



ECOSOC
YOUTH FORUM

YOUTH2030

Economic and Social Council Youth Forum

"Accelerating the COVID-19 recovery and full implementation of the 2030 Agenda with and for youth"

REGIONAL SESSION ON AFRICA

26 April 2023, 9:00 am to 10.30 am (NY Time)

Hybrid Event

IDENTIFICATION	
SDG/theme or Region	AFRICA
Session title	SDGs and the AfCFTA: Opportunities for Africa’s Youth to Accelerate the Continent’s Structural Transformation
Session co-lead UN	United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (UN-OSAA) United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
Session co-lead Youth	African Youth Commission (representing MGCY) International Pharmaceutical Students’ Federation (representing ICMYO)
BACKGROUND & KEY ISSUES	
<p>I. <u>Context</u></p> <p>As Africa seeks to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, trade represents an important means of stimulus for the continent’s socioeconomic recovery and accelerated implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the African Union Agenda 2063, especially as a driver of inclusive sustainable development for women and youth in Africa. A catalyst to this ambition is the realization of Africa’s regional integration agenda and unified markets through the landmark African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), a flagship project of Agenda 2063. Its scope covers trade in goods and services, investment, intellectual property rights, competition policy and a dedicated protocol for women and youth in trade.</p>	

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are 17 integrated goals adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity. Through the pledge to 'Leave No One Behind', countries have committed to fast-track progress for those furthest behind first.

The African Union Agenda 2063 provides a coordinated framework for the socio-economic transformation of the continent over the next 50 years. It is built on and seeks to accelerate the implementation of past and existing continental initiatives for growth and sustainable development. Youth development and engagement are cross-cutting issues in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063.

The AfCFTA contributes to accelerating the SDGs in Africa through its potential to reduce inequality, eradicate poverty, protect the planet, promote peaceful and inclusive societies, and empower people by fostering inclusive economic growth and promoting global cooperation. For instance, the AfCFTA fosters partnerships as a means of implementing the SDGs, especially SDG 17 (strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development). Other examples of AfCFTA and SDGs linkages include employment creation and industrialization (SDGs 8 and 9) through promotion of regional value chains and expanded business opportunities; economic empowerment for women and youth (SDGs 4 and 5) through growth in sectors such as agro-food processing and tech industries; peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16) through the promotion of inclusive societies, social cohesion and livelihoods opportunities; poverty alleviation (SDG 1) through income generation; among others. The World Bank¹ estimates that the AfCFTA, if effectively implemented, will increase Africa's income by \$450 billion by 2035 and increase intra-African exports by \$560 billion (mostly in the manufacturing sector). The single continental market will also contribute to lifting 30 million people out of extreme poverty and raising the incomes of 68 million people who live today on less than \$5.50 per day. The AfCFTA is therefore expected to deepen continental integration, increase productivity, create more jobs, and – critically – offer substantial opportunities by including women and youth in Africa's trade liberalization.

In January 2021, trade officially commenced under the AfCFTA, creating opportunities for businesses operating in Africa to potentially access 1.3 billion people, with a combined gross domestic product of over \$3.4 trillion. To kick-start the integration promises and build more consensus around the free trade area, the African Union during its 36th Summit placed 2023 under the theme: Acceleration of the AfCFTA Implementation.

II. Opportunities for Africa's youth – and for SDG acceleration

In realizing the aims and visions of the AfCFTA, the active involvement of the African youth population cannot be overstated – African youth can play a vital role in the economic transformation of the region. However, according to the African Development Bank, while about 10 to 12 million youths join the workforce each year, only 3.1 million jobs are created to accommodate the influx. This severe lack of employment results in poor standards of living among youth, propels migration out of Africa in search of better opportunities and incites conflicts out of prolonged and sustained frustration.

¹ World Bank report, [The African Continental Free Trade Area: Economic and Distributional Effects](https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/trade/publication/the-african-continental-free-trade-area) online at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/trade/publication/the-african-continental-free-trade-area>

The AfCFTA, however, provides new avenues for growth that will help address the current issues facing the youth population and invigorate their creativity, innovation and involvement to transform the continent.

By dedicating a protocol to Youth in Trade, the AfCFTA recognizes that young people can play a critical role in the achievement of the free trade area by initiating youth-led initiatives in agriculture, services, technology, and the creative industry, among others.

Young people can accelerate Africa's industrialization and economic transformation, especially through entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship is indeed the crux of the matter – young people are remarkably adept at initiating start-ups and other creative businesses. African youth are among the most enterprising in the world – a 2013 Gallup survey showed that more than one in three Africans planned to start up a business over the ensuing 12 months. Accelerated AfCFTA implementation will help young people by providing them with opportunities to establish new businesses, giving them access to a much larger, vibrant continental market.

III. Looking forward

Entrepreneurs, especially Small- and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) – many led by young Africans – will make the AfCFTA succeed. The free trade area presents an opportunity to push back poverty, advance industrialization and create opportunities for young people in Africa, enticing the entrepreneurial and innovative young minds of the continent to remain in Africa and not seek economic opportunities elsewhere. Yet, these will not come automatically. Making the AfCFTA work for youth requires dedicated actions and support that create an enabling environment for youth-led SMEs to nurture and grow.

SESSION OBJECTIVES

The 2023 ECOSOC Youth Forum Africa Regional Breakout Session aims to provide young leaders with an opportunity to engage on how they can concretely contribute to and benefit from an inclusive implementation of the AfCFTA and the achievement of the SDGs. The session will in particular seek to propose practical solutions to addressing the high youth unemployment rate in Africa by promoting innovations and youth entrepreneurship, intra-Africa labour mobility and trade. It also aims to influence policy formulation at the United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF).

