

Perspectives on Youth and Governance in Africa  
sadcyouth@yahoo.com

## **Perspectives on Youth and Governance**

*By Muzwakhe Alfred Sigudhla*  
President SADC Youth Movement,  
Coordinator NEPAD Youth Summit 2005

**“On the Occasion of ADFIV on Youth and Governance Symposium”  
10-15 October 2004, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**



**SADC Youth Movement**

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**"Expanding the world of possibility for young people"**

*“When our children are assured of survival and health, provided with a good education, protected from war and violence, and when youth participate in the democracy and development of their countries, then Africa will be set to claim the 21<sup>st</sup> century” – K Y Amoako*

SADC Youth Movement Regional Secretariat  
21 Lynwood Road, Building NO4-ROOM 2-25  
South Campus  
University of Pretoria  
Pretoria 002  
South Africa  
Tel: +2712 420 4241  
Fax: +2712 420 4491  
Mobile: +2772 4440507  
e-mail: sadcyouth@yahoo.com / sigudla2000@yahoo.com

## Overview and Introduction

The world attention over the last few years has focused extensively on the growing global threat of terrorism. There has been little attention and resources directed toward training youth in their respective organizations as the next generation of leaders so as to prevent the social issues that are providing fertile ground for instability. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the major challenges and opportunities that youth are presented with today and review key global youth issues with bias toward Good Governance model. The paper will also review the general status quo in respect to various instruments such as World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and beyond as adopted in the UN General Assembly in 1995; Youth Employment Networks headed by International Labour Organizations; Millennium Development Goals of 2000; and Economic Cultural Social Council (ECOSOC) of AU (Article 22 of the Constitutive Act); United Nations Commission for Social Development in 2003; United Nations Expert Group Meeting on Global Priorities for Youth held in Helsinki from 6 to 10 October 2002.

The new dawn of Africa in evolution towards development is duly centred on investing more to the future. Young people serve as economic cornerstone of Africa's development because they constitute the majority of Africa's population today. The current marginalisation of youth participation in the decision-making processes marks the undemocratic exclusion of the majority of Africa's population and poses a serious threat to social stability and good governance.

According to the African Common Position, Para 6, *"We recognize that the future of Africa lies with the well being of its children and youth. The prospect for the socio-economic transformation of the continent rests with investing in the young people of the continent. Today's investment in children is tomorrow's peace, stability, security, democracy and sustainable development."*

## Background of Global Youth Status

Who are the Youth of today? Young people between the ages of 15 and 24 total almost 1.1 billion and constitute 18 per cent of the global population. Youth and children together, including all those aged 24 years and below, account for nearly 40 per cent of the world's population. Young people face many challenges today. Although in some parts of the world they are better educated than ever before, 133 million youth remain illiterate. Young people must also deal with increasing insecurity in the labour market although they now comprise 41 per cent of the world's unemployed.

Some 238 million youth live on less than \$1 per day. An average of 7,000 young people become infected with HIV daily. Girls and young women continue to face discrimination and violence in many parts of the world and lack access to reproductive health services. Young people are also involved in armed conflict, with estimates indicating a total of more than 300,000 child soldiers around the world.,

The United Nations has long recognized that the world's youth are valuable resources for the advancement of societies; indeed, they are often the leaders of social, political and technological developments, as well as dynamic agents of social change. However, if they are to take an active role in combating societal problems, then they must be given the right tools with which to work.

The current National Youth Policies in Africa have not responded effectively in mainstreaming youth participation in economic activities that should reduce youth unemployment. The dismal statistics of Youth unemployment, social marginalisation, HIV/AIDS, Civil Wars and the lack of popular participation in their own governance, affect mostly countries in the Southern Hemisphere, specifically Africa. It is also a fact that some countries in Africa still lack adequate youth policies. Africa has not yet developed a model for youth participation at the level of the African Union and all its related institutions. This situation has led to uncoordinated youth policies. However it is noted with excitement that the African Youth Movements are now calling for participatory governance to be reflected in instruments such as an African Youth Charter and other mechanisms adopted by United Nations which would be legal mechanisms for assessing and ensuring youth participation and development.

