MAINSTREAMING THE YOUTH IN AFRICA'S DEVELOPMENT:
The role of NEPAD

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ABSTRACT

There have never been as many young Africans as there are now. The roughly 800 million young people in Africa have an untapped potential, but they are also facing significant challenges. The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) acknowledges that young women and men in Africa are resourceful and valuable assets for Africa's development. Young people are not a sectoral concern; neither are they tailed at the end of programmes of regional revival and socio-economic integration. Instead, young people are integral to the process of development across all sectors and fields of interest. It is for these reasons that this article explores the possibilities of using the Strategic Framework for the NEPAD Youth Programme as a coordinated continental approach to creating an environment that is conducive to mainstreaming the young people's interests and active participation in Africa's development. The article does not only explore a number of challenges that young people are faced with in Africa, but also suggests the need for a speedy implementation of the NEPAD Youth Programme, along with mechanisms for including young Africans in NEPAD's decision-making processes. Its added value to the NEPAD initiative lays emphasis on the significance of involving young people in the socio-economic development and advancement of Africa and to mainstream youth issues into NEPAD's work projects and programmes implementation.

Introduction

Young women and men across Africa possess the energy, dynamism and enthusiasm of youth. As young people in Asia, Latin America, Europe and North America, African youth are also vastly different from one another. They represent a homogenous but diverse group, with class and race distinctions as well as different gender and political orientation, interests and so on. Whilst working with young people is guided by a set of internationally-recognised principles and approaches, NEPAD understands that a single, one-size-fits-all approach to youth mainstreaming in Africa is inappropriate. Thus, in designing and implementing policies and programmes that promote youth mainstreaming. It is important that young people participate at all levels, bringing their perspectives and suggestions into the African development process.

The NEPAD Youth Programme needs to recognise the importance of the role of young people in Africa's development. It needs to be seen as a call for action for NEPAD and its partners that ensures that young people of Africa are given the much needed opportunity and support to participate in the decision-making processes and development programmes of NEPAD (NEPAD 2002, 25-26). The Strategic Framework provides the rationale for NEPAD's involvement in youth empowerment and development, identifying priorities for involving young women and men in Africa's development and establishing guiding principles for supporting young people at continental, regional and national levels.

NEPAD's support for social, economic and political transformation includes helping regional economic communities, member states, and civil society organisations respond to the priorities in Africa's development agenda (NEPAD 2001, 16). In the context of youth empowerment and development, NEPAD has a key role to play in forging partnerships between key stakeholders. Its function is to add value to the work of youth development actors in Africa and to facilitate linkages between these actors and with external development partners. The Strategic Framework is not intended to be prescriptive; instead it should create a continental focus on young men and women that can be used to inform, guide and support youth affairs. It articulates ways in which young women and men can engage with NEPAD structures and programmes, not only as stakeholders and beneficiaries, but also as full and equal partners.

Defining the African youth

The position of young people in society is influenced by social, cultural and economic conditions. These conditions affect the roles, responsibilities and capacity of young people in society. Gender, race, class, socio-economic status, and location influence the experience of young people in Africa. For an example, a 16 year-old girl growing up in rural Nigeria will have different needs and opportunities compared with a young, 23 year-old man growing up in urban South Africa. In the same manner, a young, 21 year-old man living in rural Zimbabwe who moves to Harare in search of employment will have different priorities compared with a 24 year-old woman who works in a family business in Fayoun, Egypt. There are local and national variations that may be found most African countries and therefore, national governments must respond differently to the challenges and needs facing their young people.

Youth is a transition period that falls between childhood and adulthood. It is a time of enormous physical, psychological, economic, and social change. Families, communities and society in general can support young people in this transition, but they can also overlook the struggles of youth. Young women and men can easily be marginalised among a range of competing development priorities. While they are often referred to as 'tomorrows leaders', their situation today can be one of disadvantage, alienation and risk.

While youthfulness is measured by age, different countries apply different definitions of 'youth'. For example, in Sierra Leone, a young person is anyone between the ages of 13 to 35 years, while the voting age is 21 years; in Zambia from 16 to 30 years, and voting age begins at 18 years (NEPAD 2004, 4). African Union member states are encouraged to establish official definitions of youth that can be consistently applied across all national policies, programmes and agencies. These definitions should be based on the social, cultural and economic context of each society.