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The 2023 ECOSOC Youth Forum Africa Regional Breakout Session will provide policy recommendations on tackling youth unemployment and promoting youth entrepreneurship in Africa through the accelerated implementation of the AfCFTA. It will also contribute to the review of the SDGs and inform policy formulation at the 2023 HLPF, the 2023 SDG Summit, and other intergovernmental forums. The summary of the ECOSOC Youth Forum is considered an informal input into the annual HLPF, and its main takeaways are referenced in the Ministerial Declaration. Key action points from the Africa Regional Breakout Session will contribute to the remarks of the ECOSOC President at the closing of the ECOSOC

Youth Forum. Its summary report will be widely distributed through the ECOSOC Youth Forum website. The conclusions and recommendations of this summary report will inform the outcome document of the ECOSOC Youth Forum and HLPF and will be widely distributed among partner networks on the continent for advocacy.

APPROACH USED TO GENERATE CONCRETE CONTRIBUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2023 ECOSOC Youth Forum Africa Regional Breakout Session will be a hybrid event bringing together young people and representatives of UN Member States, UN entities, the African Union Commission, academia, think tanks, policymakers, and civil society from Africa and the diaspora, and will be moderated by an African youth representative. The moderator will invite panellists and participants to respond to prepared questions and share experiences, lessons learned and best practices on meaningful action by African young people and other relevant stakeholders. Interpretation services in Arabic, English, French and Portuguese will be provided. The session will be live-streamed on UN WebTV to allow a wide range of participants to follow and ensure inclusivity.

OVERALL STRUCTURE AND FLOW

The 2023 ECOSOC Youth Forum Africa Regional Breakout Session will be organized in a hybrid format on 26 April 2023 from 9:00 am to 10:30 am New York time. It will be organized by UN-OSAA, UNECA and UNDP, in partnership with the African Youth Commission (representing the Major Group for Children and Youth), and the International Pharmaceutical Students' Federation (representing the International Coordination Meeting of Youth Organisations).

The African Union Youth Envoy will moderate the session, and participants will include African young people and other prominent policymakers. The moderator will ensure that the session is interactive and inclusive and leads to practical policy recommendations. The moderator will start the session off with an introductory statement and state its objectives. This will be followed by introductory statements from the President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council and the Special Adviser of the United Nations Secretary-General on Africa. The moderator will then invite panellists and participants to respond to prepared questions. The session will conclude with practical action points to accelerate the implementation of the selected SDGs and the AfCFTA, with a focus on the roles of and benefits for African young people.

SESSION DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the issues to be addressed to make the AfCFTA inclusive and to work for youth?
2. What concrete proposals could be made to address linkages between free trade opportunities in Africa and the implementation of specific SDGs?
3. How can African young people leverage emerging technologies and innovations to accelerate the implementation of the AfCFTA and promote intra-Africa trade?

4. What are the emerging market opportunities for young entrepreneurs in Africa and the diaspora to realize the AfCFTA's promises? What are the key actions to unlock such a potential?
5. What is the role of mutual recognition of academic credentials to unlock the potential of African young people's labour mobility?
6. What structural barriers to meaningful youth engagement exist in Africa and what new opportunities, in relation with the AfCFTA, can be identified for young people and youth organizations, movements and networks, to engage in the promotion of inclusive societies and in peace processes in Africa?

NAMES OF SESSION SPEAKERS AND MODERATOR

Moderator:

- **Ms. Chido Mpemba**, African Union Youth Envoy

Introductory remarks:

- **H.E. Ms. Lachezara Stoeva**, Permanent Representative of Bulgaria to the United Nations and President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council
- **Ms. Cristina Duarte**, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Special Adviser on Africa

Key messages from the ARFSD-9

- Summary of key messages from youth consultations held during the 9th Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (ARFSD-9), **Mr. Emmanuel Ametepey**, Executive Director, Youth Advocates Ghana

Panellists:

- **Honourable Kirsty Coventry**, Minister of Youth, Sport, Arts and Recreation, Zimbabwe
- **Ms. Eleonor Ewi**, African Young Women Leaders fellow, Cameroon
- **Mr. David Akwara**, filmmaker, member of the Pan African Business Women's Association (PABWA) Board of Advisers, Nigeria
- **Ms. Laone Bukamu Hulela**, Senior Advisor, Youth Alliance for Leadership Development in Africa (YALDA), Botswana
- **Mr. Youssef Chakroun**, Chief Executive Officer, Shems for Lighting, Morocco
- **Ms. Safoura Cissé**, Founder, Health Secret, Mali

OVERVIEW OF PREPARATORY EVENT/CONSULTATION

During the ninth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (ARFSD-9), which took place from 28 February to 2 March 2023 in Niamey, Niger, UNECA – in collaboration with Youth Advocates

Ghana, the organization responsible for the annual African Youth SDGs Summit, organized a consultation with African youth representatives during the “Preparatory and capacity-development workshop for major groups and other stakeholders in the African region”. The summary and key messages from the consultation will form a key input into the ECOSOC Youth Forum Africa Regional Breakout Session.

In addition, UNDP is conducting a global online consultation with youth to solicit feedback ahead of the ECOSOC Youth Forum. Key messages relating to Africa will be aggregated as an input to the Africa Regional Breakout Session.

SUGGESTED READING, IF ANY

[2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#)

[Agenda 2063](#)

[Ninth Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development \(ARFSD-9\) Report](#)

[ARFSD-9 Summary and Key Messages](#)

[Niamey Declaration of ARFSD-9](#)

[Report submitted to the 13th Extraordinary Session of the African Union Assembly of Heads of State and Government on the African Continental Free Trade Area \(AfCFTA\)](#)