EXPEDIENCE OF AN AFRICAN UNION YOUTH ORGAN WITHIN THE AU ADMINISTRATIVE CONFINES

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PROPOSAL SUMMARY

The 21st century will be shaped by what happens not just with the youths in Rome or Moscow or Washington, but by what happens with African youths as well. This is the simple truth of a time when boundaries between people are overwhelmed by our connections. Indeed, the prosperity of African youths can expand the prosperity of youths in the world as well. Recognizing that Africa’s greatest resource is its youthful population and that through their active and full participation, Africans can surmount the difficulties that lie ahead; acknowledging the commitments already made towards the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and inviting the partners to reaffirm their support to advance the well-being of youth; understanding the efforts made by States Parties and civil societies to address the economic, social, educational, cultural and spiritual needs of youth; noting with concern the situation of African youth, many of whom are marginalized from mainstream society through inequalities in income, wealth and power, unemployment and underemployment, infected and affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, living in situations of poverty and hunger, experiencing illiteracy and poor quality educational systems, restricted access to health services and to information, exposure to violence including gender violence, engaging in armed conflicts and experiencing various forms of discrimination; discovering that youth are partners, assets and a prerequisite for sustainable development and for the peace and prosperity of Africa with a unique contribution to make to the present and to future development; acknowledging the increasing calls and the enthusiasm of youth to actively participate at local, national, regional and international levels to determine their own development and the advancement of society at large including the call in Bamako (2005) by the youth organisations across Africa to empower youth by building their capacity, leadership, responsibilities and provide access to information such that they can take up their rightful place as active agents in decision-making and governance; and aligning our thoughts to the consciousness that the promotion and protection of the rights of youth also implies the performance of duties by youth as by all other actors in society; yet the absence of an institutionalized youth organ within the African Union has for far too long robbed the whole of Africa of the benefits obtainable from promising youths that form the fulcrum of its teeming population.

Policies have been made in the past, treaties and accords have been reached for far too long, but all of these have been fraught with inactions in the pursuit of an African Youth organ that would oversee the affairs of Africa’s tomorrow leaders as obtainable in other continents of the world. Now is the moment of extraordinary promise for Africa. It is time to give birth to a new Africa through the instrumentality of youths. This can be done by establishing an African Youth organ within the African Union; and from this point onwards ‘history is on the move’. This proposal gives a sublime exposition of the need for an African youth organ within the administrative confines of the African Union. It clearly expounds the endless challenges constantly being faced by African youths in the absence of an administrative backbone for their activities within the AU. A succinct exposure of the various benefits and more are some of the basic ideals of this proposal.

The current generation of youth represents more than 18% of the world’s population. As well as being the best educated generation so far, they are ambitious, flexible and best able to adapt to changing realities. Considering their energy, creativity and networking capacity, youth have a significant potential of contributing towards national development and addressing the social implications of the current crises. At the same time, it is these current crises that further aggravate

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existing challenges: access to basic services, enjoyment of human rights, education and employment opportunities.

As the United Nations World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and beyond is becoming increasingly important and ascertaining the fact that ten priority areas identified for youth (education, employment, hunger and poverty, health, environment, drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, leisure-time activities, girls and young women and youth participating in decision-making), and the five additional areas (HIV/AIDS, ICT, Intergenerational dialogue,..) adopted at the 2005 UN General assembly; while taking into full consideration the inter-relatedness of the challenges facing youth and the need for cross-sectoral policies and programmes that attend to the needs of youth in a holistic manner; it is therefore becoming more pertinent than ever to establish a youth organ within the administrative framework of the AU. Of course, the African Charter of 2006 in The Gambia may have been passed and signed by several member-nations, but the administrative machinery required to fulfil the basic ideals enumerated in that charter have for far too long been a mirage than a reality. To this end, this proposal underscores the potential structural framework that can be adopted in the establishment of this youth organ within the AU. This proposal also gives an insight into global reports on youths across Africa and beyond, while expounding the reasons for the creation of a youth organ in the United Nations which hitherto has been a tremendous success towards bringing the best out of youths globally. Finally, this proposal highlights the unique aspects of youth development in various regions but emphasizes that young people the world over are ultimately constrained in their efforts to contribute to their own development and that of their communities by the absence of adequate opportunities to participate fully in the broader process of development. Priority must be given to enhancing the role of youth in all areas of social and economic development; this not only benefits young people themselves, but also fosters a sense of community and promotes national and international development.

**OBSTACLES AND CHALLENGES CONSTANTLY FACED BY THE AFRICAN YOUTHS**

The current generation of youth represents more than 18% of the world’s population. As well as being the best educated generation so far, they are ambitious, flexible and best able to adapt to changing realities. Considering their energy, creativity and networking capacity, youth have a significant potential of contributing towards national development and addressing the social implications of the current crises. At the same time, it is these current crises that further aggravate existing challenges: access to basic services, enjoyment of human rights, education and employment opportunities, and socio-economic integration are some of the key issues that inflict upon youth development. Over 200 million youth live on less than US $1 a day, 160 million are undernourished, 130 million are illiterate, more than 10 million live with HIV/AIDS, 88 million are unemployed and young women continue to face barriers in many areas of development.

It is a glooming fact that youths constitute a major share of Africa’s population (20.4% or close to 198 million people aged 15-24 years old and over 30%, aged 15-35 years old based on the definition used by the African Union), youth are, on average, better connected to the rest of the world than any of the earlier generations of youth in the region.

**SIGNIFICANT CONSTRAINTS TO EFFECTIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA**

In Africa today, young people face many obstacles in their transition from childhood to adulthood. In many parts of the world, lack of access to education, unemployment and the scourge of HIV/AIDS exacerbate these difficulties. For boys and girls growing up in conflict situations, the challenges are even greater, as violent conflict impacts negatively on all dimensions of their lives. At the same time, feelings of exclusion can contribute to the emergence or continuation of violence. These challenges cannot be ignored. Young people are growing in numbers across the world and, in many developing countries, they make up the majority of the population. Our effectiveness as development actors depends on our capacity to understand the complexity of youth in the broader context of their societies. Too often, young people are seen as a source of problems, yet their multiple roles in society and their potential to act as agents of change towards peace and development are vitally important.
Challenges are perpetual especially in the life of young Africans who are confronted by the harsh realities of globalization and other forms of ‘civilization’. The approach to these challenges matters much and can turn what is seemingly negative into a strength. An African youth has a lot of issues to contend with while fighting to stand his ground. Basically, these challenges are summed up in the fight to live up to the expectations of the family, society and above all his/her own goals.

Despite this progress, significant constraints to effective youth development persist as they relate to the region’s most acute challenges. In the 80s, it was a common knowledge that an average African youth in Nigeria for instance can compete favorably or even more in technical areas and in exercise of intellectual capital with youths in Europe, Asia and America, but right now, they have badly been outpaced. Too often, the formative years of African youths are characterized by exposure to deep-seated poverty, deficiencies in basic services, limited access to education, health care, opportunities for decent employment, poor governance and ongoing conflict and war. Compared to other world regions, literacy and secondary school enrolment rates are still very low (e.g. the literacy rate in sub-Saharan Africa where only 72.1% of the youth population are literate, whereas in Asia it is 86.5% and in Latin America 96%6) while access to post-primary education remains limited in many contexts. Sub-Saharan Africa is home to 3 in 10 youths living on less than US $1 per day. Youth make up 37% of the working-age population, but 60% of the total unemployed2, while access to ICT and to IT skills training remains limited.3 Several key challenges are enlisted forthwith;

- **EDUCATION**

Many factors account for the inability of youth to complete education in Africa. Foremost among these reasons is the cost of schooling, including non-tuition costs such as uniforms, books and transportation. The poor quality of the education system may also account for high repetition and low completion rates. In the mid-1990s, for example, more than 70 per cent of primary school teachers in Burkina Faso had no professional qualification. This has serious implications for the quality of education received by young people graduating from primary school. For girls, low enrolment rates are due to persistent gender inequalities in access to schooling, especially at the tertiary level. Young women in Africa are therefore more likely to face a difficult transition into the workplace and into independent adulthood. This, in turn, contributes to their exclusion from decision-making, even about issues that affect their personal lives. In recent years, there has been some improvement in access to education. Between 1991 and 2004, tertiary enrolment in the region nearly doubled, in part owing to increased investment and economic recovery in a number of countries. Nevertheless, one out of every 16 students from the region is pursuing tertiary education abroad because of the limited opportunities for quality education at home.