The reason young people require special attention stems from the economic, social and cultural status accorded to people of a certain age in many societies. While young women and men have tremendous resources (such as time, energy, creativity, passion, commitment) the fact is that they stand at a cross-road between adolescence and adulthood, between economic dependence on their parents, and financial stability, between the social experience and the ability to command respect. The Strategic Framework for NEPAD's Youth Programme affirms the diversity of young people and commits NEPAD to supporting them in the transition to adulthood and maturity.

The need for the NEPAD Youth Programme

The Strategic Framework provides policy guidelines for NEPAD to mobilise public and private sector support for youth empowerment; it describes the relationship NEPAD will foster with regional economic communities, the African Union members states and continental and regional youth formations with respect to issues affecting young men and women. The framework aims to halt the marginalisation of young people in socio-economic development and encourages the integration of youth issues into decision-making processes and structures. Furthermore, the NEPAD Youth Strategic Framework recommends some institutional arrangements that allow young people to add value to the work of community-based organisations and development agencies. The following stakeholders in particular will benefit from the framework (NEPAD 2004, 7).

Regional Economic Communities (RECs)

The Strategic Framework guides NEPAD in its response to the concerns of young women and men in Africa, while establishing procedures for NEPAD's support to the Regional Economic Communities on African development projects and programmes.

Member states of the African Union and civil society organisations

 Member states of the African Union are key constituencies of NEPAD; they hold the responsibility for youth empowerment in their countries, and may be required to work with civil society organisations and other development partners to achieve Africa's development agenda. The NEPAD Strategic Framework recognises the complementary role played by African countries and civil society organisations in youth development.

It supports the sharing of information and experiences, and advocates for the creation of coordinated policies and programmes towards an integrated continental approach to the development of young people in Africa.

International development agencies

Multilateral and bilateral agencies development partners and other donor organisations as well as civil society bodies, can use the NEPAD Youth Strategic Framework as a guide for aligning their projects and programmes with the African Development Partnership Forum.

Young men and women committed to youth empowerment

There is a wide variety of groups of young people who can make use of the NEPAD Youth Strategic Framework. These include local, national, regional, and continental youth formations as well as African youth in the diasporas. These groups will better understand the mandate of the NEPAD, its position and strategy on African youth empowerment. They will know how to liaise with NEPAD and how they can contribute to the socio-economic development of Africa, but not without challenges facing the African youth.

Challenges facing the African youth

The NEPAD Youth Programme seeks to engage young people about their future, but also about the present global socio-economic realities. There is no doubt that we live in a profoundly unjust world, where many young women and men are denied access to their fundamental human rights. Yet it is also a world that is remarkably different from that in which their parents grew up. The present political climate in Africa presents that African countries are free from colonialism; a continent that is largely at peace, where new institutions flourish and cultures that have withstood centuries of oppression thrive. For young people, 'tomorrow' holds both a promise of a better future and fear of failure. Through the Youth Strategic Framework NEPAD may catalyse the capacity of young people to rise to the challenges that threaten their ability to be a major player in Africa's socio-economic transformation. These challenges may include the following:

Hunger and poverty

Young people see the promise of better health and prosperity as a new infrastructure projects and economic developments. Yet sub-Saharan Africa is the only region in the world where hunger is increasing. This increase is largely driven by the AIDS pandemic, which is compounded by food insecurity. One in three Africans is undernourished, one out of seven dies before their fifth birthday, and half of these deaths are due to malnutrition(http://www.bread.org/issues/backgroundpapers/200101.html). The World

Bank estimates that per capita Gross National Product (GNP) in Africa (excluding South Africa) is $323, and overall per capita consumption stands at $281, which is less than one dollar a day (Africa Recovery 2002, 6).Young people require multifaceted and comprehensive approaches to poverty and hunger, including social safety nets, which can reduce their vulnerability to poverty. The promotion of sustainable livelihoods is also essential to youth development. This will require partnerships between governments, business, civil society organisations, young people and international development agencies.

