working age population will remain above 30% by 2050. The latter emphasizes the need for a better understanding of the complex relationship between country and region-specific labor market policies as well as the fundamental demographic dynamics.

Figure 2: Ratio of youth (15-24 years) to working age population (15-64 years for the period 1950 projected though to 2100)



Source: ECA using UNDESA data (2015)

The incidence of unemployment among youth in the region is expected to remain elevated at 29.3% in 2016, representing the second highest rate across all regions. The slight improvement in the regional figures during 2016 stems from improvements in Egypt and Tunisia, two countries that experienced recent declines but where youth unemployment rates remain high. A further decline in the regional youth unemployment rate is expected in 2017, when it should reach 29.2%. The youth unemployment rate for the rest of Africa is expected to continue its downward trajectory, which began in 2012, reaching 10.9% in 2016 and decreasing slightly to 10.8 in the following year. However, the unemployment outlook for youth in major countries of the region remains quite mixed. In South Africa, more than half of all active youth are expected to remain unemployed in 2016, representing the highest youth unemployment rate in the region (ILO, 2016).

According to ILO (2016), the share of working youth living in poverty has steadily declined over the past couple of decades, though at a slightly slower pace than in the adult working population.

For instance, in Northern Africa, almost one in every four-working youth in the region is estimated to be living in extreme or moderate poverty in 2016. This represents a considerable improvement over the 1991 figure when almost half of all employed youth were living in poverty. However, since 2012 there have been virtually no signs of a reduction in this rate, although the gap between youth and adult working poverty rates remains relatively slight. The rest of continent continues to report the highest youth working poverty rates globally, at almost 70% in 2016. Although this rate has declined by some 10 percentage points since 1991, it is important to bear in mind that the number of poor working youth has increased by as much as 80% since that date. This is coupled with the fact that young workers in the region have one of the highest probabilities of living in poverty in comparison to adults.

Table 1: Youth Unemployment (15-24 years, 2015-2017 classified by sex - Percentages

Region	2015		2016		2017 (Projected)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
World	12.6	13.4	12.7	13.7	12.7	13.8
Developed Countries	15.6	14.2	15.0	13.9	14.8	13.8
Developing countries	8.4	10.0	13.1	14.5	13.1	14.7
Northern Africa	24.4	44.1	24.1	44.4	24.0	44.6
Sub-Saharan Africa	9.7	12.2	9.7	12.3	9.6	12.1

Source: ILO (2016)

As noted earlier, lack of employment opportunities for the youth drives them to migrate to countries where they perceive such opportunity exists. Some of the features to illustrate latter issue include the following:

- African youth are particularly worse off in access to employment opportunities. Africa youth constituted about 35% of Africa's working age population in 2015, but three fifths of the total unemployed.
- In most countries youth unemployment rate is more than twice that for adults, though in Nigeria it is more than five times. In Botswana, Congo, and South Africa, more than one in three young people are unemployed, and the average unemployment rate for the youth is about 30 percent in North Africa, compared to the world average of 14 percent.
- Relatively high levels of unpaid or family-based activities as 43% to 63% of all unpaid family-based jobs held by youth (Yeboah & Jayne, 2016).
- Relatively high-levels of economic inactivity and unemployment. About 30% of people aged 15-24 years are economically inactive (Yeboah & Jayne, 2016).
- Within the past 10 years, Africa has created over 37 million wage-paying jobs. However, the pace of job creation has not kept pace with the approximately 110 million people who joined the workforce in this period (McKinsey Global Institute, 2014).

Informal employment seems to be the characteristic for young people’s job placement. Most people in Africa have informal jobs not by choice but because of structural barriers and limited opportunities in the formal labour markets. Thus, the informal economy is the major source of employment on the continent accounting for nearly 70 percent in Africa excluding North Africa and 62 percent in North Africa (Bhorat & Ewinyu, 2016). The informal economy also accounts for the largest share of the working poor with mostly no social security (unemployment benefits) and limited access to public services. With such a high rate of informality, migration remains the predominant option.