Young people have been reduced to just being subjects of socio-economic processes and have not been recognised as social stakeholders with specific interests. The prevalent status quo in Africa requires that political commitments be translated into concrete programmes that will develop and address the plight of young people. Since young people constitute a huge number of people deeply affected by underdevelopment, poverty and economic marginalisation, the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) and Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (WSSD) become relevant to challenges that face young people today.

When one addresses governance, one must also speak of priority. Among the urgent actions required by governing bodies, two are of special priority: The UN Secretary-General in his statement to the UN General Assembly's September 2002 meeting on NEPAD, *"combating HIV/AIDS and promoting girls' education are particularly central to achieving the Millennium Development Goals and realizing the promise NEPAD holds for all of Africa ... besides being key MDGs in their own right, promotion of girls' education and control of HIV/AIDS would be the most powerful enablers for the achievement of all the other MDGs in Africa"*.

## **Defining Youth**

Youth, as a concept, varies from culture to culture and from one society to another. Alice Schlegel and Herbert Barry, in an anthropological publication based on some 200 different field studies, describe transition rites in pre-industrial societies.

The two authors found that in more than half of the societies studied, the progression from childhood to youth, especially for boys, involved some systematic rite of passage. These rites have symbolic significance in that, simply by participating in them, an individual achieves a new status and position. It is also a matter of genuine community action; the new status gains validity only through community recognition.

Life-course rituals are also present in complex societies, although the arrangements are not as clearly defined as in pre- and non-industrial societies. Age group boundaries have become blurred in Western culture. This is often believed to be related to the homogenizing-but simultaneously individualizing-effects of universal education and popular-culture consumerism.

The boundaries defining the transition from childhood to youth and from youth to adulthood are shifting, and the crossover into each new stage is now manifested in different ways than before. The ritualized events marking the progression from youth to adulthood are changing and losing their earlier significance, as an individual's

status and position do not change with the partial rituals of the consumer culture in a way that classical ritual theory would define as signalling a clear transition.

This confusing and sometimes contradictory landscape notwithstanding, the idea of transition, or the theory of life-course transitions, is a viable mechanism through which the nature of contemporary youth and the process of becoming an adult can be understood and described. The ritual transition theory thus has a contemporary utility in both a United Nations and a broader context. From an economic and social perspective, youth is a special phase of life between childhood and adulthood.

Richard Curtin gives the concept a bit more depth, asserting that youth is a complex interplay of personal, institutional and macroeconomic changes that most young people (other than those in wholly traditional societies) have to negotiate. Globalization is reshaping life-phase transitions and relations between generations, and the changes that young people must negotiate do not occur as predictably as in the past. Defining youth globally according to some exact age range is therefore an awkward task.

The age range 15-24 is often used by the United Nations and others for statistical purposes, but in many cases this distinction is too narrow. In some developed countries, for example, the male transition to adulthood, in terms of achieving the economic and social stability that comes with steady employment, may extend into the late twenties. For some men in developing countries who have not completed secondary school, the transition to stable work could take up to around age 35. Therefore in our African context a youth ranges between 15-35 years. The idea of transition from Youth Childhood is adequately explained in Jordan Human Report 2000.

### **Promoting Democracy and Good Governance**

The notion of good governance and democracy is center-stage for development. Good Governance has broad principles such as follows:

- Transparency
- Accountability
- Inclusively
- Fiscal responsibility
- Good Leadership
- Respect for Human Rights and Rule of Law
- Democracy and Fair competition for public office
- On going stakeholder participation

In light of the criteria listed above, Good governance is still illusive and lack popular participation in policy formulation. The participation, particularly of young people, thus remains an issue in Africa because few countries have complied with the above basic requirements for Good Governance. The evidence is based on various reports from Transparency International. The broad principle of Multipartyism has not triumphed to a satisfactory extent. Human rights abuse and lack of respect for rule of law is high in Africa. It is further a worry that some African countries have not ascended to African Peer Review Mechanism as peer assessment tool for African Governments. Youth Movements should take government to task to ensure implementation of what governments have agreed upon.