NEPAD's Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP) and Action Plan outline NEPAD's commitment to ending hunger. Moreover, NEPAD supports the Millennium Development Goal, which calls for the eradication of extreme hunger by 2015.[2] The Strategic Framework for the NEPAD Youth Programme should place a high priority on the eradication of poverty, and therefore, hunger, and to work with the relevant United Nations agencies and other international development groups to facilitate programmes that target hunger and poverty.

Health

African leaders had on several occasions made promises of good health care to all the people, irrespective of age. However, the promise remains a huge challenge to African youth development. For example, health projects that targeted the eradication of polio among children have been non-existent for many years. Similarly, the United Nations International Children's Education Fund (UNICEF) reports that vitamin A and iodine deficiencies, which are major causes of blindness and mental retardation in children, have been greatly reduced in the last ten years. Yet 90 per cent of the deaths, which are due to Malaria occur in Africa, while sexually transmitted infections strike young people in their prime years (Petersen 2004, 3). In general, young women and men represent one of the healthiest groups in Africa. Young people are also experiencing major threats to their health as a result of an inter-connected range of behavioural factors. These factors include the risks associated with their sexuality (such as reproductive health, HIV and AIDS; and pregnancy among young women) or alcohol and substance abuse.

The Strategic Framework for the NEPAD Youth Programme endorses the recommendation of the United Nations World Youth Forum in Dakar, Senegal that governments commit themselves to implementing policies that ensure equitable access to health information, education and services (UN 2001, 5). The NEPAD Health Strategy strengthens the commitment of African governments to address the heavy burden of disease, while the Strategic Framework for the NEPAD Youth Programme highlights and mainstreams youth health issues within this broad agenda.

HIV and AIDS

About twenty five years ago HIV and AIDS were virtually unheard of in Africa. Today, the scourge is threatening the wellbeing and economic activity of many young people and their families. Yet all African countries have taken concrete measures to stem the tide through awareness campaigns. Research indicates that the messages do reach the public; but young people are most vulnerable and not willing to change their sexual behaviour. As a result, prevention, care and support and the provision of treatment to those who need it remains a huge challenge in most African countries. The health system in Africa is struggling to cope with the increased mortality rate, the morbidity of the general population as well as health workers.

NEPAD endorses the United Nation's Declaration of Commitment, in which States are required to extend access to prevention information and services (such as voluntary counselling and testing, HIV and AIDS education) by 2015, and recognises that thus far only 20 per cent of all Africans have access to such services (UN 2001, 10). NEPAD also supports the recommendations of the Seven Global Youth Organisations to empower Africa's young people to counter the HIV and AIDS pandemic; and in particular, the proposals to scale-up existing programmes, expand care and access to health services, and to build on good practices.

Peace and security

Many young Africans cherish the prospects of peace. In the last twenty years civil wars in Somalia, Angola, Mozambique, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Liberia have ended and peace accords are underway in DRC, Sudan and Burundi. In South Africa and Namibia, legislation that entrenched apartheid has been abolished. Yet the fear of war is still lingering. For young women and men who have felt the pain of landmines and the heartache of losing loved ones to war, the scars run deep. The recent political uprisings in Kenya in 2007 and Zimbabwe in 2008 have affected most young people, who are extremely vulnerable in situations of conflict and instability. Not only are they the primary victims of war, they are also drawn into conflict. Despite the existence of stringent international laws that prohibits the use of children as combatants, there is an estimated 120,000 child soldiers in Africa(http://www.amnestyinternational.org//htl).

Maintaining peace and preventing conflict are important elements of youth empowerment and development. The Lisbon Declaration on Youth Policies and Programmes affirms the role that young people play in promoting peace and non-violence, and further recommends the adoption of national and international policies and laws that prevent youth from participating in all kinds of violence, and in particular, to prevent the involvement and recruitment of young people in armed conflicts. However, 'despite the hardships Africa faces, there is good reason to trust the Africa youth, who will be able to draw lessons from the past in order to build a society where

peace, and solidarity prevails'. For them, peace will lay the foundation for stability and prosperity. Conflict prevention and resolution is a major priority for NEPAD. The Strategic Framework for the NEPAD Youth Programme will draw attention to the impact these issues have on young people, and will create channels for dialogue that will empower young people to participate in the process of peace-building and conflict resolution.

