



Director General's statement on the occasion of the Africa Day 2017 celebration at the Vienna International Centre, 25 May 2017

Excellencies, Honourable guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a special privilege and a great pleasure for me to speak at this year's commemoration of Africa Day.

Africa Day provides us with a day of reflection on Africa's achievements in the recent past, a celebration of its population and culture.

I would like to express my appreciation to the Africa Group for organizing this event, especially the Chair of the Group, Mrs. Faouzia Mebarki, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, and I would like to reiterate the excellent cooperation UNIDO has had with the African Member States. Also, UNIDO appreciates the close partnership with the African Union Commission on all technical cooperation areas that UNIDO has been implementing in African countries.

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The theme for this year's Africa Day, "Harnessing the Demographic Dividend through investment in Youth" is a great opportunity to focus on one of the most critical issues of Africa's development agenda: the threats arising from high youth unemployment and at the same time, the potential offered by an increasing share of people at working age.

The theme also fits very well with the aspirations of a resolution made by the United Nations General Assembly in July 2016 proclaiming the period 2016-2025 as the Third Industrial Development for Africa (IDDA III). The IDDA III resolution aims to continue creating jobs, reducing poverty and furthering the progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the African Union Agenda 2063.

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The rapid population growth and the occurrence of a demographic transition in Africa have generated discussions on the prospects to open a window of opportunity and capture the demographic dividends.

With 200 million people aged between 15 and 24, Africa has the youngest population in the world. The current trend indicates that this figure will double by 2045. Only 51% of the 15-24 year olds actively participate in wage-earning jobs in Africa, which reduces national competitiveness and prospects for economic growth, and stable societies.

Therefore, we need to strengthen the ability of economies to absorb the labour force. History has shown that countries cannot have sustained economic development without industrialization and without a burst of entrepreneurial energy. This is particularly true in many East Asian countries, where, the demographic transition has been especially rapid. China has clearly enjoyed significant gains, where the demographic dividend contributed to nearly one quarter of the economic growth in the past three decades which was also spurred by an emergence of a strong private sector and entrepreneurship.

A thriving private sector is indeed key for growth, as well as entrepreneurship, which is about the ability to turn ideas into actions and to create values for others. This ability includes creativity, innovation, risk-taking, planning and management of business affairs. Empirical evidence indicates that investing relatively more in early years to improve both cognitive as well as socio- emotional skills is more cost-effective than later interventions. Therefore, investing in young people with skills related to creativity, risk taking, planning and management of business and an entrepreneurial mindset is fundamental for the development of countries.

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With all these factors in mind, and within its mandate to promote inclusive and sustainable industrial development, UNIDO places great emphasis on integrating youth and women into the economy of their countries. Through its programmes and projects, UNIDO has been helping governments in their efforts to create jobs, prevent migration and integrate marginalized youth into the economy.

Initiatives range from reinforcing local support structures; enhancing information sharing platforms; assisting young entrepreneurs create and develop their businesses through value-chains; enhancing technical and vocational skills of young people for manufacturing and related services to working with schools and universities in the development and implementation of entrepreneurship curricula.

As an example, UNIDO has assisted several African countries (such as Angola, Cabo Verde, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda and Uganda) in introducing a practical entrepreneurship curriculum in schools with the aim of promoting positive attitudes towards entrepreneurship and developing entrepreneurial competencies. Over 2.6 million young women and men have so far studied entrepreneurship in these countries, and more than 7,000 entrepreneurship instructors have been trained. We also recently launched this programme in Nigeria with funding from Japan.

UNIDO has also continued with the promotion of youth entrepreneurship in agro-related manufacturing industries. Particular focus is made on adding value to agricultural commodities, including non-food sectors as well as on SME development for increased job creation.

In Ethiopia, through a joint initiative with SIDA and in collaboration with Volvo, UNIDO is transferring modern technical know-how for vocational skills training in the field of heavy equipment, in order to generate jobs for youth. Under this initiative, a vocational training center to provide heavy duty equipment and commercial vehicle maintenance training has been established. The initiative is now also being implemented in Zambia.

In Liberia, UNIDO has partnered with a private sector company - Komatsu, the Government of Japan, and the Booker Washington Institute, to further support vocational training for the heavy duty equipment sector.

Moreover, UNIDO has recently developed a project called Entrepreneurs for Social Change, which aims at promoting youth-led social entrepreneurship in the Euro-Mediterranean region, and is foreseen to be replicated to other regions, including Africa.

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All these examples are, but to say that UNIDO will remain committed to its efforts focused on youth empowerment and in this regard I would like to reiterate our resolve to continuing with all the African member states, the Africa Group here in Vienna as well as with the African Union and its Commission.

Partnerships with other institutions including development financial institutions and the private sector will also continue to be sort to facilitate youth empowerment through productive activities and entrepreneurship.

At the core of all this will be the Programme for Country Partnership (PCP) approach, at the centre of which is job creation for youth.

Thank you very much and enjoy the Africa Day celebrations!