Young people's inability to continue their education and their need to earn an income to a large extent accounts for the many young people seeking work. The formal labour market in Africa is still small, however, and remains inaccessible to youth who lack adequate skills, experience and strong social networks. Because of the limited vacancies in the job market, the number of unemployed youth in all of Africa grew by about 34 per cent between 1995 and 2005. As the fastest growing labour force in the world, youths in Africa will be increasingly difficult to accommodate in the labour market in the future if appropriate employment policies are not instituted in the next few years. These challenges are rife and for far too many years have confronted Africa, but has been met with unforgivable inactions. This is a challenge to be waged by the emergence of youth organ in the adminstrative framework of African Union. History is on the move.

By reason of age and maturity, youths, especially graduates, are faced with a precarious reality. This reality dawns of them as they take charge of their responsibilities after leaving the comfort of home. Fear of unemployment pips an average African youth the minute he/she understands the world. It is even worse if they have neither godfather nor guidance. It is saddening that the youths who are no longer seen as a sign of hope, have turned into a source of despair and became a threat – a “lost

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2 “Youth and Employment in Africa: The Potential, the Problem, the Promise”, World Bank 2008/2009.
generation”. Not only are young people in Africa losing their prestigious status that nationalism gave them in its ascending phase, but they no longer represent the national priority. This loss in status is reflected in the collapse of the institution of education. Excluded from the arenas of power, work, education, and leisure, young Africans construct places of socialisation and new sociabilities whose function is to show their difference, either on the margins of society or at its heart, simultaneously as victims and active agents, and circulating in a geography that escapes the limits of national territories.

- **HIV AIDS**

Young people in sub-Saharan Africa face serious health concerns relating both to infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria and to non-communicable conditions such as injuries, mental illness and environmental risks. Large numbers of the current cohort of 15- to 35-year-olds in Africa have likely experienced malnutrition and/or were exposed to diseases such as pneumonia, malaria, diarrhoea or measles as children. According to health surveys for the period 1988-1999, between 30 and 40 per cent of the children in sub-Saharan Africa experienced stunting due to chronic undernutrition. Without proactive health care, many of the children and youth in sub-Saharan Africa today will be susceptible to reduced longevity, lower educational achievement, weakened immune systems and, ultimately, the replication of these conditions in the next generation. In addition to lacking quality education and decent work opportunities, young people in sub-Saharan Africa also face serious health problems. The number of new HIV/AIDS cases in Africa continues to grow and is rising faster than treatment services are being scaled up. Estimates suggest that young women’s HIV prevalence rates are twice as high as those for young men. HIV/AIDS has also had a major impact on other age groups, with repercussions for youth. For example, the high morbidity and mortality caused by the epidemic are also affecting the availability of teachers. While HIV/AIDS has been devastating to Africa’s youth, there are other causes for concern. Some of the leading causes of death for those aged 15 to 29 years of age in the region are tuberculosis, malaria, unsafe abortion and road traffic accidents, as well as war and violence. Among the 10 million youth currently living with HIV/AIDS worldwide, more than 60% (6.2 million) are in Africa; over 12 million youth have been orphaned by HIV/AIDS in Africa, leading to the creation of hundreds of thousands of children and youth-headed households. Many more such household have been created by armed conflict: the period 1990-2000 alone saw 19 major armed conflicts in Africa in which youth have been both victims and perpetrators of violence. Also, African youth do not benefit in an equal manner from the opportunities created by globalization in terms of growth and real development. These challenges are even more severe for particular sub-groups within the youth cohort, including girls and young women, youth with disabilities, those living in rural areas or regions suffering from ongoing conflict and those affected by HIV/AIDS.

- **ARMED CONFLICTS**

The region has experienced many armed conflicts over the past decade, which has had both direct and indirect consequences for youth. Youth have not only been among the victims of violence; they have also frequently been recruited into the militias and armies that have perpetrated violence. In a culture where youth often have no voice and no opportunities to develop, recruitment into militias has been easy, especially when it comes with the promise of some meagre remuneration or power. There have also been indirect consequences resulting from armed conflict, including the displacement of populations, the breakdown of health and social services and the heightened risk of disease transmission. In combination with poverty, such conflict has deepened the alienation of young people from society and has hampered their ability to participate fully in development, even after the cessation of hostilities. Indeed, Africa is not a crude caricature of a continent in perpetual war. These endless conflicts are a milestone around Africa’s neck. The youths are the worst hit in

these circumstances as vast majority of youths across Africa and children are enlisted as military combatants. It is the death sentence of a society to force children and youths to kill in wars. It is the ultimate mark of criminality and cowardice to condemn women to relentless rape. Africa's diversity should be a source of strength and not a cause for division. We are all God's children and we all share common aspirations to live in peace and security, to access education and opportunity, to love our families and our communities and our faith. That is our common humanity, and that is the ingredient that has been missing in far too many places in Africa and for far too long. This proposal expounds the miraculous impact that the establishment of an African Youth organ on some of the societal vices that have accosted African youths for far too long.

- **HOSTILE ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT**

Youth in Africa today are on the cusp of a transition to lower fertility and population growth rates in the region. They were born between the early 1980s and early 1990s, which was the beginning of a period of incipient decline in fertility rates and in annual population growth rates in the region. In many parts of sub-Saharan Africa, the first notable decline in fertility rates was registered in the early to mid-1980s, when many of today's youth were born. The young people of today have grown up in smaller families; their parents were among the first in the region to have improved access to modern methods of contraception, and the declines in fertility suggest that many used these opportunities to limit their fertility. This ostensibly opened up avenues for the children of that era, who are today's youth, to benefit from higher allocations of household resources. However, economic difficulties arising from a combination of factors, including the global economic recession of the 1980s, domestic political and management difficulties, and prolonged droughts in many parts of the region, resulted in high levels of individual and national poverty. Therefore, between 1983 and 1992, when most of today's youth were born, the majority of sub-Saharan African countries experienced major social and economic setbacks. Investment in key areas of health and education suffered. Though fertility rates had begun to change in the 1980s, Governments still had to contend with the demands associated with the momentum and pressure created by the large birth cohorts of previous generations. These and other developments set the stage for major macroeconomic difficulties at the national level; the measures taken to promote recovery, including structural and sectoral adjustment policies that called for cost recovery in the social sectors, had equally devastating effects on young people and their families. Constraints to youth participation in African society are therefore not simply related to young people's lack of effort or disinterestedness, but to a complex interaction of household, national and global economic and social forces that impinge on their welfare.

- **UNEMPLOYMENT**

Shortages of decent jobs, low wages, a mismatch of skills and labour market needs, and socio-economic exclusion constrain the transition from school-to-work in most Africa countries. Young women, in particular, face numerous difficulties as the intersecting influences of gender and age limit the avenues for their economic participation. This proposal therefore examines progress and constraints in youth development in the countries in Africa, with a focus on employment opportunities and related gender aspects. Unemployment in most African countries is primarily a youth issue rather than a generalized population issue. Despite the fact that young people represent only about one third of the total working-age population, they account for almost half of all unemployed people in the continent. The current labour market situation has evolved over many decades and is a result of a combination of demographic, social, economic, political and cultural factors. The continent's population more than tripled from 1960 to 2005, and between 1995 and 2005 the youth labour force grew by 30 per cent. The continent is the only one in the world in which the share of youth who are employed has increased over the past decade. However, since not enough new jobs were created in either the public or private sectors to accommodate the entering young job seekers, unemployment rates soared and eventually led many young people to drop out of the labour force entirely. Consequently, the continent now holds the distinction of having both the highest rate of youth unemployment in the world and the lowest rate of youth labour force participation (40 per cent), especially for young women (25 percent). It also has the lowest youth employment-to-population rate (29.7 per cent) in the world. This means that only one in three young people in the continent has a job.
POVERTY