Access to quality education and training

The future holds the prospects of education and training. Many African countries are in the process of attaining universal access to education for primary school children. Yet the majority of African countries fear being left behind. In many African countries there are significant barriers to education and training–these include the high costs of school fees, uniforms and textbooks, the need for families to encourage children to work during school holidays to earn money, as well as discrimination against girls and young women. Young people who are excluded from the education system are more likely to face unemployed, health problems and very much likely to participate in criminal activities than their peers.

Getting young people into schools is a challenge, and more so is the quality and relevance of what they learn. Governments have recognised the need to diversify and vocationally orient the curriculum taught in education and training institutions so that young people are provided with knowledge and skills that can assist them in dealing with the demands of adult life and increase their prospects of employment. A good education lays the foundation for youth empowerment and development. NEPAD affirms the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals[3] regarding education and training, along with the various international declarations of the Lisbon Declaration on Youth Policies and Programme (UN 1998, 5), the Braga Youth Action Plan (UN 1998, 2), and the Dakar Education for All Forum (UN 2001, 2); each of which encourages governments to design new strategies to overcome the problems that exclude young people from the education and training they require, and allocate resources to education and training systems that correspond to economic, social and entrepreneurial realities based on identified needs and technological advancements. Indeed NEPAD has given great emphasis to the education and training needs of the continent, and the Strategic Framework ensures that the perspectives of young people regarding education and training will not be lost.[4]

Good employment

The promise of a decent and productive employment is within the grasp of a new generation of Africans. Although Africa's economies are growing faster than they have in the last two decades, joblessness is still a reality for many young people in Africa. Armed with tertiary qualifications and wide-eyed hopes for better futures, they search for jobs in order to feed and clothe their families.

Unemployment is one of the greatest problems facing young people in Africa. In most African countries, unemployment amongst young people is considerably higher than the general population, with young women being far more disadvantaged than young men. Responding adequately to this challenge requires integrated efforts that recognise the links between youth unemployment and economic growth and changing trends in the labour market. Often, youth get jobs that are not secured and not well paying. While this may be reasonable for new entrants into the labour market, informal employment and limited job opportunities mean that there are few prospects for career advancement.

The need to create decent and productive employment for young people is crucial towards meeting the UN Millennium Development Goals[5], and is also the goal of the Youth Employment Network — a global alliance of the United Nations, World Bank and International Labour Organisation. Similarly the International Labour Organisation's Global Employment Agenda and the Jobs for Africa Programme is concerned with youth employment and foresees the creation of a number of alliances and partnerships at global and regional levels as a means of implementing the United Nations' International Labour Organisation project (ILO 2003, 4).

There is a need for the NEPAD Strategic Framework to support the call made by the United Nations for governments to encourage youth enterprise and employment programmes, while promoting links with the business community. The NEPAD Business Group and other continental, regional and national agencies (such as chambers and councils of business) also need to support the creation of more and better jobs for young people. Special attention should also be given to young people who are most disadvantaged in the labour market (that is, young women, young people with disabilities, and young people from indigenous minorities).

Youth rights and leadership

The exclusion of young women and men from mainstream policies, programmes and governance structures is a major concern. A key requirement for youth empowerment is the need to ensure that young people are fully engaged in decision-making processes and structures that affect their wellbeing. Young people are our future leaders, but there are also young leaders among us. Nurturing and recognising young leaders and engaging them in national, regional and continental structures is a critical youth empowerment tool–and so is the promotion of political awareness among young people. While young people were the driving force behind many independence movements, their political involvement in post-Colonial Africa has waned. Political transformation in Africa, like economic and social transformation, requires young people who are politically aware and active.

The World Youth Report of the United Nations (UN 1998, 16) states that 'many politicians, community leaders and others are far from convinced that harnessing the active involvement of youth represents an effective strategy for achieving better outcomes' and provides ways to address the challenges. Furthermore, the World Youth Forum rightfully claims that the fundamental element of youth empowerment is young people's access to policy-making bodies at local, national and international levels and the rights of young people to participate in these domains should be fully endorsed by member states.

