African Union

OFFICE OF THE
YOUTH ENVOY

Youth Mental
Health Toolkit
On **5 Emerging
Issues in
Africa**

#**I**can**survive**

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Advocacy Tool

Contents

Introduction

Chido Cleopatra Mpemba

It is clear that Mental health is an issue of paramount significance in Africa, where young people constitute a substantial and vibrant segment of the population, accounting for approximately 60% of the continent's total demographic. Recognizing the vital role of youth as catalysts for Africa's progress and development, addressing their mental well-being has become an urgent imperative. As the African Union Chairperson's Envoy on Youth, there is a unique opportunity to lead the charge in addressing the mental health challenges that young Africans face. This is even more critical as the African continent grapples with multifaceted challenges, including the impact of climate change, challenges in education, unsafe digital spaces, unemployment and social isolation resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic. I acknowledge the significant role that various stakeholders are playing in supporting the mental health of young people during these challenging times. As I continue to advocate for the interests of African youth, I remain committed to a sustained focus on promoting mental well-being and ensuring that essential assistance and support are readily accessible to young people when required. As part of my mission to advocate for the interests of African youth, I embarked on a listening tour across Africa and in the Diaspora, engaging with over 50 000 young people to hear their concerns in the past 2 years since November 2021. These engagements took place through youth town hall meetings, community visits, consultations on various topics and feedback from our inaugural African Union Youth Envoy survey launched in May 2022. It is abundantly clear that numerous emerging issues are impacting the mental health of young people. Consequently, I am introducing the #ICanSurvive Toolkit as a continent-wide Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) advocacy tool, designed to empower young individuals and implore governments and development partners to take meaningful action. This toolkit serves as a guide for youth, equipping them with the necessary tools to champion mental health advocacy across the continent. As a set of recommendations for member states and development partners, it aligns with the Africa Youth Charter's commitment to ensuring every young person's right to the highest attainable standard of mental health. This toolkit is more than a resource; it's a testament to the collective dedication to supporting Africa's young generation as they embark on their journey toward a brighter and mentally resilient future, with the African Union playing a pivotal role in advancing this mission.

H.E Ms Chido Cleopatra Mpemba
African Union Chaiperson's Envoy on Youth
Cabinet of the Chairperson
November 2023

A Quote from 1 November 2023, Africa Day

" Mental health is vital, yet often overlooked determinant of health and wellbeing. Without hope, it is difficult to succeed in our ambitious aim to provide opportunities of Education, Employment, Entrepreneurship and Engagement to and with 300 million Young People"

H.E Moussa Faki Mahamat:
African Union Commission Chairperson.

#ICanSurvive Mental Health Youth Advocacy Toolkit Patron

H.E Mrs Monica Geingos is the First Lady of the Republic of Namibia and President of the Organisation of African First Ladies for Development (OAFLAD). As First Lady, Mrs. Geingos implements her programs through the One Economy Foundation, with a focus on public health, youth empowerment, education, entrepreneurial development, mental health, and Gender Based Violence. This includes the successful youth program, the #BeFree movement, a one-stop youth centre of excellence where young people co-create sustainable interventions which respond to youth needs by strengthening the resilience, and decision-making capacity, of adolescents and young adults.

Background

Globally, young people are at a higher risk of experiencing mental health issues compared to individuals at other stages of the life cycle. According to the Centre for Disease Control, mental health is the psychological, emotional, and social well-being of individuals, enabling them to cope with life stressors, learn and work well, realize their abilities, and contribute to their community . Young people grappling with mental health conditions may encounter challenges including isolation, discrimination, stigma, and difficulty in accessing mental health services . Additionally, mental health struggles among young people have serious and long-lasting consequences, including troubled parent/child relationships, poor academic performance, and anger outbursts, heightening the need for access to mental health services. While greater strides have been made in some African countries, for example, decentralization of mental health care, significant challenges remain.

Thus, mental health challenges in the African context are complex and multifaceted, demanding a nuanced understanding and targeted interventions to address the unique cultural, social, and economic factors at play. These peculiar challenges underscore the importance of developing a mental health toolkit tailored for young people in Africa, addressing their unique needs and promoting awareness, accessibility, and acceptance of mental health services in the region.

In most African countries, mental health care is still inadequate, inefficient, and inequitable . Young people are often exposed to known risk factors for mental health difficulties, including low socioeconomic status, crime, violence, HIV/AIDS, TB, and Malaria, among other risk factors . Faced with these challenges, the number of young Africans who receive mental health treatment is extremely low. While the global annual rate of visits to mental health facilities stands at 1.051/100,000 populations, in Africa, it stands at 14/100,000 . In addition, the Lancet Global Health article "Mental Health in Africa" notes that there are 1.4 mental health workers/100,000 people, compared with the global average, which stands at 9/100,000. Partly as a result, about 98.8% of those in need of mental health services in Africa do not receive such . As a result, most people are left with no option but to visit religious or traditional leaders for treatment.

Goals of the #Icansurvive Toolkit

The goal of this #ICanSurvive toolkit is to address the mental health challenges faced by African youth, stemming from the continent's complex social, political, and economic context. These challenges were identified through extensive engagements, including town hall meetings, community visits, consultations, and surveys, involving over 50 000 young people across Africa and the Diaspora in 2022. The objectives of the toolkit are rooted in the recognition of the pressing need to address the mental health challenges faced by young people in Africa, aligning with the AU's commitment to youth well-being. The specific goals of the toolkit includes the following:

Raising Awareness: The toolkit aims to increase awareness and understanding of the profound impact of various stressors on the mental health of young people in Africa. It seeks to educate both the youth and key stakeholders about the psychological consequences of these challenges.