Youth are, and will remain, a significant share of Africa’s population for many years to come. The failure to provide opportunities for this large generation could have enormous economic, cultural, political and social consequences. Engaging youth fully in the region’s development is thus not a matter of choice, but rather an imperative. The emergence of an African youth organ within the administrative confines of African Union would address the problems occasioned by poverty and the devastating effects it has on youth development in Africa. Between 1983 and 1992, when most of today’s youth were born, the majority of African countries suffered major social and economic setbacks. The measures taken to promote recovery, including structural adjustment and liberalization policies, resulted in major retrenchment and job losses and the withdrawal of State subsidies for social services. Many households experienced extreme difficulty in accessing basic goods and services, including those needed to support the education and health of their children, today’s generation of youth. The percentage of youth who live in poverty continues to be extremely high in Africa. It is estimated, for example, that over 90 per cent of Nigerian and Zambian youth (almost 40 million) live on less than US $2 per day. Non-monetary dimensions of poverty, such as nutritional deprivation, as well as the lack of electricity and access to water, also affect large segments of the region’s youth population. The importance of basic household facilities cannot be overemphasized. In the absence of water in the household, youth, especially girls, are often responsible for fetching water not only for their own households, but also for others. This detracts from self-development and involves risks of exploitation. Moreover, access to electricity is fundamental to benefiting from modern technologies such as computers, which not only facilitate communication but may also offer distance-learning opportunities for youth. Poverty which has a firm grip on the African setting and society since its inception has to be forgotten. People no longer consider talents and jobs satisfaction when choosing jobs, but can trade anything for a well paid job, usually outside their areas of specialization. For many young Africans, ‘youth’ is not serving as a transitional phase to a more established social status, but is an enduring limbo. This is a source of tremendous frustration.

Talk of Africa and talk of extended family. Family pressures rear their heads and you deal with the fact that you do not run alone but pull others along with you. Opposites attract each other, says the magnetic law, so you can’t run away from relationships. These days, one is left to wonder if it is all about money or if fidelity is archaic. For those who manage to scale through the high cost that sometimes spurs an end to most engagements they are the lucky ones. You finally settle down and those who were asleep when you toiled decided to wake up on your account. Those who are to help in the disguise of their uniform rob you the more. Fear of the known and the fear for the unknown are part of being an African. Many of Africa’s youth are caught up in situations of armed conflict; even some very young children have become bearers of armed embroiled in the civil wars that have disrupted millions of lives on this continent.

Globalization has significantly changed the values and culture of youth, who more readily challenge traditional authority structures, but also experience disorientation and anomie caused by the day-to-day clashes between traditional and modern values and norms. Changing family structures have eroded many of the traditional constraints imposed on young people, but at a cost. The support systems on which they previously relied in times of difficulty have weakened. This has contributed to the emergence of lifestyles that place many young people at risk.

In view of the demographic and socio-economic realities in the region, African Governments are increasingly putting in place national youth policies aimed at supporting the well-being of young people. However, much remains to be done to advance a comprehensive approach to youth development. Intergenerational partnerships need to be strengthened and programmes undertaken that address the full range of priorities contained in the World Programme of Action for Youth. In addition to benefiting from Government policies, youths in Africa are also increasingly taking their development into their own hands; the recent African Youth Charter is a testament to their effort. They are more and more involved in voluntary activities that promote both the development of their own potential and that of their communities. However, it is a lesson in shame that despite the statutory foundation already created by the African Youth charter, much is yet to be done in area of
implementation of the ideals upon which the African Youth Charter was founded as a result of the absence of an established African Youth organ within the AU.

ENSURING YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA THROUGH THE CREATION OF AFRICAN YOUTH ORGAN IN AU

As far reaching as these challenges may be, many youths in Africa are determined to succeed and are using varied approaches to ensure their “survival.” Some are staying in school longer; others are dropping out of school to work and earn an income. Some are joining the informal economy or setting up private businesses; others opt to migrate in search of greener pastures. It is clear from these actions that youth are not a passive group waiting for resources and opportunities to be handed to them. In all regions, they want to make a better life for themselves. However, lack of adequate investments in youth, challenges related to globalization, and other changes in the world economy, as well as social and cultural constraints, have often combined to create unfavourable contexts for youth development and participation. An enabling environment for youth development and participation is urgently needed if youth are to attain their full potential and contribute to national development. Given the large youth share of the global population, especially in less developed regions, the failure to ensure that young people have access to resources and opportunities for health maintenance, education, leisure and volunteer activities, poverty reduction, employment, and the protection of the rights of girls and young women will derail future national and global development. The similarities in the core challenges in youth development across regions suggest that there may be some common approaches to addressing these problems. The United Nations have taken the lead in solving these youth challenges through the institution of its youth organ within its organization, which has hitherto achieved tremendous results in these areas of youth challenges. Following the foundation built by the UN, the African Union can achieve similar results if the ideals of these proposals are properly considered and implemented. Youth development is incomplete if young people are not given a chance to participate in society. Youth must also be engaged in all aspects of policy and programme development. The key to ensuring that today’s young people’s transitions are completed successfully and that they become responsible and productive adult members of their communities lies in enabling them to develop themselves while having opportunities to contribute to society on an equal basis.

Although the size of the youth population in sub-Saharan Africa presents major challenges to Governments in the region, the opportunity for countries to reap a dividend from the large numbers of people in the labour force cannot be overlooked. It has been emphasized in this connection that, to fully reap the demographic dividend, options must be provided for broadening opportunities to enable young people to develop skills and to use them productively; young people should be given the assistance they need to acquire the capabilities to make good decisions in pursuing those opportunities, and second chances should be offered to those who need to recover from decisions that have negatively affected their development. There is little doubt that youth transitions in sub-Saharan Africa have been affected by the lack of capabilities and skills among young people. A majority of youth in Africa today have completed more years of schooling than their parents did but have limited opportunities in employment and other areas of development participation. Although developing capabilities and skills is undeniably important, it is also vital to address the socio-political and economic environments that have affected youth development in the region and to provide second chances to those who may have fallen through the cracks of the structural and sectoral policy shifts that defined the childhood of many of today’s youth.

OVERCOMING THESE CHALLENGES: THE EXPEDIENCE OF AFRICAN YOUTH ORGAN IN THE AU WITH SUPPORT FROM NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS AND STAKEHOLDERS

After decades of major youth development challenges in sub-Saharan Africa, the tide has begun to turn. Governments are increasingly recognizing the importance of building youth capacities so that young people can contribute meaningfully to national development. More and more, young people are being viewed as having a major role to play, and Governments, in conjunction with youth-led organizations and other civil society institutions, are beginning to devise and implement new sets of
youth development policies and strategies that, unlike those of the mid-twentieth century, reflect the perspectives and collaboration of adults and young people. Regional development and cooperation initiatives also include emphasis on youth development goals. Young people in sub-Saharan Africa are becoming increasingly involved in voluntary activities that promote the development of their own potential and that of their communities. Opportunities such as these give youth the chance to gain labour market skills while also contributing to national and community development. At the regional level, the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), with its vision of eradicating poverty and promoting sustainable growth and development on the continent, recognizes the key role that young people should play in socio-economic development and the promotion of peace and security. Adopted as the economic programme of the African Union, NEPAD has become a tool for achieving good governance and a criterion for assessing the performance of African Governments within this context. NEPAD provides an advisor and a “youth desk” that offer direct entry points for young Africans wishing to participate in the new development framework for Africa. Young people are contributing to the peer review mechanism process designed to strengthen the implementation of NEPAD; the African Youth Parliament is working to ensure that youth are meaningfully involved in this process. The African Union recognizes that “Africa’s future cannot be mapped out, and the African Union’s mission fulfilled, without effectively addressing youth development, empowerment and the preparation of young people for leadership and the fulfilment of their potential.”

**IMPORTANCE/BENEFITS OF AFRICAN YOUTH ORGAN WITHIN THE CONFINES OF THE AU ADMINISTRATIVE SETUP**

Despite the fact that the African Youth Charter has entered into force since 18 August 2009, large youth audiences are not informed of its content or its potential impact on their lives and the lives of their communities, whereas governments do not have the capacity to address its implications in terms of policy reform. The emergence of an African Youth organ within the administrative structure of the AU like other organs would among other things:

- Guarantee the participation of youth in parliament and other decision-making bodies in accordance with the prescribed laws;

- Facilitate the creation or strengthening of platforms for youth participation in decision-making at local, national, regional, and continental levels of governance;

- Ensure equal access to young men and young women to participate in decisionmaking and in fulfilling civic duties;

- Give priority to policies and programmes including youth advocacy and peer-to-peer programmes for marginalised youth, such as out-of-school and out-of-work, to offer them the opportunity and motivation to re-integrate into mainstream society;

- Provide access to information such that young people become aware of their rights and of opportunities to participate in decision-making and civic life;

- Institute measures to professionalize youth work and introduce relevant training programmes in higher education and other such training institutions;

- Provide technical and financial support to build the institutional capacity of youth organisations;

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9 (African Union, 2006).
- Institute policy and programmes of youth voluntarism at local, national, regional and international levels as an important form of youth participation and as a means of peer-to-peer training;

- Contributing its quota in peaceful resolution towards advancing the frontiers of peace.