The Strategic Framework for NEPAD Youth Programme needs to affirm the importance of participation by young people in policy-making, programme design, and governance structures that affect not only young people, but also society at large. In its report on the World Programmes of Action for Youth to the year 2000 and beyond, the Secretary-General of the United Nations emphasised the need to involve young people as active agents for change and development, and not just passive targets of externally initiated programmes (UN 2001: A/56/180).

Youth with special needs

Young people living in rural areas, indigenous youth, young people with disabilities, those who are not enrolled in school, and those who are in conflict with the law are particularly vulnerable. NEPAD affirms the practice of paying special attention to the needs of those young people who live in poor communities or who do not have access to resources and are part of socially-excluded groups by designing targeted initiatives that specifically address their social and emotional needs.

Culture and tradition

For many centuries, tradition and culture have been at the centre of African development. Yet today the pride and appreciation of Africa's multiple cultures and heritages are being eroded by the forces of globalisation. Media images, the food, that people eat, way of dressing and speaking are rapidly shifting to reflect non-African realities. There is a need to help young people to connect not only with their own cultures and traditions, but also with those of fellow Africans. This will help young Africans to relate to the world, and teach them to appreciate the value and history of Africa, which is a critical element in African Renaissance. As Bankie notes, 'for the youth, the need to create awareness around Pan-Africanism, the African nation and culture should be kept constantly in view and review, in the schools, at the universities and within the learning process in general (Bankie 2001, 16).

Globally, indigenous knowledge from Africa has played a critical role in diverse fields. Africans have identified herbs that are now used in medicines, invented the drum that is at the core of music, and taught philosophy in ancient Egypt. It is important for young

people to know and understand this history. The Strategic Framework for NEPAD Youth Programme need to promote pride in African heritage and recognise the significant role indigenous knowledge can and has played in human development.

Institutional representation

Despite their great numbers, young people are poorly represented in the political, economic and social institutions of Africa. While many member states have established ministries of youth and supported the work of national youth councils in an effort to ensure that young people contribute to national development, there is still more to be done, both within countries and at regional and continental levels. Regional Economic Communities have often acknowledged the importance of young people and their representation in civil society, but young voices are rarely heard in these decision-making structures. There is a significant generation gap in this regard. While NEPAD is committed to the development of young women and men across Africa, people who are well beyond their youth run its institutions.

Young people are often excluded from participating in high-level structures because of their age and perceived inexperience. Youth empowerment requires a commitment to building the capacity of institutions that provide young people with a voice and the opportunity to contribute to development nationally, regionally and across the continent. Youth leadership, dialogue and representation can only be achieved through institutional frameworks that are focussed on these goals. NEPAD recognises the importance of ensuring young people are represented in its structures and programmes and the Strategic Framework for NEPAD Youth Programme need to establish mechanisms for ensuring this. It is also understood that there are times when specific youth-owned and managed institutions are required.

While these kinds of arrangements face the danger of further marginalising young people into organisations that are viewed as irrelevant, they can create opportunities for nurturing young leaders and can broaden youth participation on issues affecting Africa's development. Thus, the challenge of youth empowerment requires a commitment to building institutions that are open to young people's participation at all levels.

Challenges faced by young women

Young women in Africa have never had as many opportunities as they do today. More girls have enrolled in primary education than ever before and women's participation in economic and political life has increased dramatically since the UN Decade for Women ended in 1980. Girls continue to lag behind their male peers in all aspects to social and economic life. The only social indicator in which women have reached gender parity with men is HIV infection – 60 per cent of those living with the virus in Africa are women.

Most African countries are signatories to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which commits states to eradicating laws and customs that are harmful to women. Yet today's young women face enormous challenges. Girls are more likely to drop out of school than boys, more likely to be married early, and less likely to own and inherit land than their brothers. NEPAD supports the ratification of CEDAW by those countries that have not yet done so, and reinforces the 50/50 policy position taken by the African Union. The Strategic Framework for NEPAD Youth Programme takes these initiatives further by ensuring that special attention is given to young women in development policies and programmes. Furthermore, it will be important that young women participate fully in the youth structures established by the NEPAD Strategic Framework

Environmental degradation

The environment that has allowed African to till the land and yield crops for hundreds of years is under threat from polluted clouds that Africans did not create. Our young people have inherited an environment that is under threat. Whether in rural or urban areas, the quality of water and air — now and in the future — is a major concern. Thus, sustainable development is a prerequisite for youth empowerment. At the United Nation's World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 2002, African Ministers stated that participation by young people in sustainable development is the foundation of the success of a strategy to secure the future of Africa (UN 2002, 1 – 12).There is a need in the framework of sustainable human development to ensure strengthening the skills of young people in all areas.

