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Ad Hoc Expert Group Meeting

"Youth employment and sustainable development in North Africa"

3-6 October 2017, Rabat (Morocco)

Aide Memoire

I. Background

Today, the generation of youth¹ is the largest in history, with the vast majority living in developing countries. According to the United Nations World Population Prospects statistics², there were 1.2 billion young people aged 15-24 years globally in 2015, comprising nearly 17 per cent of the world's population. Approximately 226 million of these young people lived in Africa, making it the most youthful continent in the world. Children under age 15 accounted for 41 per cent of the population in Africa and young persons aged 15 to 24 accounted for a further 19 per cent.

The 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, which embraces the three dimensions of sustainability - economic, social and environmental, recognizes the central role of decent work in achieving sustainable development as highlighted by Goal 8 which aims to “promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”.

By 2030 the target date for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it is projected that the number of youth in Africa will increase by 42 per cent to 321 million. While the size of the youth population has peaked in all other regions, Africa's youth population is expected to continue growing throughout the remainder of the twenty-first century, especially in low and lower-middle income countries. Such a large youth population can be the force that drives Africa's sustainable development.

The socio-economic conditions of youth have improved in recent years, but not considerably. There has been an increase in school enrolment over the past twenty years and the gender gap in education has narrowed; however, youths continue to face a myriad of challenges that constrain them from fulfilling their full potential. Employment remains the main concern of youth in the region. African youths have the potential of being a great impetus for Africa's sustainable development, provided that appropriate investments in creating employment opportunities are made. However, if youth issues are not addressed, Africa's sustainable development will remain stunted.

It is evident that inability to find decent and stable employment creates a sense of frustration among youths which imposes economic and social costs including risks of engaging in crime and being recruited into terrorists groups. Unemployed dissatisfied youth are more likely to actively challenge their situation and can become a socially destabilizing force, as evidenced by increasing demands for change on the continent.³ Unrest in some countries in North Africa illustrates the destabilizing potential of unmet aspirations of youth.

Unemployment rates reflect only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the employment challenges youth face. Not only are young people more likely to be unemployed than adults, they often occupy jobs with little or no social security and are more likely to work longer hours with low productivity and low wages.

¹ Youth, according to UN definition, are people between 15 and 24 years of age.

² UN World Population Prospects <http://esa.un.org/wpp/>

³ Many young people were involved in the movements and uprisings that arose in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya.

II. Meeting objective

The overall objective of the meeting is to carry out a deeper analysis of youth employment and sustainable development as a follow up to the study on “Being Young in the Maghreb” published by the North Africa Office of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA-NA) in 2013. This shall be done by highlighting the major challenges that youth face in finding employment opportunities. The lack of skills and jobs compounded by the mismatch between skills demanded and supplied are some of the common hurdles for young people trying to enter the labor market; creating employment opportunities for youths entering the labor market every year has proved to be a challenge. The high unemployment and lack of economic opportunities is driving irregular and unsafe migration particularly amongst young people. Thus the 2030 Agenda calls for member States to develop and operationalize a global strategy for youth employment by 2020. The analysis in this meeting will aim to illustrate what governments and other key actors are doing to ensure that employment policies achieve meaningful results for youth. Thus, the analysis will show case studies in North Africa that provide good practices for promoting youth employment and empowerment that is sustainable.

III. Expected outcome

The immediate outcome expected from the meeting is a revised comprehensive report on youth employment and sustainable development; including good practices, lessons learnt and proposed way forward.

In implementing the Agenda 2030 and the continental framework for sustainable development-Agenda 2063, it is important to fully understand and account for the changes in the youth population that are likely to unfold in the future. The dramatic increase in the number of African youth calls for innovative approaches to tap on the huge development potential that the young people readily present to the region as a whole.

In order to fully take advantage of its youth population and ensure future prosperity, Africa must invest heavily in creating employment opportunities, for both young men and women, in rural and urban areas. The effective implementation of youth employment policies requires that youth related issues be given high priority in sustainable development agendas.

Integration into the mainstream of sustainable development remains a priority concern for young Africans and is linked to recent situations of civil unrest in some countries in North Africa. This issue must therefore be tackled with urgency.

African countries, in collaboration with development partners, should allocate sufficient resources to ensure that employment policies and programmes are operational and implemented, and enhance research in youth development issues, including the collection and analysis of disaggregated data through national statistical offices. Such measures will enable young Africans to have improved access to valuable information and opportunities for making informed decisions about employment. Beyond that, collection and analysis of data is instrumental to ensure interventions and policies are evidence based and respond to situations on the ground.

IV. Organization and format of the meeting

The meeting will be held in the form of plenary sessions. Participants will be presented with the report on youth employment and sustainable development, they will also attend and discuss presentations by different experts. Member countries will be sent the final version of the report.

V. Attendance

Participation in the meeting is open to ministries, national administrations and institutions in charge of economic and social development, labor, and youth, representatives from private sector organizations, academia and research centers, agencies of the United Nations System and other development partners in the sub region.

VI. Date and venue of the meeting

The meeting will be held from 3rd to 6th October 2017 in Rabat (Kingdom of Morocco).

VII. Working languages

The working languages of the meeting are French, English and Arabic.

VIII. Contacts

For more information regarding the organization of the meeting, please contact:

Coordination

Mr. Omar Ismael Abdourahman, OIC

Email : abdourahman@un.org

Focal point - EGM

Ms. Amal Nagah Elbeshbishi - Economist

Email : elbeshbishi@un.org

Invitations

Ms. Naima Sahraoui –Director's Assistant

Email : sahraoui.uneca@un.org

Press / Communication

Ms. Houda Filali-Ansary –Communication Officer

Email : filali-ansary@un.org

Documentation

Mr. Mohammed Mosseddek, Research Assistant

Email: mosseddek.uneca@un.org

Administration / logistics

Mr. Lahcen Hmade - Administrative Assistant

Email : hmade@un.org

Tel (Office): (+212) 537 71 56 13/537 71 78 29