## Millennium Development Goals

**“As put by the UN Secretary General: *“The lesson of the last decade is that it is not enough for leaders to promise something, even when the resources are available to back it up, unless the whole of society is mobilised to achieve the goal.....The most striking advances towards the goals of the World Summit for Children ...were achieved through this combination of strong partnerships and sustained political commitment, involving the broadest possible range of people”* (We, the Children, page 95).**

Global achievement of the Millennium Development Goals is highly dependent on Africa's progress. As put by the UN Secretary-General, *“NEPAD will not be a success if Africa fails to achieve the MDGs – and the world as a whole cannot achieve the MDGs unless they are achieved in Africa”*<sup>1</sup>. To illustrate this: Sub-Saharan Africa today has some 10 per cent of the world's population, 70 per cent of the world's HIV/AIDS cases, 80 per cent of AIDS deaths and 90 per cent of AIDS orphans. In stark contrast to trends in other regions, today's Southern African children can expect to live shorter lives than their grandparents. The situation is better in North Africa, but there is a dearth of reliable data on HIV infection which limits the ability of policy makers there to generate a broad momentum for preventive action.

For Africa as a whole, there has been some improvement in preventing young child deaths during the 1990s: under-five mortality across the continent is estimated at around 12% of newborns (ADB, estimate for 2000). But Sub-Saharan Africa is still the part of the world with the highest child death rates - 17 per cent of its newborns do not live to the age of five - and it contains 9 of the 14 countries in the world where child mortality has actually increased in recent years. Its share of young child mortality in the world has risen from around 14% in the 1960s to 43% in the year 2000. In the coming decade, Africa's share of global under-five mortality – the subject of MDG #4 - will probably exceed that of the rest of the world combined, as shown below:

## Youth unemployment

"Global Employment Trends for Youth 2004, a new analysis prepared by the ILO's Employment Strategy Department, found that while youth represent 25 per cent of the working age population between the ages of 15 and 64, they made up as much as 47 per cent of the total 186 million people out of work worldwide in 2003. But the problem goes far beyond the large number of young unemployed people: the report says that young people represent some 130 million of the world's 550 million working poor who work but are unable to lift themselves and their families above the equivalent of US\$ 1 per day poverty line. These young people struggle to survive, often performing work under unsatisfactory conditions in the informal economy. Consequently, one must ask, "What are the governing institutions doing?"

Tackling youth unemployment and the consequent vulnerabilities and feelings of exclusion would be a significant contribution to the global economy. According to the report, halving the world youth unemployment rate would add at least US\$ 2.2 trillion to global GDP, equal to around 4 per cent of the 2003 global GDP value. Furthermore, as the report points out, people who get a good start to working life are less likely to experience prolonged unemployment later.

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<sup>1</sup> Statement of the Secretary-General to the Meeting of the UN General Assembly on NEPAD, 16 September 2002.

"We are wasting an important part of the energy and talent of the most educated youth generation the world has ever had", says ILO Director-General Juan Somavia. "Enlarging the chances of young people to find and keep decent work is absolutely critical to achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals."

### **Global unemployment hits Youth hard**

"Global Employment Trends for Youth 2004" found that rising worldwide unemployment has hit young people hard, especially young women. Those who can find work often face long working hours, short-term or informal contracts, low pay and little or no social protection such as social security or other social benefits. Young people are thus increasingly dependent on their families and more susceptible to illegal activities, the report says.

The report puts the global youth unemployment rate at 14.4 per cent in 2003, a 26.8 per cent increase of the total number of young unemployed people over the past decade. Youth unemployment rates in 2003 were highest in the Middle East and North Africa (25.6 per cent), followed by sub-Saharan Africa (21 per cent), the Transition economies (18.6 per cent), Latin America and the Caribbean (16.6 per cent), South-East Asia (16.4 per cent), South Asia (13.9 per cent), the Industrialized economies (13.4 per cent), and East Asia (7 per cent). The industrialized economies region was the only region where youth unemployment saw a distinct decrease (from 15.4 per cent in 1993 to 13.4 per cent in 2003).

The report shows that the growth in the number of young people is rapidly outstripping the ability of economies to provide them with jobs. While the overall youth population grew by 10.5 per cent over the last 10 years to over 1.1 billion in 2003, youth employment grew by only 0.2 per cent to around 526 million employment opportunities. Only some of this gap can be explained by the fact that more young people are pursuing an education for longer periods.

Young people also have more difficulty finding work than their adult counterparts, the report says, with the global youth unemployment rate in 2003 at 3.5 times the global adult unemployment rate. While there is a correlation in most countries between trends in youth and adult unemployment rates, the report notes that during recessions, youth unemployment tends to rise more rapidly than adult joblessness.