The NEPAD Environment Action Plan presents a framework for partnership programmes that foster sustainable development. Synergies between these programmes are promoted by the Strategic Framework for NEPAD Youth Programme to ensure that young people participate in and benefit from these efforts. To this end, the recommendations of the United Nations Commission for Social Development (UNCSD) are supported through environmental awareness and education programmes for young people world wide (UNCSD 2003, 20).

Globalisation and migration

Globalisation offers immense opportunities for young people in Africa—the promise of cultural exchange, new technologies, and a chance to leapfrog into the future. Yet it brings with it formidable challenges that have contributed to under-development in Africa. The cultures that have protected our youth for centuries are seen by some as too old to compete. Similarly, the oral traditions of the old face extinction in the face of a 'satellite generation'. Young people in Africa are more closely connected to the international community than ever before. Some may have friends and relatives in the diaspora, others choose to study abroad, or seek work opportunities overseas. However, as the World Youth Report of the UNCSD indicates, the vast majority of

young people are 'not fully integrated members of the global culture'; too many are 'economically and socially' excluded from the benefits of globalisation (UNCSD 2003, 303). While a good number of people in developed countries have regular access to information and communication technologies, the vast majority of Africa's youth have no access to new modes of communication. Indeed, the World Youth Forum and NEPAD have both highlighted the need for young people to be empowered to overcome the 'digital divide' through information and communication technology. The rapid growth of the knowledge economy highlights the importance of enhancing the capacity of young people in Africa to compete in this arena.

Globalisation has also created conditions for increased levels of migration. Migration has become an important issue throughout Africa. Young people are often required to travel in search of employment, a better life, or to avoid conflict and dangerous conditions. Young people leave their homes countries and communities for greener pastures elsewhere in the world; they find themselves in unfamiliar conditions without social safety nets to support them. As foreigners they are easily exploited and can suffer the pain of xenophobia and racism while often excluded from fully participating in social and economic life.

The United Nation's International Labour Organisation (ILO) World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalisation (WCSDG) encourages states and regional inter-governmental organizations such as NEPAD to become an instrument for development and a stronger voice in the governance of globalisation (ILO 2004, 50). The NEPAD Youth Strategic Framework takes this challenge further by providing young people in Africa with a mechanism to contribute to these debates. Furthermore, NEPAD's supports for regional and continental integration need to recognise and respond to the experiences and challenges facing young people.

African youth in the diaspora

Many young Africans find themselves far away from their African homes and disconnected from their culture and family networks. For some, Africa is a place they have only heard about, while for others it holds distant memories. Young people from Africa can find themselves without roots in foreign lands. They face the challenge of living in different cultures, without fully knowing their own. They can suffer the indignity of xenophobia and are themselves influenced by inaccurate media representations of their homeland as they search for an identity they can be proud of. Research has shown that many young Africans of the diaspora long for a closer connection to home and look for opportunities to become practically involved in supporting the further development of Africa — either by returning to make their contribution or by supporting development efforts from any part of the world. Others recognise that as Africans they can choose to live anywhere in the world; indeed young Africans are also global citizens who have much to offer other countries and the world as a whole.

NEPAD recognises the challenges of young people of the diaspora with a hope that these young women and men can be proud of their culture and heritage. The Strategic Framework for NEPAD Youth Programme need to bridge the divide between the young women and men living in Africa and those living elsewhere. It will provide information and guidance to young people of the diaspora to facilitate their support of African youth empowerment and development. Regardless of where they live, African youth are encouraged to be proud of their African identities and values.

NEPAD strategy for African youth

The Strategic Framework for NEPAD Youth Programme endeavours to create the conditions to realise the following vision (NEPAD 2004, 9): 'Young women and men in Africa are able to actively participate in socio-economic development and the transformation to a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable society.'