- Provide access to information and services that will empower youth to become aware of their rights and responsibilities;

- Include youth representatives as part of delegations to ordinary sessions and other relevant meetings to broaden channels of communication and enhance the discussion of youth-related issues.

- Promote youth civic engagement in Africa to empower youth as agents of peace and key actors in their communities, to assist them in making successful transitions from school to the workplace and to prevent violence.

- Develop a shared vision for coherent action with key partners in the region and therefore provides a solid basis for forging global alliances.

- Present an opportunity to convene key stakeholders in identifying and addressing the challenges facing youth in Africa, as well as anticipating future challenges.

- Promote policy dialogue initiatives among governments, academia, youth and development partners to translate research into policy options.

- Will seek to address these challenges, by raising awareness of the Charter and by providing technical assistance to the African Governments for its dissemination and implementation.

- Provide a fundamental framework for the development of policy responses affecting youth in Africa.

- Focus on fostering an inclusive and democratic representation of youth concerns, as well as supporting youth-led action at community level.

- Promote the establishment of democratic, representative and inclusive National Youth Councils in Africa.

- Focus on the transition from school to the workplace by seeking to establish a Fund to support youth social entrepreneurship as a means for youth to acquire the necessary skills to become economic entrepreneurs.

- Establish an administrative mouthpiece for the youths in Africa within the organs of the African Union

- Enhance proper and adequate implementation of the policies and ideals in the African Youth Charter.

- Provide a basic platform for youths in Africa to air their views as stakeholders within the African Union

- Integrate youth concerns in the development agenda at national, regional and continental level within the administrative structure of African Union.

- Translate youth policy commitments into concrete actions addresses youth issues, particularly violence among youth and other issues affecting the welfare of youth, especially youth in rural areas and marginalized groups as well as unemployed youth in Africa.
- Promote youth participation in the identification of an agenda for youth, in decision-making processes and in the elaboration of youth policies.

- Encourage the contribution of African youth to the process of regional integration, to democracy, a culture of peace and human rights.

- Support the socio-professional integration of youth in urban and rural communities, namely through education and youth entrepreneurship.

**PROPOSED LEGAL FRAMEWORK/STRUCTURE/ GENERAL WORKING MODALITIES OF THE AFRICAN YOUTH ORGAN**

The proposed African Youth Organ could adopt a legal framework similar to the African Youth Charter but with marked distinctions due to administrative involvements and procedures in line with the structure of the African Union itself. It could take this form;

**PREAMBLE**

- **GUIDED** by the Constitutive Act of the African Union, the States Parties to the present “African Youth Charter”;

- **GUIDED** by the vision, hopes and aspirations of the African Union, inclusive of Africa’s integration, the inherent dignity and inalienable rights afforded to all members of the human family as set out in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (1976) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1976), and articulated for the African peoples through the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights (1986);

- **RECALLING** the resolution of the Heads of State and government during the 1999 Algiers Summit for the development of the Pan-African Charter;

- **FULLY ATTACHED** to the virtues and values of African historical tradition and civilization which form the foundation for our concept of people’s rights;

- **RECALLING** the historic injustices imposed on Africa such as slavery, colonization, depletion of natural resources and taking into account the firm will of African peoples for self-determination and the economic integration of Africa;

- **CONVINCED** that Africa’s greatest resource is its youthful population and that through their active and full participation, Africans can surmount the difficulties that lie ahead;

- **BEARING IN MIND** the international Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979) and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights relating to the Rights of Women in Africa (2003) and the progress achieved in eliminating gender discrimination, but ever cognisant of the obstacles that still prevent girls and women from fully participating in African society;

- **REAFFIRMING** the need to take appropriate measures to promote and protect the rights and welfare of children as outlined in the Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989) and through the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1999),

- **ACKNOWLEDGING** the commitments already made towards the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and inviting the partners to reaffirm their support to advance the well-being of youth;
- **RECOGNISING** the efforts made by States Parties and civil societies to address the economic, social, educational, cultural and spiritual needs of youth;

- **NOTING** with concern the situation of African youth, many of whom are marginalized from mainstream society through inequalities in income, wealth and power, unemployment and underemployment, infected and affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, living in situations of poverty and hunger, experiencing illiteracy and poor quality educational systems, restricted access to health services and to information, exposure to violence including gender violence, engaging in armed conflicts and experiencing various forms of discrimination;

- **RECALLING** the United Nations World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and beyond and the ten priority areas identified for youth (education, employment, hunger and poverty, health, environment, drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, leisure-time activities, girls and young women and youth participating in decision-making), and the five additional areas (HIV/AIDS, ICT, Intergenerational dialogue,..) adopted at the 2005 UN General assembly;

- **RECOGNISING** that youth are partners, assets and a prerequisite for sustainable development and for the peace and prosperity of Africa with a unique contribution to make to the present and to future development;

- **CONSIDERING** the role that youth have played in the process of decolonisation, the struggle against apartheid and more recently in its efforts to encourage the development and to promote the democratic processes on the African Continent;

- **REAFFIRMING** that the continuous cultural development of Africa rests with its youth and therefore requires their active and enlightened participation as espoused in the Cultural Charter for Africa ;

- **GUIDED** by the New Partnership for Africa’s Development Strategic Framework for Youth Programme of 2004 that is working towards youth empowerment and development;

- **ACKNOWLEDGING** the increasing calls and the enthusiasm of youth to actively participate at local, national, regional and international levels to determine their own development and the advancement of society at large;

- **ACKNOWLEDGING ALSO** the call in Bamako (2005) by the youth organisations across Africa to empower youth by building their capacity, leadership, responsibilities and provide access to information such that they can take up their rightful place as active agents in decision-making and governance;

- **TAKING INTO CONSIDERATION** the inter-relatedness of the challenges facing youth and the need for cross-sectoral policies and programmes that attend to the needs of youth in a holistic manner;

- **CONSIDERING** that the promotion and protection of the rights of youth also implies the performance of duties by youth as by all other actors in society;

- **TAKING INTO CONSIDERATION** the needs and aspirations of young displaced persons, refugees and youth with special needs;

HAVE AGREED AS FOLLOWS:

**PART ONE**

**THE ORGAN AND ITS OBJECTIVES**

1. **DEFINITION**
The African Youth Organ shall be in charge of all matters relating to the interest of youths across Africa and shall utilize the various services and facilities existing in African countries to promote youth development and active participation in governance. The Institute shall consist of a central planning and co-ordinating unit and those existing institutions and facilities throughout the African region shall form the decentralised branches of the AYO.

2. ESTABLISHMENT

An organ to be known as the African Youth Organ (hereinafter referred to as the organ) is hereby established by this Agreement. It shall be governed in accordance with the provisions of this Agreement.

3. OBLIGATIONS OF PARTIES

- States Parties of the African Union to the present Agreement shall recognize the rights, freedoms and duties enshrined in this Treaty.

- State Parties shall undertake the necessary steps, in accordance with their Constitutional processes and with the provisions of the present Agreement, to adopt such legislative or other measures that may be necessary to give effect to the provisions of the Agreement.

4. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE AFRICAN YOUTH ORGAN

The aims and objectives of the African Youth Organ shall among other things include;

- Guarantee the participation of youth in parliament and other decision-making bodies in accordance with the prescribed laws;

- Facilitate the creation or strengthening of platforms for youth participation in decision-making at local, national, regional, and continental levels of governance;

- Ensure equal access to young men and young women to participate in decisionmaking and in fulfilling civic duties;

- Give priority to policies and programmes including youth advocacy and peer-to-peer programmes for marginalised youth, such as out-of-school and out-of-work, to offer them the opportunity and motivation to re-integrate into mainstream society;

- Provide access to information such that young people become aware of their rights and of opportunities to participate in decision-making and civic life;

- Institute measures to professionalize youth work and introduce relevant training programmes in higher education and other such training institutions;

- Provide technical and financial support to build the institutional capacity of youth organisations;

- Institute policy and programmes of youth voluntarism at local, national, regional and international levels as an important form of youth participation and as a means of peer-to-peer training;

- Contributing its quota in peaceful resolution towards advancing the frontiers of peace.