The relative disadvantage of youth is more pronounced in developing countries, where they make up a strikingly higher proportion of the labour force than in industrialized economies, the report says. Eighty-five per cent of the world's youth live in developing countries where they are 3.8 times more likely to be unemployed than adults, as compared with 2.3 times in industrialized economies.

The report also says that labour force participation rates for young people decreased in the world as a whole by almost 4 percentage points over the last decade, partly as a result of young people staying in education but also because many young people become so frustrated with the lack of employment opportunities that they simply drop out of the labour force. Participation was highest in East Asia (73.2 per cent), sub-Saharan Africa (65.4 per cent), and lowest in the Middle East and North Africa (39.7 per cent).

The report says that as well as suffering from lower chances to find employment, young people face discrimination based on age, sex and socio-economic background. Dominant ethnic groups fare better in most countries' labour markets, and the study finds that, in general, youth from lower income households are more

likely to be unemployed. These statistics should form the platform for a plan of action from governing bodies.

### **Future Prospects Depend on Growth**

In developing regions - which have the largest shares of youth within the working-age population - the fate of the youth entering the labour force in years to come will depend on the rate of growth of the economy as well as an improvement in the employment content of growth, the report says. In industrialized economies, where youth populations are expected to fall, the effects of demographic change are likely to reduce youth unemployment.

But the report warns that this will not happen automatically. A combination of both targeted and integrated policies on youth unemployment is needed to enable young people to overcome their natural disadvantage against older, more experienced, workers. Such policies have been identified by the UN Secretary-General's Youth Employment Network (YEN), the UN-World Bank-ILO partnership, headquartered at the ILO. Created following the Millennium Summit, the Network has responded to the growing challenge of youth employment by pooling the skills, experiences and knowledge of diverse partners at the global, national and local level. This partnering and pooling of resources is a good example of good governance.

The YEN has promoted the development of National Action Plans on youth employment amongst a group of "lead countries". So far 10 countries have stepped forward to champion the development of national policies to showcase innovative solutions to meeting the youth employment challenge.

The ILO is providing technical support and policy advice to countries within this partnership. One such tool is the recently released guide, "Improving prospects for young women and men in the world of work, which specifies basic considerations, trade-offs and experiences that can be drawn upon to develop and implement policies, including National Action Plans on youth employment.

Notwithstanding the above responses, Africa has not yet developed National Action Plans on youth employment. The Youth Employment Summit held in September 2002 in Alexandria, Egypt, has shown that African Countries have not done enough to promote Youth Employment. However, there are countries, who have created opportunities for promoting youth participation in the economy. For example, South Africa's Entrepreneurship Youth Development Fund called (Umsobovu). Also the National Youth Policies adopted in 2000 has recognized the South African Youth Council, as Civil Society and National Youth Commission as Statutory body, arm of Government to facilitate youth participation in the policy formulation process.

### **UN Youth Agenda**

A close look at the historical development of the United Nations youth agenda indicates the relevance of the three fundamental Charter-based themes to youth policies. Starting in 1965, peace became the theme most closely connected with youth policy; in subsequent decades participation and development were also recognized as key themes of a global youth policy. The General Assembly designated 1985 International Youth Year and identified the goals of participation, development and peace as priorities.

These three interrelated themes continue to reflect the overall objectives of World Programme of Action. The International Youth Year established a baseline for social

and political thinking on youth matters and, most importantly, pointed States and communities in a specific direction that allowed them to demonstrate their concern for their young people in concrete terms and to enable youth themselves to influence the course of their own lives. The declarations and programmes of United Nations global conferences constitute another normative basis for global youth policy.

The priority areas of the World Programme of Action built upon the policies introduced at summits and conferences held in the early 1990s. For example, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro, June 1992) provided an impetus to target the environment as one priority area in the Programme, and the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, September 1995) helped lead to the inclusion of a priority area focusing on girls and young women.

The World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen, March 1995) contributed to the identification of a number of the Programme's priority areas including education, employment, health, and hunger and poverty. The 10 priorities of the World Programme of Action, clearly reflecting the global agenda established by various international instruments, include the following: Education, Employment, Hunger and Poverty, Health, Environment, Drug Abuse, Juvenile Delinquency, Leisure Activities, Girls and Young Women Participation.

