

Youth Statement at the High Level Policy Dialogue

By George Ndungu, Organization of African Youth.

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen.

I have the honor to address Honorable Ministers and other distinguished guests. I appreciate the organizers of this meeting for inviting me to share the youth recommendations.

The UN High Level Panel report on the Post-2015 Development Agenda released on 30 May 2013 calls on the world to 'leave no one behind', and this represents a critical landmark in youth-led ' campaign to see the world's new development framework inclusive of young people's perspectives and aspirations. With about 65 % of the total population of Africa below the age of 35 years, the SDGs provides governments with an opportunity to prioritize an investment in youth development and should be inclusive, integrating young people's own account of their aspirations and values.

Africa is the only continent with a significantly growing youth population. In less than three generations, 41% of the world's youth will be African. By 2035, Africa's labour force will be larger than China's. How do we ensure that Africa benefits from this imminent demographic dividend?

We believe the central role of young people in development should be acknowledged and promoted through the creation of enabling environments for youth participation. Investing in young people in Africa can generate significant social and economic returns, making it an effective use of technical and financial development assistance. To make significant progress in transforming the economic and social realities of our developing continent, national governments and regional economic communities must harness the demographic dividend by promoting pro-employment growth policies.

The Organization of African Youth has been consulting with young people with an aim of collecting their views and aspirations on the future they want for Africa. Through convening a regional youth conference and releasing a declaration, mobile campaigns, national youth consultations and electronic surveys; young people continue to make their voices heard and submitting their recommendations for the new set of goals.

Youth empowerment and creation of decent jobs remains the top priority of young people for the post-2015 era. Almost every delegate that has spoken in this meeting has mentioned about the need to create jobs for young people. The number of available jobs for young people is only part of the problem. Our educational systems are still failing to provide a large proportion of youth with the skills they need to secure a living.

We need an investment and promotion of an education curriculum that is ICT-incorporated, action-oriented, technical, vocational and entrepreneurship based with the aim of preparing youth for self-employment and cope with the actual working requirements and conditions. Further, Governments provide transparent financial support to young people by enacting youth friendly policies that allow them to access loans and grants to establish businesses and self-employment initiatives.

The efficient and effective management of resources across countries depends heavily on good and accountable governance. Sustainable development can only be achieved through inclusive and effective governance. Governance should be about enhancing state's capacity to respond to the needs of people in an inclusive and equitable manner; facilitating political participation of all, including the poor and the marginalized, and empowering young people to hold governing institutions accountable.

Governments and the United Nations must ensure and support participation and representation of young people in development processes including meetings and in developing policies and endeavor to partner with the youth in implementing and monitoring the SDGs. We propose that to the African Union Commission to consider including regional youth-led organizations to the membership of High Level Committee on the Post-2015 Agenda to ensure our voices are heard at the highest decision making level. This will be a clear indication of youth commitment to youth inclusion.

The SDGs should target inclusive, green and sustainable growth; devoting more attention to higher standards and to outcomes that improve the quality of young people's lives. The new framework must put young people at the core of targets and indicators aimed at poverty reduction, enhanced access to clean water and modern energy, urban development, green jobs, healthcare and improved agricultural technologies. I am glad to mention that we will be convening a Regional Youth Green Growth Forum in December this year in Nairobi, Kenya, with an aim of providing a platform for young people to learn, share, identify and replicate tools to foster inclusive green growth in Africa.

By our sheer numbers, young people do deserve 'a seat' at the negotiating table for the next set of goals. Youth participation is a right. It serves as a developmental guarantee and a means to enable young people negotiate their aspired functional futures. The SDGs requires a fundamental shift from being just another global political declaration to a framework which provides national governments with a roadmap on measures to meaningfully improve young people's quality of life.

It is very important that writings with specific mention of youth appear in the regional SDGs report and outcome documents with new goals, targets and indicators which resonate with what is most of value to young people. With Africa having the largest population of young people, we are calling for a stand-alone goal on "Youth Empowerment and Creation of Decent Jobs" and we request member states to support in championing this call in the ongoing negotiations. African can play the major role in ensuring that an investment in young people is prioritized. We recommend that African countries should include young people in their official government delegations to all the negotiation meetings including the Open Working Group and the Intergovernmental process set to start in September 2014 as a way of ensuring Africa's priorities are effectively articulated and negotiated at the global level. Consultations with young people should be held at the regional and national level. We strongly recommend that the SDGs should be ambitious and should aim to get to zero on extreme poverty and set to be achieved over a 15 year timescale, starting from 2016.

In conclusion, there is no sustainable future without today's generation of children and young people. We want an Africa that values diversity, respects and promotes environmental sustainability. An Africa that is governed based on fairness and equality, where everyone feels safe and has access to basic services such as health and education and where the standards of those services are high no matter what people's background or economic situation. No young person in this region should be excluded or marginalized because of gender, ethnicity or disability. Young people in this region should have access to decent employment opportunities and be incorporated into decision making processes and given access to the highest levers of power regardless of their background. This is the Africa I want and I believe this is the Africa we all Want. To the African Honorable Ministers: Support us in designing a future that will make us feel proud of you.

Thank you for your attention.