- Provide access to information and services that will empower youth to become aware of their rights and responsibilities;

- Include youth representatives as part of delegations to ordinary sessions and other relevant meetings to broaden channels of communication and enhance the discussion of youth-related issues.
- Promote youth civic engagement in Africa to empower youth as agents of peace and key actors in their communities, to assist them in making successful transitions from school to the workplace and to prevent violence.

- Develop a shared vision for coherent action with key partners in the region and therefore provides a solid basis for forging global alliances.

- Present an opportunity to convene key stakeholders in identifying and addressing the challenges facing youth in Africa, as well as anticipating future challenges.

- Promote policy dialogue initiatives among governments, academia, youth and development partners to translate research into policy options.

- Will seek to address these challenges, by raising awareness of the Charter and by providing technical assistance to the African Governments for its dissemination and implementation.

- Provide a fundamental framework for the development of policy responses affecting youth in Africa.

- Focus on fostering an inclusive and democratic representation of youth concerns, as well as supporting youth-led action at community level.

- Promote the establishment of democratic, representative and inclusive National Youth Councils in Africa.

- Focus on the transition from school to the workplace by seeking to establish a Fund to support youth social entrepreneurship as a means for youth to acquire the necessary skills to become economic entrepreneurs.

- Establish an administrative mouthpiece for the youths in Africa within the organs of the African Union.

- Enhance proper and adequate implementation of the policies and ideals in the African Youth Charter.

- Provide a basic platform for youths in Africa to air their views as stakeholders within the African Union.

- Integrate youth concerns in the development agenda at national, regional and continental level within the administrative structure of African Union.

- Translate youth policy commitments into concrete actions addresses youth issues, particularly violence among youth and other issues affecting the welfare of youth, especially youth in rural areas and marginalized groups as well as unemployed youth in Africa.

- Promote youth participation in the identification of an agenda for youth, in decision-making processes and in the elaboration of youth policies.

- Encourage the contribution of African youth to the process of regional integration, to democracy, a culture of peace and human rights.

- Support the socio-professional integration of youth in urban and rural communities, namely through education and youth entrepreneurship.

**PART TWO
POWERS, COMPOSITION, FUNCTIONS, STATUS OF THE AFRICAN YOUTH ORGAN**

5. The Assembly shall be the major youth organ of the Union. The Assembly shall be responsible for implementing the youth policies and objectives of the Union. To this end, it shall:
(a) Determine the general youth policies and major guidelines of the Union, and give directives, coordinate and harmonize them in line with youth policies of Member States;

(b) Take any action, under this Agreement, to attain the youth objectives of the Union;

(c) Oversee the functioning of various African youth bodies as well as the follow-up of the implementation their objectives;

(d) Prepare and adopt its rules of procedure;

(e) On the recommendation of the various Youth ministries across National governments in Africa, take decisions and give directives concerning youth development;

(f) In carrying out its function hereunder, exercise any other powers granted to it under this Treaty.

6. The organ shall comprise of two youth representative from each member state across Africa who would oversee the interest of youths in their respective countries. The organ shall be made up of youths within the age of 15 - 35 who have distinguished themselves in proactive youth development activities in their respective countries to serve as representatives of youths in their respective countries at the administrative setup of the African Union.

7. The functions of the African youth organ shall include;

- Implementing all the ideals inherent in the African Youth Charter
- Preparing development projects and programmes of the Union and submit it to the Executive Council for approval;
- Ensuring the supervision, follow-up and the evaluation of the implementation of decisions taken by the organs of the Union in respect of matters concerning youths;
- Carrying out any other functions assigned to it for the purpose of ensuring the implementation of the provisions of the Constitutive Act of African Union.
- Guaranteeing the participation of youth in parliament and other decision-making bodies in accordance with the prescribed laws;
- Facilitating the creation or strengthening of platforms for youth participation in decision-making at local, national, regional, and continental levels of governance;
- Ensuring equal access to young men and young women to participate in decisionmaking and in fulfilling civic duties;
- Giving priority to policies and programmes including youth advocacy and peer-to-peer programmes for marginalised youth, such as out-of-school and out-of-work, to offer them the opportunity and motivation to re-integrate into mainstream society;
- Providing access to information such that young people become aware of their rights and of opportunities to participate in decision-making and civic life;
- Instituting measures to professionalize youth work and introduce relevant training programmes in higher education and other such training institutions;
- Providing technical and financial support to build the institutional capacity of youth organisations;
- Instituting policy and programmes of youth voluntarism at local, national, regional and international levels as an important form of youth participation and as a means of peer-to-peer training;
- Contributing its quota in peaceful resolution towards advancing the frontiers of peace.

- Providing access to information and services that will empower youth to become aware of their rights and responsibilities;

- Including youth representatives as part of delegations to ordinary sessions and other relevant meetings to broaden channels of communication and enhance the discussion of youth-related issues.

- Promoting youth civic engagement in Africa to empower youth as agents of peace and key actors in their communities, to assist them in making successful transitions from school to the workplace and to prevent violence.

- Developing a shared vision for coherent action with key partners in the region and therefore provides a solid basis for forging global alliances.

- Presenting an opportunity to convene key stakeholders in identifying and addressing the challenges facing youth in Africa, as well as anticipating future challenges.

- Promoting policy dialogue initiatives among governments, academia, youth and development partners to translate research into policy options.

- Seeking to address these challenges, by raising awareness of the Charter and by providing technical assistance to the African Governments for its dissemination and implementation.

- Providing a fundamental framework for the development of policy responses affecting youth in Africa.

- Focusing on fostering an inclusive and democratic representation of youth concerns, as well as supporting youth-led action at community level.

- Promoting the establishment of democratic, representative and inclusive National Youth Councils in Africa.

- Focusing on the transition from school to the workplace by seeking to establish a Fund to support youth social entrepreneurship as a means for youth to acquire the necessary skills to become economic entrepreneurs.

- Establishing an administrative mouthpiece for the youths in Africa within the organs of the African Union

- Enhancing proper and adequate implementation of the policies and ideals in the African Youth Charter.

- Providing a basic platform for youths in Africa to air their views as stakeholders within the African Union

- Integrating youth concerns in the development agenda at national, regional and continental level within the administrative structure of African Union.

- Translating youth policy commitments into concrete actions addresses youth issues, particularly violence among youth and other issues affecting the welfare of youth, especially youth in rural areas and marginalized groups as well as unemployed youth in Africa.

- Promoting youth participation in the identification of an agenda for youth, in decision-making processes and in the elaboration of youth policies.

- Encouraging the contribution of African youth to the process of regional integration, to democracy, a culture of peace and human rights.
- Supporting the socio-professional integration of youth in urban and rural communities, namely through education and youth entrepreneurship.

8. The organ shall be the administrative framework for youth across Africa to air their views through their representatives.

PART THREE
APPOINTMENTS

9. Appointments into the office of youth representatives shall be done by renowned experts in youth development and activities from individual National governments. A person who is to be appointed must have distinguished himself/herself in the area of youth development with visible proactive youth activities in his resident country.

PART FOUR
GENERAL UNDERTAKINGS

10. Member States shall undertake to create favourable conditions for the development of youth bodies across Africa and the attainment of its objectives, particularly by harmonising their strategies and policies.

(a) They shall refrain from any unilateral action that may hinder the attainment of the said objectives.
(b) Each Member State shall, in accordance with its constitutional procedures, take all necessary measures to ensure the enactment and dissemination of such legislation as may be necessary for the implementation of the provisions of this agreement.
(c) Any Member State, which persistently fails to honour its general undertakings under this Agreement or fails to abide by the decisions or regulations of the Organ, may be subjected to sanctions by the Assembly upon the recommendation of the Organ. Such sanctions may include the suspension of the rights and privileges of membership and may be lifted by the Assembly upon the recommendation of the Organ.