Table 2: Youth Employment Status in Selected African Countries

Country	Employment Status			
	Wage employment	Self-employment	Contributing to family work	Other
Botswana	62.8	7.2	29.9	0.1
Congo	20.1	55.3	17.2	7.5
Congo DR	10.2	49.1	36.3	4.4
Egypt	64.9	4.1	31.0	
Ethiopia	17.9	24.1	58.0	
Ghana	13.3	26.2	50.4	10.2
Malawi	14.9	18.9	56.0	10.3
Mali	5.4	41.6	53.0	
Nigeria	72.6	17.0	8.5	1.9
Rwanda	27.7	16.8	55.5	
Senegal	12.2	41.7	46.3	
South Africa	84.8	7.1	5.9	2.1
Tanzania	8.0	9.0	20.2	62.8
Uganda	14.0	20.9	63.6	1.6

Source: AfDB (2012)

Employment prospects of younger women varied considerably across countries of Africa. Out of 15 countries analyzed by the AfDB (Table 2), the female youth employment rate was higher in eight (AfDB, 2012). In North African countries, female labour force participation rates were much lower than the global or the rest of African averages. The latter is also reflected in the high female unemployment rates for northern Africa (ILO, 2016). Moreover, women who work in the private sector were concentrated in low-pay jobs, causing a large gender gap in earnings.

Other Key aspects of inequality among youth in Africa

Gender Equality for Girls and Young Women

Approximately half of the world's youth are adolescent girls and young women. These girls and young women possess a huge untapped potential. When educated, healthy, safe from discrimination and gender-based violence, and equipped with the right skills and opportunities, they hold the key to unlocking many of the world's most pressing problems: reducing poverty, advancing gender equality, catalyzing countries' social and economic development, halting the spread of HIV, reducing maternal mortality, and ending violence against women, among many others. Achievement of inclusive and equitable social development and expansion of development opportunities and benefits to all people, particularly for the continent there is need to expand the health coverage to all people, and to provide education to all of them as well, through formal and informal systems. Also, empowerment of women in all areas of development agenda so that they can be part of decision-making processes that affect their lives, including in governance.

Women lag men in many other crucial areas, including access to decent work and political decision-making. Female labour force participation rates vary widely, reflecting different economic, social and cultural factors and social norms. Globally, women's access to paid employment in the non-agricultural sector has slowly increased over the past two decades. Women's share of paid employment in the non-agricultural sector increased globally, from 35 per cent in 1990 to 40 per cent in 2012, with some progress recorded in almost all regions. But women remain far more likely to have part-time jobs, to earn less than men for doing the same job and to work in certain low-paying occupations with limited labour protection, such as domestic work. In addition, women remain underrepresented compared to men in national parliaments and other political decision-making bodies.

The empowerment of girls and young women and the achievement of gender equality are important ends in themselves, and both contribute to sustainable development as well (United Nations, 2015a). The Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Addis Ababa Declaration on Population and Development (African Union, ECA, & UNFPA, 2013) both lay down a broad array of actions to eliminate inequalities between men and women, including: establishing mechanisms for women's equal participation and equitable representation at all levels of the political process; promoting women's education and skills development, thereby improving women's ability to earn an income and become self-reliant; ending all forms of discrimination against women; ensuring women's equal access to the labour market and social security; eliminating violence against women; and assisting women in establishing and realizing their rights, including those related to their sexual and reproductive health

Health Issues

Youth in Africa struggle with poor health conditions, including diseases like HIV and AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis, inadequate nutrition, disabilities, mental illness, violence and substance abuse. Some of these health issues lead to mortality. These health issues are complicated by the lack of adequate understanding of their causes and worsened by inequalities in age and gender. According to Gyimah and Kimenyi notes that an effective way to deal with health issues is to take a holistic approach that considers not only youth's physical and mental well-being but also their social, economic and cultural environment.

Policies should seek to change young people's behavior to deal with some health problems especially HIV and AIDS. Prevention campaigns should be done to increase awareness among the youth. For example, campaigns like the ABC (Abstain, Be careful, use a Condom). Campaigns like these require young people to be active participants in solving problems affecting them. Policies should also seek to increase youth's capacity to make informed decisions about their health through education and access to youth friendly information and services or after school programs organized in communities by non-governmental organizations. Policies should seek to implement and increase youth friendly health services that emphasize coordination among the various ministries responsible for youth that include health and education related activities such as nutrition and physical activities. These would be coordinated by the youth themselves to increase their development and empowerment.

African youth are also vulnerable to environmental health concerns like physical, chemical and biological factors external to a person and all related factors that affect the person's health (WHO 2008). Youth's vulnerability to environmental health comes from several sources including unsafe drinking water and sanitation, air pollution and electronic pollution. These conditions affect the general population but youth tend to be more active and spend more time outdoors engaging in physical activities, they are more vulnerable to environmental health issues. Youth policies should improve youth health outcomes by provision of safe water and sanitation, as well as controlling water and air pollution. In addition, the youth policies should also consider the growing number of youth population in their planning for the provision of basic amenities for the youth.

