

**3<sup>rd</sup> Pan African Youth Conference  
“The Future is Now – Youth are not too young to lead”/  
IOE Side Event on the Future of Work**

**Banjul, The Gambia**

**24-25 March 2019**

**SUMMARY REPORT OF HIGHLIGHTS AND OUTCOMES**

**Background:**

The number of unemployed young men and women in Africa continues to grow and opportunities in ‘traditional’ forms of work are decreasing due to several factors including low productivity; the collapse of the commodity boom; skills gaps; global competition; and the adoption of new technologies. On average, approximately 60% of the population of African countries are young people. For the African Youth Commission and its supporters, this points to the need for young people to have a seat at the table - the future belongs to them and they cannot wait another 25 years to be included in the discourse. Realising the potential of the youth now should be a priority among leaders, the youth themselves and all other stakeholders.

*“Redouble your efforts, Africa!”*

Progress, development, peace and security should be at the forefront of government policies. Lack of opportunity and development, and irregular migration, can have fatal consequences. Youth should have the opportunity to speak to their leaders to express their concerns in order to shape policies that create opportunities and prosperity at home and save lives in the long term.

**AYC Conference and IOE side event:**

The participation in the AYC Conference, and IOE side event, of members from the West and Central Africa region, which was enabled by the IOE-EU partnership, signalled the strong willingness of the private sector to include Africa’s young people in the policy discourse on youth employment and skills and business development.

More than 1 million young people across the Continent annually seek entry to a labour market that lacks the capacity to absorb them.

*“It is urgent to ensure that Africa’s youth are future-ready and equipped through proper training to access increasingly digitalised quality jobs across the region.”*

Employers across the region regularly identify an inadequately skilled workforce as a constraint to their businesses, a factor which can be mitigated by destigmatising vocational training, making TVET opportunities more widely available and ensuring that key policies include aligning the curricula of schools with the needs of industry and helping to build crucial skills for business. An example raised during the conversation was how one African company was unable to recruit data scientists from within Africa and had to resort to employing the majority of its workforce from abroad.

There was consensus around the need to increase the skilling, reskilling and upskilling of youth and the current workforce, which must include confidence building as well as creative and soft skills such as teamwork.

An additional need is to review employment policies to improve the enabling environment for business and entrepreneurship. Young people must have the opportunity to become economically empowered and one way to do this is by encouraging youth to turn their innovative ideas into business opportunities, and to foster production and services in Africa. In this manner young people can become economically independent and influence policy- and decision-making.

In light of these persistent issues of skills mismatch, and a lack of jobs and an enabling environment for entrepreneurship in the region, IOE hosted a side event on 24 March on 'the Future of Skills and Jobs in Africa' to bring youth from across the continent together with EOs to discuss the key trends that underpin the future of jobs and skills and to encourage dialogue on employment and entrepreneurship policies.

*"Young people are ready to contribute to the transformation of their own countries."*

Facilitated by Anetha Awuku, IOE Project Manager, the side event encouraged youth to reflect on a number of questions around the future of work; their aspirations in terms of what they would most like to achieve from their jobs; the employment sectors most conducive to job creation in Africa, and more. The contributions showed that young people can and want to contribute to "the Africa we want" and must have the support of policy makers to do so and be empowered to lead.

Speakers Richard Gbedoah (Global Apprenticeships Network - GAN) and Beatrice Pokuah Prempeh (Ghana Employers' Association - GEA) gave an overview of the current landscape in Africa for jobs and skills. Richard shared the perspectives of GAN4Youth on the skills-mismatch currently faced by employers across the region whilst Beatrice highlighted the work of EOs in this area, including ways in which GEA was fighting against informality.

Momarr Mass Taal (CEO Tropingo Foods – The Gambia) and Tony Nyagah (CEO Strauss Energy - Kenya) drew on their own successful entrepreneurial experiences to highlight the rich potential for job creation in the agri-business and solar energy sectors. As Africa aims to become more digitalised and more technologically engaged, the creative industries, digital design and engineering, data technology, care, education and health sectors were deemed promising for job creation.

It was underlined that there are skills spectrums within jobs in all sectors. For example, young people can consider becoming a lab assistant or lab technician rather than a lab technologist or pathologist. Similarly, there are opportunities for welders within the aviation industry, not only for engineers.

As Africa seeks to digitalise, issues were raised regarding how to ensure a sustainable and constant electricity supply, a lack of which means blackouts resulting in perishable items going to waste; difficulties for business to function and provide services; barriers to technological development and services, including internet access and telecommunication services. Barriers to investing in sustainable energy R&D and services should therefore be reduced, and incentives provided to introduce new technologies across sectors. In addition, a mindset of what agriculture means in the 21<sup>st</sup> century must include investing in machinery and processing and focus on African self-sufficiency in food security rather than relying on imports.