PART FIVE
MEETINGS

11. The Council shall meet twice a year in Ordinary Session. One such Session shall precede the Ordinary Session of the Organ. An extra-ordinary Session may be convened by the Chairman of the Organ who shall be elected by member representatives or at the request of a Member State provided that such request is supported by two-thirds of the members of the Council.

PART SIX
DEVELOPMENT

12. Every young person shall have the right to social, economic, political and cultural development with due regard to their freedom and identity and in equal enjoyment of the common heritage of mankind.

(a) States Parties shall encourage youth organizations to lead youth programmes and to ensure the exercise of the right to development.
(b) States Parties shall encourage the media to disseminate information that will be of economic, political, social and cultural benefit to youth;
(c) promote the development of youth media for the dissemination of information to young people;
(d) encourage international co-operation in the production, exchange and dissemination of information from both national and international sources that are of economic, social and cultural value to youth;
(e) provide access to information and education and training for young people to learn their rights and responsibilities, to be schooled in democratic processes, citizenship, decision-making, governance and leadership such that they develop the technical skills and confidence to participate in these processes;

**PART SEVEN**

**YOUTH PARTICIPATION**

13. Every young person shall have the right to participate in all spheres of society.

(a) States Parties shall take the following measures to promote active youth participation in society:
(b) They shall guarantee the participation of youth in parliament and other decision-making bodies in accordance with the prescribed laws;
(c) Facilitate the creation or strengthening of platforms for youth participation in decision-making at local, national, regional, and continental levels of governance;
(d) Ensure equal access to young men and young women to participate in decision-making and in fulfilling civic duties;
(e) Give priority to policies and programmes including youth advocacy and peer-to-peer programmes for marginalised youth, such as out-of-school and out-of-work youth, to offer them the opportunity and motivation to re-integrate into mainstream society;
(f) Provide access to information such that young people become aware of their rights and opportunities to participate in decision-making and civic life;
(g) Institute measures to professionalize youth work and introduce relevant training programmes in higher education and other such training institutions;
(h) Provide technical and financial support to build the institutional capacity of youth organisations;
(i) Institute policy and programmes of youth voluntarism at local, national, regional and international levels as an important form of youth participation and as a means of peer-to-peer training.
(j) Provide access to information and services that will empower youth to become aware of their rights and responsibilities,
(k) Include youth representatives as part of delegations to ordinary sessions and other relevant meetings to broaden channels of communication and enhance the discussion of youth related issues.

**PART EIGHT**

**NATIONAL YOUTH POLICY**

14. Every State Parties shall develop a comprehensive and coherent national youth policy.

(a) The policy shall be cross-sectoral in nature considering the interrelatedness of the challenges facing young people;
(b) The development of a national youth policy shall be informed by extensive consultation with young people and cater for their active participation in decision-making at all levels of governance in issues concerning youth and society as a whole;
(c) A youth perspective shall be integrated and mainstreamed into all planning and decision-making as well as programme development. The appointment of youth focal points in government structures shall enable this process;
(d) Mechanisms to address these youth challenges shall be framed within the national development framework of the country;
(e) The policy shall provide guidelines on the definition of youth adopted and specify subgroups that shall be targeted for development;
The policy shall advocate equal opportunities for young men and for young women;
A baseline evaluation or situation analysis shall inform the policy on the priority issues for youth development; The policy shall be adopted by parliament and enacted into law;
A national youth coordinating mechanism shall be set up and shall provide a platform as well as serve as a linking agent for youth organisations to participate in youth policy development as well as the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of related programmes;
National programmes of action shall be developed that are time bound and that are connected to an implementation and evaluation strategy for which indicators shall be outlined;
Such a programme of action shall be accompanied by adequate and sustained budgetary allocation.

PART NINE
EDUCATION AND SKILLS

15. Every young person shall have the right to education of good quality.

(a) The value of multiple forms of education, including formal, non-formal, informal, distance learning and life-long learning, to meet the diverse needs of young people shall be embraced.
(b) The education of young people shall be directed to:
(i) The promotion and holistic development of the young person’s cognitive and creative and emotional abilities to their full potential;
(ii) Fostering respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms as set out in the provisions of the various African human and people’s rights and international human rights declarations and conventions;
(iii) Preparing young people for responsible lives in free societies that promote peace, understanding, tolerance, dialogue, mutual respect and friendship among all nations and across all groupings of people;
(iv) The preservation and strengthening of positive African morals, traditional values and cultures and the development of national and African identity and pride;
(v) The development of respect for the environment and natural resources;
(vi) The development of life skills to function effectively in society and include issues such as HIV/AIDS, reproductive health, substance abuse prevention and cultural practices that are harmful to the health of young girls and women as part of the education curricula;
(c) States Parties shall take all appropriate measures with a view to achieving full realisation of this right and shall, in particular:
(i) Provide free and compulsory basic education and take steps to minimise the indirect costs of education;
(ii) Make all forms of secondary education more readily available and accessible by all possible means including progressively free;
(d) Take steps to encourage regular school attendance and reduce drop-out rates;
(e) Strengthen participation in and the quality of training in science and technology;
(f) Revitalise vocational education and training relevant to current and prospective employment opportunities and expand access by developing centres in rural and remote areas;
(g) Make higher education equally accessible to all including establishing distance learning centres of excellence;
(h) Avail multiple access points for education and skills development including opportunities outside of mainstream educational institutions e.g., workplace skills development, distance learning, adult literacy and national youth service programmes;
(i) Ensure, where applicable, that girls and young women who become pregnant or married before completing their education shall have the opportunity to continue their education;
(j) Allocate resources to upgrade the quality of education delivered and ensure that it is relevant to the needs of contemporary society and engenders critical thinking rather than rote learning;
(k) Adopt pedagogy that incorporates the benefits of and trains young people in the use of modern information and communication technology such that youth are better prepared for the world of work;
(l) Encourage youth participation in community work as part of education to build a sense of civic duty;
(m) Introduce scholarship and bursary programmes to encourage entry into post-primary school education and into higher education outstanding youth from disadvantaged communities, especially young girls;
(n) Establish and encourage participation of all young men and young women in sport, cultural and recreational activities as part of holistic development;
(o) Promote culturally appropriate, age specific sexuality and responsible parenthood education;
(p) Promote the equivalence of degrees between African educational institutions to enable the youth to study and work in State Parties;

**PART TEN**

**POPULARIZATION OF THE ORGAN**

16. States Parties shall have the duty to promote and ensure through teaching, education and publication, the respect of rights, responsibilities and freedoms contained in the present Charter and to see to it that these freedoms, rights and responsibilities as well as corresponding obligations and duties are understood.

**PART ELEVEN**

**SAVINGS CLAUSE**

17. Nothing in this Charter shall be taken as minimising higher standards and values contained in other relevant human rights instruments ratified by States concerned or rational law or policies.

**PART ELEVEN**

**FINAL PROVISIONS**

**SIGNATURE, RATIFICATION AND ADHERENCE**

18. The present Charter shall be open to signature by all the Member States. The present Charter shall be subject to ratification or accession by Member States. The instrument of ratification or accession to the present Charter shall be deposited with the Chairperson of the Commission.

19. The present Charter shall come into force thirty (30) days after the deposit with the Chairperson of the Commission of the instruments of ratification of fifteen (15) Member States.

**SOME REPORTS ON YOUTH ACTIVITIES ACROSS AFRICA & THE WORLD**

- **BENIN: SCOUT VOLUNTEERS AGAINST HIV/AIDS**

The Ministry of Youth, Sports and Leisure of Benin has come up with an original and effective idea to help address the HIV/AIDS pandemic. It is tapping into an available pool of human resources through the Scout movement, an organization with the spirit of volunteering at its core. The programme focuses on building the skills of Scout leaders and young Scouts in planning and organizing education and sensitization sessions on HIV/AIDS, using radio programmes, workshops, meetings, and consultations for advocacy on HIV/AIDS. Trained Scout leaders now constitute a permanent pool of resource people in communication and training for youth against HIV/AIDS and can begin to spread the word to their Scouts, who in turn can sensitize other youth.

The programme aims at:

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11 Benin: Scout Volunteers against HIV/AIDS 106 Box 3.3
• Sensitizing thousands of young people to the danger of HIV/AIDS and how to prevent it;
• Making local Scout structures a potential reference point in the HIV/AIDS eradication process;
• Making every Scout an HIV/AIDS fighter.