This vision is informed by NEPAD's overall mandate. Through the Strategic Framework, NEPAD recognises young people as critical actors in the 'eradication of poverty' and the achievement of 'sustainable growth and development', while encouraging them to participate actively 'in the world economy and body politic'.

Similarly, the Strategic Framework for NEPAD Youth Programme contributes to the overall mission of the NEPAD initiative by harnessing 'relevant knowledge for informed policy formulation' for youth empowerment and development; it ensures that young people benefit from and participate in the development and implementation of NEPAD (NEPAD 2004, 9).

Aims and strategic objectives of the NEPAD youth programme

In pursuit of this vision and within the context of NEPAD's support for young women and men in Africa, the Strategic Framework for NEPAD Youth Programme aims to provide guiding principles, mechanisms and the conditions necessary for coordinating a continental approach to the social, economic and political empowerment of young people in Africa, promoting creativity and innovation in youth development while aligning and integrating national and regional policies, programmes and initiatives. This aim will be achieved through three Strategic Objectives (NEPAD 2004, 86).

Strategic objective 1

Establish and maintain mechanisms and procedures that ensure the voice of young people is heard within NEPAD and that youth empowerment and development issues are effectively mainstreamed into all development programmes.

Strategic Objective 2

Facilitate the creation of development partnerships with governments and relevant organisations and the mobilisation and equitable distribution of resources within Africa and beyond to support youth empowerment and development in Africa.

Strategic Objective 3

Support Regional Economic Communities, Member States, civil society and the private sector in their efforts to promote youth empowerment and development.

The NEPAD youth programme presents the strategies that will be designed and implemented to achieve these strategic objectives. NEPAD highlights the importance of young women and men in the development of Africa with commitments towards the implementation of the Strategic Framework for NEPAD Youth Programme. This provides an opportunity for NEPAD to ensure the issues affecting youth empowerment and development are fully identified and mainstreamed into its economic, social and political programmes and structures.

Concluding remarks

The article establishes that Strategic Framework for NEPAD Youth Programme imagines a future in which young women and men in Africa are part of peaceful, prosperous and economically-viable communities. The article lays out a scenario that is within reach, a vision that is in line with and informed by NEPAD's overall mandate. It also emphasises that through the implementation of the Strategic Framework for NEPAD Youth Programme, young people are recognised as critical actors in Africa's growth and development, both now and in the future.

In pursuit of this vision and within the context of NEPAD's support for young women and men in Africa, the article recommends guiding principles, mechanisms and the institutional arrangements necessary for a continental approach to youth empowerment and development. It outlines three key areas of work. It suggests actions that NEPAD itself can take. Too often, young people are accused of not speaking up and articulating their concerns. While some young people need support in order to speak out, too often the fault lies with those who fail to listen.

The first objective of the Strategic Framework addresses head on the challenge of ensuring that the voices of young people are heard in the process of implementation of projects and programmes of NEPAD. The second objective highlights the need to facilitate partnerships that can support youth empowerment and development in Africa. While the third objective of the Framework outlines the need to design and implement a NEPAD Youth Programme that supports the work of Regional Economic Communities, Member States, civil society and the private sector in promoting youth participation in Africa's development.

The guiding principles and programmes in the NEPAD Strategic Framework for African youth, along with its plans of action will mark the beginning of a new phase in NEPAD's support for young people. The framework, if well implemented will define the process by which NEPAD will earn the much-needed trust and support of the African youth with the hope for productive and sustainable livelihood now and in the future.

Notes

1   Dr Ijeoma is affiliated to the School of Public Management and Administration at the University of Pretoria, South Africa. He can be contacted at edwin.ijeoma@up.ac.za.

2   The first Millennium Development Goal is a call to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. Target 1: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than one dollar a day. Target 2: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.

3   United Nation's Millennium Development Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education. Target 3: Ensure that by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling. Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women. Target 4: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005 and to all levels of education no later than 2015.

4   NEPAD has identified six priority focus areas for education: (1) meeting the Millennium Development Goals on basic education and improving the quality of education; (2) promoting gender equality; (3) school feeding and nutritional programmes; (4) addressing HIV/AIDS; (5) distance education and open learning; and (6) centres of educational excellence.

5   Millennium Development Goal, Target 16: In co-operation with developing countries, develop and implement strategies for decent and productive work for youth.

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