Governance

In most African countries, the age hierarchy embodied in the culture has meant that there are limited opportunities for youth to express themselves and to meaningfully participate in national social and political discourse. However, some governments are making efforts to provide for the full participation of youth in the political process through different channels of representation including the creation of national youth councils, youth parliaments and regional youth advocacy groups. Participation by youth in the political process is important to addressing the extreme

poverty rate that disproportionately affects them. However, efforts to encourage effective participation of youth have generally not been successful, partly because of a lack of meaningful access and integration of youth into the political apparatus of the state, along with youths and governments limited capacities, due to inadequate skills and resources. Solutions to effectively involve youth in the political process could be, youth should be provided with the opportunity to participate in politics at all levels which could even include quotas, as well as encouraged to be politically involved.

Youth can be also provided with the information and training needed to understand key aspects of the government, including the budget process at the regional and local levels. This is important because some national policies are based on consensus developed at the regional and local levels, including youth policies. One way to increase involvement by youth would be to provide relevant internships for them. Youth can also be provided with enhanced social consciousness and political participation with the help of non-governmental organization which have generally been very active and seem to be successful. Collaboration between the governmental and the NGOs in this area could be beneficial. With many African countries set to see increases in their youth population, national development planning and systems strengthening must be adapted and sharpened to prepare for the demographic shift. This will require demographic data and analysis at national and sub national levels. The availability of sufficient data is very important to the formulation of effective youth policies.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Empowering African youth requires the investments on many fronts and indeed, many actors are involved with member States at the driving seat. Forging strategic partnership would be cost effective strategy to create synergies and greater coherence among actors to implement fully and effectively the continent's youth empowerment agenda and priorities as spelled out in the African Youth Policy Charter adopted by Heads of States and Government in 2006.

Worthy of note is that, while partnership among actors for youth empowerment is important, partnering with youth themselves should be a dimension of any measures to empowerment them. Indeed, empowering the youth is a holistic process with the youth, young women and men as key actors. This is to say that, from the outset, any actions which are defined, implement, monitored and evaluation without the youth are not empowering. Instead, they will lead to their disempowerment and further their exclusion.

Partnerships in ensuring coherence both within and between sectors are of vital importance where Youth Employment is concerned. It is therefore essential that within the existing "Continental

Youth Frameworks” mechanisms are designed to facilitate collaboration that could lead to full operationalization of youth employment action plans co-owned by the youth, governments and private sector.

Such action plans should be incorporated into the continent’s development plans; including all programs and projects of the private sector coherently and systematically articulated at the Regional, sub-regional and national levels in their approaches; viewed in the context of integrated policies and good understanding among the bodies, government structures and other partners concerned especially the Private Sector.

The plan should also be integrated into countries’ national planning; national, bilateral and multilateral partners should align their support to such priorities and reflect the later in their development programmes and projects, through the establishment of lines of action exclusively for the youth and women and also through effective integration, promotion and participation of youth and women in all programmes and projects in the public and private sectors.

For example at ECA through the Social Development Policy Division, we are involved in a number of initiatives to empower youth and remove inequalities, including:

- Collaboration with AUC and UNFPA to come up with a “*Road Map on Harnessing the Demographic Dividend through Investment in Youth*”. The objective of the roadmap is to guide and facilitate the implementation of the theme of the year 2017 by member states, Regional commissions (RECS) and partners through key deliverables, milestones and concrete actions as stated by the Assembly Decision (Assembly/AUC/Dec.601 XXVI). The Key pillars identified were 4, namely: Education and entrepreneurship; Education and skills development; Health and wellbeing; Rights, Governance and Youth empowerment.
- AUC/ECA/ILO – have come up with a 5-year priority programme on employment poverty eradication and inclusive development.
- AUC/ECA/ILO and AfDB – have put in place a thematic working group on employment that aims at tackling employment in general but more specifically youth employment. The working group sits in the Joint Support Secretariat Office – JSSO at ECA and AfDB has established a seed fund to support youth entrepreneurship policies and programmes under this initiative.

Overall, there is need to promote wider collaboration and to seek new and deeper knowledge of the potential of African young people and the broad conditions that have an influence on this potential. Secondly, as a continent we must explore ways and means to develop and implement youth employment operational action plans by governments, in partnership with the youth, and all actors, including the private sector of African member states.

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