The programme is implemented by the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Leisure in partnership with the Ministry of Health, through the National Programme Against AIDS, and is supported by UNDP and UNV. The programme is making inroads into mobilizing youth volunteering through scouting and contributing to reducing stigmatization among HIV/AIDS victims.

- **BURKINA FASO: VOLUNTEERS FOR DEVELOPMENT**

How does a country get its youth to take voluntary action for development when the tradition of volunteering itself needs to be revitalized? This is a challenge that the Government of Burkina Faso is addressing in its efforts to eradicate poverty and improve governance. In 2006, a programme was launched aimed at enabling young Burkinabe to become Volunteers for Development. During the first year, the following steps were taken to establish a legal and operational volunteer infrastructure:

• Legislation on national volunteering was drafted and is now being considered by Parliament;
• An independent committee (Groupement d’Intérêt Public) was set up to facilitate an innovative partnership between counterpart ministries, civil society organizations, the private sector and other stakeholders, for which proposed by-laws and a list of members were prepared;
• A country-level coordination mechanism was established for the National Volunteer Programme, which is to be integrated in the Ministry of Youth and Employment;
• A regional volunteer centre was set up in each of six pilot regions selected through a call for proposals from civil society organizations. They will promote volunteering and will support the “Volunteers for Development” who join the programme;
• The operational procedures and management tools were defined for the National Volunteer Programme.

The first wave of National Volunteer Corps activity will begin in 2008 with the assignment of 100 Volunteers for Development to institutions working in priority sectors such as health, education, environment, economic development, and local community capacity-building. Each volunteer will enter into a tripartite contract signed by the volunteer, the host institution and the National Volunteer Programme and will serve for a period of 12 to 24 months. The contract is intended to ensure adequate training, integration and monitoring of the volunteers. The lessons learned from the first wave will shape the further development of the programme. The spirit of volunteerism is already being widely promoted through campaigns. An annual National Volunteer Day has been designated, volunteers are being given media exposure, and a logo and a website about volunteering have been created. This initiative will provide young people in Burkina Faso one channel among others through which they can contribute to the achievement of national development goals.

- **MOZAMBIQUE: ATTRACTING YOUTH INTO DISTRICTS**

One of the key development issues for Mozambique is the need for skilled people to live and work in rural areas. Like young people in many countries, the skilled youth in Mozambique are attracted to the towns and cities, where they hope to find interesting jobs and a comfortable lifestyle. Through an initiative called Férias Desenvolvendo o Distrito (meaning “youth developing districts”), the National Youth Council and the University Students’ Association have devised a means of addressing this issue. Supported by the Ministry of Youth and Sports and various United Nations agencies, they are using volunteering as a means of building up the skills of graduates while opening up possible alternative employment paths for them. Graduate students have the opportunity to volunteer at district offices.

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12 Burkina Faso: Volunteers for Development 107 Box 3.4
13 Mozambique: attracting youth into districts 108 Box 3.5
(where working conditions are normally deemed not to be good) through volunteer vacation programmes. The initiative helps the Government of Mozambique fill posts that have been vacant and works to improve the level of service provision for development at the district level. The programme began in 2006 with the placement of 200 undergraduate and postgraduate students from all public universities in Maputo in 18 district offices that deal with issues such as agriculture, education, health, social action, fishing, public administration, decentralized planning, environment and justice. Before their placement, the volunteers were trained in community-based participation and public administration. The programme was repeated in 2007 and included participants from all over the country. This programme has been successful in at least three ways: it has ensured that skills are brought to offices that are otherwise under-resourced; it has taken some steps towards addressing the major problem of youth unemployment in Mozambique by giving young people skills and practical experience and opening up opportunities they may not have previously considered; and it has helped change young people’s perceptions of working in district offices. Surveys indicate a significant decrease in the percentage of students expressing discontent with working and living conditions at the district level.

- **SIERRA LEONE: YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND JOB CREATION THROUGH AGRICULTURE PROGRAMME**

  Food insecurity, skill deficiencies, and problems associated with population growth and increasing urbanization are all challenges faced by large numbers of youth in Sierra Leone. One volunteer programme addresses all of these issues in one go. Through a programme called Youth Engagement and Job Creation through Agriculture, some 15,000 young men and women between the ages of 15 and 35 are involved in a major effort to improve food security. At the same time, they are improving their own skills and gaining access to resources, which in turn ensures sustainable livelihoods. The Ministry of Youth and Sports, with assistance from UNDP and UNV, is meeting three goals simultaneously:

  - **Youth empowerment and employment.** Many subsistence farmers are young people; training and resources that have been passed on to the youth provide them with the means to sustain their businesses and livelihoods, which in turn contributes to their sense of empowerment;
  - **Food security.** The programme has proved that young people can manage crops and animals effectively;
  - **Rural-urban migration.** The programme demonstrates that there are viable livelihood alternatives outside the cities. By supporting young people in farming activities, the community-based programme also empowers youth to organize themselves for microenterprise development; facilitates the process of youth empowerment by organizing and supporting various voluntary group projects; establishes networks between engaged youth groups for voluntary experience and best-practice sharing; and provides for self-employment for mixed groups of youth farmers in vegetable gardening, food-processing, other agricultural activities, and marketing, which will promote recognition of their volunteer actions in the districts. The programme has been successful in proving that young people can be positively engaged in their own development as well as in the development of the nation.

- **PROMOTING YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN ALGERIA**

  Structural adjustment and public sector downsizing have made it difficult for young people to find jobs in Algeria. In 1996, the Government created the National Agency for the Support of Youth Employment (ANSEJ). The Agency provides counselling and other forms of support for young entrepreneurs and assists them in project implementation. The programme mainly targets unemployed individuals between the ages of 19 and 35 who possess the necessary professional qualifications and/or practical experience in their respective fields and can contribute 5 to 10 per cent of the investment amount. ANSEJ helps young entrepreneurs financially by providing zerointerest lines of credit and interest subsidies on bank loans. The Agency’s decentralized network

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14 Sierra Leone: Youth Engagement and Job Creation through Agriculture programme

extends across the country. In 2007, around 750 agents arranged for young entrepreneurs to receive funding totalling 4.5 billion Algerian dinars (US$ 64 million). The network has been electronically linked since 2002, and a database has been set up with information on young entrepreneurs and their businesses. ANSEJ published directories on microenterprises in 2002 and 2004 and organized three national exhibitions (in 1998, 2000 and 2003) as well as several regional salons. These events are intended to promote the products and services of microenterprises, to facilitate the establishment of direct links (and the creation of business networks) between them, and to encourage the development of a culture of entrepreneurship among unemployed youth by showing them what other young people have been able to achieve. In 2000, the Agency launched a website that provides extensive information on microenterprise creation and expansion. By the middle of 2005 over 300,000 files had been submitted to the Agency and more than 65,000 microenterprises had been created, and by 2007 the investment total had reached around 114 billion dinars (US$ 6 billion); these small businesses are believed to have generated more than 186,000 direct employment opportunities.

- **THE EMPOWERMENT OF DISADVANTAGED GIRLS IN RURAL EGYPT**

Ishraq is a multifaceted programme designed to strengthen functional literacy, life skills, health knowledge and civic participation among girls, and to challenge prevailing gender norms and community perceptions about the roles of females in society. Ishraq was implemented in four rural villages in Upper Egypt, targeting out-of-school teenage girls. The programme was launched in 2001 by four non-governmental organizations (Caritas, the Center for Development and Population Activities, the Population Council and Save the Children) in partnership with the Egyptian Ministry of Youth and the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood. Ishraq provided development and support services for 277 girls aged 13-15 years, 84 per cent of whom had never attended school. In addition to literacy classes, the programme offered participants life-skills training, community engagement opportunities, and sports activities. Young female secondary school graduates from the community were recruited and trained as programme leaders. Each group of around 25 girls met four times a week for three-hour sessions. The meetings were set up to accommodate the girls’ schedules, as they often had domestic duties and other work obligations. An important feature of the programme was the involvement of boys, parents, and community leaders, whose perceptions of gender roles became more progressive over time.