The global agenda has continued to evolve since the adoption of the World Programme of Action, and additional youth policy themes have emerged. The United Nations Millennium Summit, the General Assembly special sessions on HIV/AIDS and Children, the Second World Assembly on Ageing, and several follow-up conferences to the world summits have been held since the original priorities were established, and these new developments have led to an expansion of the normative basis of global youth policy.

### **Youth Participation**

The participation of young people in decision making process in the continent is at the heart of social and political discourse. The notion of Good governance is located within the broad principles that all stakeholders' participation is required in *Decision-making and Governance*. In most African Countries, Youth constitute a majority of electoral voters, however, the legislative parliaments have less than one (1) percent youth participation as MP's. Young people continue to be subdued and relegated to Youth wing of political parties and have been used as agents to amass political power,

In some instances they are used in armed conflicts. For example, between 1989 and 2000, one hundred eleven (111) armed conflicts were reported. Laleh Ebrahimiyan notes that civil warfare mostly took place in Africa. It is further estimated that there are 300 000 civil soldiers today, most of whom are found in Africa. There's no youth participation in the Peace and Security Council of the Africa Union. No role has been defined for youth participation, despite the belief that military intervention should not be the only form of intervention--civil intervention should include civil society participating in the mobilization of the society for peace and democracy.

Globally, the African youth remain mostly excluded from UN Youth gatherings. The UN Youth Agenda and interpretation of youth issues has been done mainly through western mechanism. These global phenomena undermine the notion of Good Governance. African Heads of State and Governments when attending the UN General Assembly often neglect to include Young people in their delegation to New York.



National Youth Policies that exist in Africa do not comply with the guidelines provided for in World Programme of Action to year 2000 and beyond and most policies do not compliment internationally agreed-upon instruments. Youth policies are developed by consultants with no input or aspirations from youth formations. Young people have been marginalized in terms economic participation because few countries in Africa has National Action Plan for Youth employment. Government's procurement policies are not friendly to the establishment of micro youth enterprises.

Youth companies have no special considerations and have to compete with big established foreign dominant companies for governments and private sector opportunities. This has discouraged youth participation in African economy. The United Nations aims to enhance awareness of the global situation of Youth and of the rights and aspirations of young people. It works towards greater participation of youth in the social and economic life of their societies. Find out more about the UN Youth Agenda. Third Committee of the General Assembly discusses youth issues From 6 to 8 October, the Third Committee of the 58th session of the General Assembly discussed important global youth issues including: - the recommendations contained in the summary of the World Youth Report 2003; - the convening of a future world youth forum, to be based on an intergovernmental decision emanating from the General Assembly. Several countries have included young people in their delegations to the General Assembly. These youth delegates are also working together to further develop youth participation at the United Nations.

### **Policy Gap**

The analysis of challenges facing African Youth are summarized as

- Lack of Coordination of Youth Policy in Africa
- Lack of African Youth Charter
- Slow ratification of International Instruments to deal with Youth issues
- Lack of Political will to involve Youth on policy formulation

### **Fostering Sustainability and Preserving Africa's Botanical Resources**

The current challenges facing African Youth is to practice good governance in nurturing and preserving Africa's natural resources. It is important to consider the recommendations of WSSD held in 2002, Johannesburg, South Africa. Youth leaders should compliment NEPAD's agenda by responding to issues such protection of environment for the sake of the *Next Generation*. Russia has recently ratified the Kyoto Protocol and Youth Africa should demand that African Countries should move more quickly in responding to the challenge.

African Youth should develop platforms on the following crucial issues:

- Innovative ways to increase the availability of safe drinking water
- Preservation of Africa's botanic resources
- A programme of reforestation and sustainable forestry
- Non pollution source of energy

### **Challenges facing Youth Movement in Africa**

The challenges facing the African Youth Movements are summarized as follows:

- Poor lobbying and Advocacy Skills
- Lack of political space for participation
- Fragmentation and lack coordination
- Shortage of Financial and Human resources
- Poor Leadership and organizational discipline
- Lack of Platform for exchange of best practices
- Lack of credible continental organization
- Lack acknowledgement of Youth Work
- Competition Adult lead NGO's doing Youth Work

Therefore the ADFIV Youth and Governance should respond to these challenges to enable youth to participate effectively through lobbying and advocacy for youth issues at all level. The participation of all stakeholders is the key to good governance. Youth Leaders have to develop effective leadership skills to develop a clear youth agenda and lobby it effectively to institutions and governing bodies

