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PROPOSED THEME OF THE AFRICAN UNION IN 2017:
DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDENT AND INVESTMENTS IN YOUTH
(Item proposed by Malawi)

CONCEPT NOTE

PROPOSED 2017 THEME OF THE AFRICAN UNION ON “HARNESSING THE DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND THROUGH INVESTMENTS IN THE YOUTH”

Agenda Item Proposed by the Republic of Malawi

The Context

1. Africa has set a noble, justifiable and ambitious set of goals to ensure its economic and social development through **Agenda 2063**. This agenda clearly articulates a vision of a “*prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development*”. The agenda further recognizes that people must be at the centre of all development efforts and envisions an Africa in which “*development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and with well cared for children*”. Further, Agenda 2063 recognizes the potential contribution of Africa’s changing population dynamics to structural and economic transformation on the continent.

2. The demographic dividend, which refers to the economic benefits that can occur when a population has a relatively large proportion of productive people, with less dependants and when governments effectively invests in their health, education and employment and ensure macroeconomic and labor policies lead to a major expansion of safe and secure employment, will be central to Africa’s ability to attain the transformative development as inspired by the **Agenda 2063**. The concept of harnessing the demographic dividend is also critical towards the attainment of the goals and targets of the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**.

3. The importance of the demographic dividend for Africa has clearly been recognized. African leaders have committed to focus on the growing youth population and ensure that this youth bulge is translated into a demographic dividend for the continent. The African Union Assembly through its Executive Council decision EX.CL/Dec. 742 (XXII) called for the recognition of the demographic dividend in the continent’s development efforts.

4. The AU Agenda 2063, makes several calls for investment in youth and women in realizing its vision that will be “*driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena*”. It also calls for “*shared prosperity and well-being, for unity and integration, for a continent of free citizens and expanded horizons, where the full potential of women and youth are realized, with freedom from fear, disease and want*”.

5. The 2013 Joint Annual Meetings of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development and AU Conference of Ministers of Economy and Finance called for the development of a continental demographic dividend initiative that will contribute to accelerating economic development on the continent. This is also echoed in the Common African Position on

the Post 2015 Development Agenda (CAP)¹ and the African Regional Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Beyond 2014 outcome document on harnessing the demographic dividend (*Addis Ababa Declaration on Population and Development*).

6. Further, the African Youth Charter makes numerous calls for a holistic investment in young people, noting that such is essential to their individual wellbeing and to the growth of the continent². Young people have themselves made several calls on African Heads of State and Government through the Intergenerational Dialogues organized by the African Union Commission for the prioritization of investments in the youth.

7. Most recently, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development also underscored the strategic importance of the demographic dividend³ to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Further, it is interesting to note that five (5) of the seventeen (17) goals of the SDGs are directly linked to the demographic dividend whilst nine (9) of the goals explicitly call for new knowledge and professional capacities as targets for their fulfillment which makes global investments in the capabilities of young people in key areas a powerful multiplier for the achievement of numerous development goals.

8. It is also worth mentioning that many countries across Africa are already putting in place measures that will help create an enabling environment and position them to reap the demographic dividend. Further, recent studies carried out in some African countries, including Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, and Malawi, have provided evidence on the prospects of harnessing demographic dividend, and underlined key challenges that Africa will face on the path to harnessing demographic dividend.⁴ These studies have also provided policy options that can maximize potential benefits from demographic dividend.

The Proposal

9. In order to meaningfully address the various aspects of the demographic dividend, including the challenges and opportunities of Africa's young generation, there is need for a platform at the continental level where Member States can deliberate on appropriate actions to be taken at national and regional levels. It is against this backdrop that the Government of the Republic of Malawi is proposing the adoption of ***"Harnessing the Demographic Dividend through investments in Youth"*** as the theme for the 2017 African Union Assembly of Heads of State and Government.

Rationale for the Proposed Theme

10. The continent has the youngest population in the world and the youth are Africa's greatest asset which will play a vital role in determining the continent's development

¹ Paragraph 48 of the Common African Position on Post 2015 Development Agenda

² African Youth Charter, Articles 10,13,14,15,16

³ Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Para 25)

⁴ UNFPA supported these studies on Demographic Dividend in the said countries. The reports are available on the website.

trajectory for the next 50 years. It is estimated that Africa will have 2.8 billion people by the year 2063; 72 percent of this number will be below 30 years of age. The Agenda 2063 actually recognizes that failure to harness demographic dividend is one of the key risks/threats that could affect the implementation of its First Ten Year Implementation Plan.

11. It is clear that the demographic dividend is not an automatic benefit that countries derive just by having a large youth population but it is the result of careful, timely and strategic investments made in young people. The time to take advantage of the African youth bulge is now, as this opportunity will not be there forever and, it will not be repeated. Africa must act now because right decisions and policies take time to establish and take effect.

12. Indeed, the cost of inaction by African leaders will be very high and has rightfully been described by some experts as the potential demographic disaster⁵. Failure to provide appropriate training and decent jobs⁶ for Africa's bulging youth population could pose a potential threat to the economic and social stability of the continent. This is because, without the right investments, Africa faces the potential of a large proportion of its working-age population with inadequate skills and poor health with its attendant high unemployment, lack of civic awareness and participation among others. This, as has been witnessed in other parts of the world and even in some parts of Africa, is the perfect recipe for disaster.

13. A year entirely devoted to the theme of demographic dividend would drive political leadership at the highest level for the much needed investments and economic reforms that would accelerate sustainable economic growth and move Africa closer to her aspirations of a strong, free and prosperous continent as articulated in the Agenda 2063. More specifically, such a high level gathering would help reinforce a continental focus on youth issues and call for recommitment of the necessary resources to harness the demographic dividend in Africa. In addition, it would create the needed momentum for governments to implement strategic investments in entrepreneurial skills and employment, health and education, all of which are prerequisites of benefiting from the youth bulge which demand a coordinated approach and response at the continental level.

14. Finally, the theme on demographic dividend and youth investment would also serve as a major driver for Africa to address, in the collective and most effective way, some of its greatest challenges: high fertility rates and youth dependency, empowerment of women, adolescent girls and other vulnerable youths; the migration issues; and the involvement of youth in armed and political conflicts among others.

⁵ Africa's Youth: A Ticking Time Bomb or An Opportunity, Kingsley Ighobor, African Renewal, 2013

⁶ Decent jobs are jobs that are safe, gainful and provide a conducive environment where employers respect workers' rights.

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