Balogun Odunayo (Nigerian Employers' Consultative Association), Paul Adama (Nigerian Employers' Consultative Association) and Moses Mubiru (Federation of Ugandan Employers) raised the important message that the future doesn't just happen, it must be created, which set the tone for participants to reflect on possible socio-economic and development futures for Africa.

*"The way forward is collaboration, coordination and partnerships."*

Buba Saho (Gambian Chamber of Commerce and Industry) highlighted the work of employers' and business associations and the need for increased partnerships amongst governments, employers, educational institutions and other stakeholders to adopt effective strategies. Ousseine Diallo (FOPAO) supported this approach and reiterated that the aim was not to create new methods and processes, but to use existing processes to fill skills and employment gaps.

It was also agreed that there was a pressing need to review policies that create a more enabling environment for business and entrepreneurship and empower and support start-ups and SMEs. Further points were made that a sustainable job-creating business climate requires strong institutions, and, for the private sector, this means having EOs with the capacity to advocate for an enabling environment; that building institutions of responsible social dialogue, such as EOs, helped to promote accountability and good governance; and that effective EOs provided essential support services to business.

It was recognised that young people are innovating faster than the government can create policies for. For example, young people are finding solutions in the financial tech industry. Technology galvanizes and amplifies the voice of the youth.

*"We can't dwell on the problems in Africa; we must focus on solutions and concrete action plans."*

### **Suggested actions to harness the talents of young people**

1. Create innovative hubs and think tanks to allow youth to come together and find solutions.
2. Find better ways to raise awareness among youth of the types of jobs available, for example through online job searches, and invest in job centres.
3. Change the mindset about the type of work young people can do, for example invest in local entrepreneurship competitions and publicise them on radio, in newspapers and online.
4. Destigmatise vocational training.
5. Highlight the work of outstanding youth in various sectors.
6. Be physically present at institutes and training centres and be part of university talks.
7. Include youth in policy dialogues by mapping youth organisations in every country and giving them a seat at the table.
8. Ensure a focus on sustainable energy creation to be able to advance technologically and industrially.
9. Make it easier to register businesses in order to discourage informality.
10. Encourage youth to join mentorship programmes and to mentor other youth.
11. Use film and television to spread the message of the importance of the participation of youth in policy- and decision-making.

*“What can I do in my space as a young leader?”*

1. Remember that competence is not synonymous with age! Build self-confidence.
2. Be accountable for the work you do and the services you deliver.
3. Pitch your ideas at every opportunity and push for investments.
4. Use existing networks that bring young adolescents together and harmonize work.
5. Partner with other youth where possible to be unified with the same messaging to avoid divisions.

Following the side event, the IOE constituency met to consolidate the key EO takeaways to integrate youth into policy- and decision-making processes:

1. Take steps to include young people within EO management structures; youth must be valued and mentored into leadership positions.
2. Continue to engage in conferences of this nature to ensure EOs are not disconnected from the reality on the ground and are aware of the professional and personal aspirations of youth. This would equip EOs to give concrete advice and to curate the agenda with the government, as well as to network and have a comparative approach to other African countries.
3. Make efforts to achieve more visibility for the work EOs do, especially in the areas of youth employment and skills development.
4. Link local entrepreneurs with the correct government agencies. EOs can partner with youth who are already making an impact in specific sectors and highlight their work.
5. Coordinate the voice of business around common positions and advocate with one voice.
6. Support business, and advocate for support for business, to increase skilling, reskilling and upskilling of youth and the current workforce.

*“The government has a key role to play.”*

Politics is everyone’s business. Social and economic equality is key to maintaining a thriving population. Governments can reinforce and replicate best practices to accelerate development and south to south cooperation.

1. Encourage young people to enter the political sphere as well as the entrepreneurship space.
2. Ensure that key policies include aligning the curricula of schools to the needs of business and industry.
3. Focus on building soft skills and hard skills that boost employability.
4. Earmark investment in education and entrepreneurship for youth because financing is key.
5. Empower and mentor the next generation of leaders, activists and independent/ responsible citizens of their respective nations.
6. Recognise that young people are underrepresented in decision-making processes. Youth inclusion is key (persons with disabilities, HIV infected youth, LGBT youth). Ensure that government is involved and putting extra emphasis on women and adolescents.
7. Recognise that women are disadvantaged in life skills, health and maternal health matters and put them at the forefront of policy. We need to see more girls in school and developing business competencies.