



CONCEPT NOTE

WEST AFRICA REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

10 November 2012

Organised by the African Development Bank (ADB) and the Development Centre of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

Date and Location:

The 1-day conference will be held at the **King Fahd Palace Hotel (former Meriden Président)** in Dakar, Senegal on Saturday November 10th, under the high patronage of the Government of Senegal. The conference is jointly organised by the African Development Bank and the OECD Development Centre.

Background

The condition of youth in West Africa is a growing concern. Youth inactivity levels in the sub-region are amongst the world's highest, at over 25% according to the ILO. The sub-region is still facing high rates of inactivity, underemployment and poor working conditions with long hours and low pay. The objective of this conference is to bring together policymakers, experts, private sector, youth and civil society organisations to discuss how to improve employment opportunities, and therefore living conditions, of youth in the region. The conference will be the opportunity to identify bottlenecks keeping youth from entering the job market and try to find actions to overcome them, with concrete proposals and follow-up actions with measurable results. The materials presented during the conference will reflect work prepared by experts and academics in thematic areas as well as a cross section of governmental bodies in West Africa, AfDB and OECD, including the recent OECD/AfDB/UNDP/UNECA report: *African Economic Outlook 2012*, whose special topic is "*Promoting Youth Employment*".

Theme and approach of the conference

The approach is to better understand the relative importance of known drivers of youth unemployment in West Africa to help governments, businesses and civil society prioritise their actions. Existing literature has identified, among others: skills mismatch between the labor market and education and training systems, a growing supply of labor unmet by aggregate demand, slow or stagnant structural transformation, political instability and difficult economic environments in many countries. "Success stories" in fighting youth unemployment in the region will help elucidate which actions have proven most effective in West Africa and why. This empirical evidence will help define a way forward for West African countries to build upon their individual and collective strengths and create jobs for youth.

In each session, speakers will document success stories and failures focusing on experience sharing from other within and beyond West Africa, and propose alternatives to improve and scale-up actions so as to ensure higher impact for job creation for youth. The conference programme will cover two main themes:

I. Education Models, Trainings and Skills needed for Africa's youth and Development in West Africa

This session will focus on the political economy and governance of the education and training systems in West Africa. We will discuss the framework to be put in place at country level, including key government, business and civil society initiatives. Participants will investigate the linkages, mechanisms, institutions and framework to be developed in order to ensure that this framework supports the social and economic development of each country.

Key topics to be discussed:

1. **Primary and secondary education systems in West Africa:** Which primary and secondary education systems are best preparing students for employment? What reforms should be undertaken to ensure success across West Africa? What role for ICTs?
2. **Higher Education:** What skills should the tertiary sector provide to meet the demands of job markets and businesses and support sustainable growth and greater productivity in Africa?
3. **Vocational and Professional Training:** What forms of professional training, continuous and life-time education, and are needed to meet job markets needs in West Africa?

II. Job-creating Growth Strategies, Economic Policies and Business models for West Africa.

This session will focus on how the broader economic environment can support and enable job creation. Recognizing that education and training do not exist in a vacuum, the session will seek to identify how economic, infrastructure, and sectoral initiatives can support an enabling environment conducive to job-rich development. For this purpose, we will focus on the key sectors driving growth and economic development in West Africa. For instance, the participants will share their country/organization experiences in the area of economic development, focusing on their adopted strategies. Amongst other issues, we will focus on the development of Small and Medium Size Enterprises (SMEs) and the promotion of entrepreneurship, leading to the creation of opportunities and alternatives for young African entrepreneurs and leaders.

Key areas to be covered:

1. **Growth strategies and Economic Policy for Job creation:** What economic policies to be developed by African governments for a better and sustainable growth conducive to job creation in West Africa?
2. **Infrastructure Development, TICs and regional Integration:** What policies and frameworks to be developed in order to promote and invest in Africa's regional Infrastructure for a greater regional integration, trade and development in West Africa?
3. **Agriculture, Growth and job creation:** How to better promote and develop Africa's agriculture sector in order to reach increased, accelerated and sustainable growth leading to structural transformation, job creation and poverty alleviation in West Africa.
4. **Industrial Development, SMEs Promotion and Services:** How to promote and support manufacturing and on-site transformation in Africa for a stronger and sustainable economic growth, economic diversification and job creation for youth in West Africa.

Speakers

Policy makers, experts, private-sector representatives, academics, members of civil society and youth representatives from Africa and other continents will be gathered to discuss their experience, focusing on concrete examples to facilitate knowledge sharing.

Audience

The conference aims to gather those who can provide and learn from "success stories". Youth employment is a horizontal issue, influenced by a wide range of actors, including:

- policy makers at the local, national and regional levels

- business and investment community
- civil society organisations
- academia
- youth

Output

The proceedings and presentations made during this conference will be synthesized and published in a document as the Conference's result which can take the form of a **"White Book on Youth Employment in West Africa"** that the African Development Bank and the OECD Development Centre will co-author. A final declaration will also be issued at the end of the conference by the Ministers demonstrating their engagement to promote youth in the region in order to reap the demographic dividend. The Conference will yield a public discussion on why certain reforms were successful (both in education and labor markets sector) and able to contribute to economic growth and employment creation while others failed to have an impact. This public discussion will start at the time of the conference but it is envisaged to continue over time among the stakeholders in each country and in the region as a whole. Finally, a dedicated website will be built to host the proceedings and major outputs of the conference.

Expected impact

The conference's proceedings is expected to **(a)** give greater publicity to successful West African policies, programs and initiatives in the area of youth employment and raise their profile across the region, **(b)** support the region's aggregate economic growth rate by applying economic policies that have a well-documented positive impact on a wider scale and **(c)** mobilize business and civil society actors constituencies that will support and sustain economic reforms for an inclusive growth process.

Practical information

Organisation of the sessions

Each topic will have high-level plenary presentations, parallel workshops (breakout sessions) and roundtables followed by interactive debates for learning and experiences sharing.

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