Ishraq benefited from rigorous evaluation; a pre-test/post-test design was used for participant assessments, and control groups were set up in two other villages. Two thirds of the girls who participated in Ishraq from beginning to end had entered middle school by the time the 30-month programme drew to a close, while none of the girls in the control villages had done so. Among the participants who took the government literacy exam, 92 per cent succeeded in passing it. The programme strengthened the girls’ self-confidence, autonomy and negotiation skills and encouraged their involvement in public life. By the end of their Ishraq experience, the girls indicated an increased preference for delaying marriage and reduced support for female genital mutilation. Cooperation with local authorities helped ensure that girls would be able to obtain identification cards, an important step towards limiting under-age marriage and promoting active citizenship. The Ishraq experience offers a number of important insights for enhancing the prospects of disadvantaged young women around the world. A second phase is under way, and programme leaders who were trained in the first phase will be involved in the second. Consideration is also being given to the establishment of a fund to provide Ishraq graduates with additional schooling and training opportunities. Collaboration with local non-governmental organizations will allow the replication of the programme in other localities.

- **TANZANIA: PARTNERSHIP FOR COMMUNITY-BASED VOLUNTEERING**

The Ministry of Labour, Employment and Youth Development of Tanzania has set up youth camps as a mechanism for mobilizing youth and engaging them in community activities. The camps are
encouraging young people to get involved in volunteering within their community and are supporting the delivery of social services. The programme began in June 2006 with 30 male and female volunteers in the Moshi district. The original plan, which provided for four camps, has been expanded to allow the establishment of ten camps in various districts by December 2007. The volunteers assist with “cleaning up” and preserving the environment, construction activities (schools, dispensaries, and road rehabilitation), and tree planting. The camps also provide spaces where community youth can meet the volunteers to discuss issues and to learn through seminars. Seminar topics include:

- The National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty (MKUKUTA);
- HIV/AIDS education;
- The formation and registration of community-based and non-governmental organizations;
- The formation of Savings and Credit Cooperative Societies (SACCOS);
- The National Youth Policy;
- Environment conservation.

A key lesson from this Tanzanian initiative is that a range of partners can contribute to the success of a youth volunteer programme. This programme draws strength through its partnership with the local government structure. This helps to ensure that community members are aware of the camps and are willing to participate in them. In addition, the youth department liaises with district youth offices to ensure that the programme is well supported through access to infrastructure and equipment. The programme has also aligned itself with the National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty (MKUKUTA) and receives international support from UNDP and UNV. The youth camps in Tanzania have shown that if young people are given opportunities and adequate facilitation, they are often willing to participate actively in structured community activities that support local social services. The involvement of local citizens with youth in community activities has helped to revitalize the spirit of volunteering and self-help, breaking down the notion that development is to be delivered only by the Government.

- **PRO-POOR GROWTH STRATEGIES IN VIET NAM**

According to a 2003 report by international donor agencies, the progress made by Viet Nam in reducing poverty has been “simply remarkable”. Figures for 2002 indicate that the proportion of the population living in poverty was reduced by half in less than a decade. This achievement illustrates how effective pro-poor growth strategies can be. While some regions and population groups have benefited more than others—poverty seems to be persistent in many rural areas and among minority groups. Viet Nam continues to reduce poverty considerably faster than other countries at a similar level of development. The vast improvement in the poverty situation in Viet Nam is the result of both targeted policies to reduce poverty and strong economic growth. Public policies have ensured that the poor are reached through targeted transfers, and the Government has also increased the non-monetary assets of the poor by facilitating higher levels of educational attainment and improved health status. These policies have been greatly reinforced by high rates of economic growth, second only to those of China and Ireland over the past decade. At the same time, challenges such as the country’s determined fight against corruption remain on the agenda. It has been acknowledged that the “abuse of public office for private gain risks making everyday life miserable when it happens at low levels”, and when it reaches a point where collective decision-making is affected, it can lead to resource misallocation and waste. Improving governance at all levels reduces constraints on both poverty reduction and economic growth. There are 16 million young people between the ages of 15 and 24 in Viet Nam, approximately 2 million of which are poor. The recently completed Youth Development Strategy to 2010 identifies unemployment as the single greatest challenge currently facing Vietnamese youth, and efforts to address this problem are at the centre of the national fight against poverty. It is estimated that 5 per cent of young people are out of work, and 26 per cent are underemployed. One policy change in Viet Nam that has benefited young people in particular relates to the starting and running of enterprises. Since the enactment of the Enterprise Law in 2000, almost 60,000 private companies have been created in the country, providing 1.3 million to 1.5 million new jobs. The Viet Nam Association of Young Entrepreneurs claims that young businesspeople set up three quarters of the private enterprises established between 2000 and 2002. However, the new jobs

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are mostly to be found in the main urban centres, as the rural provinces have not benefited from the new Enterprise Law to the same extent. Other regulatory obstacles give State-owned enterprises an advantage over private firms. The capacity to scale up policies and programmes is an important prerequisite for achieving poverty reduction. “Absorptive capacity” refers to the human resources, managerial skills, monitoring and evaluation systems, and infrastructure available in a country; low absorptive capacity can impose major constraints on a country’s ability to expand a successful programme and operate it on a much larger scale. Viet Nam, with its high rates of literacy and numeracy, long experience with mass organizations, and ability to mobilize people down to the village level, has sufficient absorptive capacity to continue moving forward in developing programmes and strategies for reducing poverty.

In all, these initiatives, along with others in the region, help to develop the capacities of Africa’s youth and equip them with skills they will use throughout their lives. They also enable youth to see themselves as active agents of development within their communities. In the process, youth are perceived not only as assets to their communities, but also as individuals who have acquired practical experience. Through their involvement in such programmes, young people are helping to broaden public awareness of volunteering, and helping to shape the direction of civic engagement policies and interventions. According to a consensus statement of the Economic Commission for Africa and the African Union, “since the heroic contributions of youth to the independence movements in Africa, young people’s enthusiasm has underpinned the most energetic and effective social movements. The idealism and commitment of youth have the potential to enact far-reaching social change and to build up effective institutions for humanitarian action, social development and political change. It is essential, therefore, that African Governments, working with their development partners, foster the spirit of volunteerism among young people”.  

- **YOUNG PEOPLE VOTE FOR PEACE IN COLOMBIA**

In 1996, more than 2.7 million children and youth in different provinces all over Colombia, comprising the recently formed Children’s Movement for Peace, participated in a special election known as the Children’s Mandate for Peace and Rights. Their ballot incorporated 12 basic rights taken from the Colombian Constitution and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Through their votes, the children communicated their three highest priorities: the right to enjoy life and good health, the right to peace and protection in war, and the right to love and family. One year later, inspired by the success of this initiative, 10 million adults (twice the usual voter turnout) held a national referendum known as the Citizen’s Mandate for Peace, Life and Liberty, the results of which helped determine the outcome of the next presidential election (the winner, Andres Pastrana, ran on a platform for peace). Over 100,000 children have become active participants in the Children’s Movement for Peace in Colombia, supported by UNICEF, the Red Cross and other human rights groups. In both 1998 and 1999, the Children’s Movement was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, drawing worldwide attention to the situation of young people in armed conflict. The members of the Movement, many of whom come from deprived areas in conflict, have been actively promoting peace throughout Colombia. They have lost friends and family in the violence and have witnessed kidnappings and random killings, and they are determined to build a better future for themselves and the young people to come. Some members have faced death threats because of their work for the Peace Movement. Unfortunately, the impact of the Movement has deteriorated in recent years, and reports from Colombia indicate that adolescents are becoming increasingly marginalized and disenfranchised.

**REASONS FOR CREATING YOUTH ORGAN IN UNITED NATIONS**

There are numerous global and regional reasons for the formation of the Youth arm of United Nations and hitherto, these ideals have for far too long and for far too many places been achieved. Some of the major reasons includes the following but not restricted to them;

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To strengthen knowledge building, management and promote research on youth issues.  
To foster the development of policies and frameworks to address youth issues.  
To promote policy dialogue initiatives among governments, academia, youth and development partners to translate research into policy options.  
To promote youth participation in decision-making, youth civic engagement and social inclusion.  
To recognize the rights of youths worldwide to effectively and meaningfully participate at all levels of decision-making within the administrative setup of United Nation.  
To support youth to develop their skills and effectively exercise their civic and political rights and strengthen national and regional structures to fully and effectively involve youth in political and social arenas.  
To assist Member States in the development of public policies to address youth issues with the participation of youth

CONCLUSION