### **Legal Instruments for assessing Commitments made for Youth**

Youth Movement can engage other stakeholders such African Union and its sister institutions, Governments, NEPAD Secretariat, Private sector and other social actors that may be relevant to the advancement of Youth Agenda. The following could be the instruments among others that may be considered for discourse:

- UN World Programme of Action to year 2000 and Beyond , Adopted 1995
- ECCOSOC of AU Adopted June 2004, Addis Ababa
- Millennium Development Goals (MDG's)
- National Action Plans for Youth Employment (YEN) ILO
- APRM Adopted 2003, June Maputo
- Johannesburg Plan of Implementation
- Dakar Employment Strategy ( World Youth Forum of UN 6 to 10 August 2001)
- Braga Youth Action Plan
- Lisbon Declaration on Youth Policies and Programmes, Adopted World Ministers responsible for Youth, 12 August 1998
- Resolution Pan African Youth Movement , October 2003, Namibia

### **NEPAD Youth Summit 2005**

It is exciting to note that Young people from different parts of Africa and Africa's Diaspora are coming together to develop an effective response to enable them to use NEPAD as a platform for a Socio-Economic Agenda for Africa. It is everybody's belief that unless African people are involved in their Continent, then development will not take place.

The NEPAD Youth Summit being organized to launch a broad youth social movement in 2005, is intended to be an outcome based event to promote youth participation in the implementation and monitoring of NEPAD at country level. It is expected that the NEPAD Youth Summit framework will develop a programme to compliment AU and NEPAD and the Youth will also develop social outreach programmes to stimulate national and regional dialogue on NEPAD. Therefore the participants of ADFV should consider participating in this historic event being created and organized as a process lead by young people for young people in collaboration with youth-serving organizations and individuals.

## **African Youth Charter**

The establishment of the African Youth Charter as a regional mechanism for youth development and participation is crucial more than ever before. It envisages that the Youth Charter to be adopted by African Union (AU) will assist in terms of the mainstreaming of youth involvement and the coordination of UN instruments of Youth as World Programme of Action. The Youth Charter would also ensure that countries complying with the Charter will develop effective strategies for Youth Employment. It will further address challenges such as child labour which is against International Convention on the Rights of Child. The charter should also address the misuse of children in civil wars.

The Youth Charter should provide quota systems for the participation of Young people in institutions such as national parliaments, AU institutions such as Pan African Parliament, etc. It should reflect bias for young people in terms of procurement policies. However the African Youth Charter campaign should be lead by Youth Movement and develop a draft that will serve as tool for engagement of the African Union. It is exciting to note that the NEPAD Youth Summit 2005 has the Youth Charter in its agenda.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion the ADFIV on Youth and Governance in responding to the issues contained in the paper should take note of the following for strategies, debates and future actions that need to be undertaken:

- Stimulate a dialogue on governance issues by emphasizing the important role that youth can play in addressing corruptions at all level
- Encourage youth to demand accountability and concrete actions from their governments to address Youth unemployment
- Encourage youth to participate in development which is key to breaking the cycle of poverty and ultimately changing entire societies
- Help create network of knowledge sharing and learning on Good Governance and anti-corruption issues among the youth by encouraging the use of the web to develop new forms of social and global citizenship

## **Recommendation**

The ADFIV Youth and Governance should then come out with toolkit that will be utilized in understanding Good Governance and will trigger action after ADFIV. This booklet should include the following:

- Understanding Good Governance
- Corruption: definition issues and cost
- Causes of corruption
- Responses to corruption the role of Media and Parliaments
- The Role of the Youth on Good Governance
- Collective and individual Action Plans on Governance
- Learning Approach and Process

**Acknowledgements of Sources of Information**

- Report of Labour Organizations
- UN Conventions
- Youth Publication Journal
- Jordan Human Resource report 2000
- Youth Employment Networks reports
- SADC Youth Movement perspective on Global Youth Trend
- AU Commission publications.
- Pan African Youth Leadership Summit Dakar, UNPD
- UNECA Publications
- NEPAD Young Face of Africa, UNICEF
- 1992 OAU International Conference on Assistance to African Children (ICAAC)
- Common position paper