Youth Empowerment: A core goal of the toolkit is to empower young people to take proactive steps in safeguarding their mental well-being. It equips them with knowledge, advocacy skills, and the ability to seek help when needed.

Advocacy and Policy Influence: The toolkit seeks to mobilize young people as advocates for change, enabling them to raise their voices on mental health issues. By doing so, it aims to influence policies and initiatives that can better address mental health needs of young people in Africa.

Strengthening Mental Health Services: Another significant goal is to encourage governments and various stakeholders to strengthen mental health service, especially for young people in Africa. The toolkit advocates for the allocation of resources and policies that prioritize mental well-being.

Resilience Building: Ultimately, the toolkit seeks to enhance the resilience of young people by addressing their mental health needs. It aims to provide them with the tools and knowledge to adapt to the challenges and uncertainties of life while maintaining their well-being.

Thematic Areas

Through extensive engagements across Africa and the Diaspora highlighted earlier, five crucial themes emerged:

MENTAL HEALTH AND CLIMATE CHANGE:

In Africa, young people are increasingly recognizing the link between climate change and their mental health. Environmental challenges such as droughts, flooding, food insecurity, and displacement due to climate change can lead to heightened anxieties among young individuals. Witnessing the adverse effects of environmental degradation in their communities can cause stress and emotional distress, particularly for those who are concerned about the future state of the planet.

MENTAL HEALTH AND SOCIAL ISOLATION:

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the issue of social isolation among young people in Africa. Lockdowns, social distancing measures, and limited social interactions have led to feelings of loneliness, depression, and anxiety among many young individuals across Africa. Access to mental health support and interventions to address the psychological impact of isolation is vital.

MENTAL HEALTH AND DIGITAL SPACES:

The influence of digital technologies on the mental well-being of young people in Africa is substantial. The pervasive use of social media, exposure to cyberbullying, and the pressure to maintain an online image can lead to issues like anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. Additionally, limited access to digital spaces in some spaces in some regions may exacerbate feelings of exclusion and isolation, impacting mental health.

MENTAL HEALTH AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

Economic uncertainties, unemployment, and financial struggles across the continent significantly affect the mental well-being of young people in Africa. The lack of stable employment opportunities and financial security can lead to stress, anxiety and even depression. The relationship between mental health and economic development is bidirectional, as good mental health is essential for productivity and youth participation in economic activities.

MENTAL HEALTH AND EDUCATION:

Within the African education system, academic pressures and stress can have profound effects on the mental health of young individuals. High expectations, limited resources, and the desire to excel academically can lead to conditions like anxiety and burnout. Striking a balance between educational aspirations and mental well-being is crucial to ensuring that young people can thrive academically while maintaining good health.

MENTAL HEALTH AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Africa is not insulated from the harsh realities of climate change, as the continent witnesses growing frequency and intensity of extreme weather events. The persistent occurrence of these events, exacerbated by climate change, has given rise to "climate anxiety". Over the years, Africa has reported approximately 1700 natural disasters reported between 1970 and 2019, with floods representing the majority, accounting for 60 percent of all documented natural disasters during that period[3]. Young people, often referred to as Africa's demographic dividend, are disproportionately affected by the climate crisis, rendering them particularly vulnerable to psychological impacts. The direct effects of extreme weather events on the mental health of Africa's youth are multifaceted. Trauma resulting from occurrences like floods, droughts and other climate related disasters across Africa is a significant concern. Research has consistently shown that individuals living in areas affected by these events experience not only physical health issues but also mental health challenges[4]. The prolonged and heightened stress associated with these extreme weather events often leads to conditions such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), with young people among the most vulnerable populations in Africa. The following delves deeper into the effects of climate change on the mental health among young people in Africa.

1 https://www.statista.com/statistics/1270517/distribution-of-reported-natural-disasters-in-africa-by-type/
2 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). "Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability." Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report. 2022.

Impact of extreme weather events on young people's mental health

Loss of livelihoods

Changing climate patterns across Africa is severely affecting the agricultural sector, which serves as a primary source of livelihood for young people. They are often bearing the brunt of unpredictable weather events, prolonged droughts, and unseasonal rainfall, damaging crops, and reducing agricultural yields[3]. Prolonged drought is currently affecting the Sahel region due to inadequate rains. Young people are experiencing hunger and malnutrition, affecting their physical and mental health. The region faces added challenges, including ongoing conflicts, high poverty rates, and existing food insecurity, which has left the young population highly vulnerable and with limited coping capacity for drought[4]. Many families now rely on humanitarian aid, causing feelings of helplessness and insecurity, thus intensifying their mental health burdens due to the ongoing food crisis.

Displacement and Migration

As temperatures continue to rise and ecosystems undergo significant changes, Africa faces the 'triple planetary crisis,' which encompasses climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss. This crisis is triggering a wave of environmental disasters, exacerbating climate-induced migrations, and forced displacements[5], and profoundly affecting the mental health of young people on the continent. In 2021, over two million individuals were displaced due to climate-related crises across Africa, resulting in significant mental health challenges, particularly among the youth. In these critical situations, Sub-Saharan Africa is witnessing a heavy toll on the mental well-being of young people, with anxiety, depression and trauma becoming prevalent issues in these vulnerable communities[6]. In addition, the ripple effects of climate change extend to issues of displacement and the prevalence of informal urban settlements, further intensifying the mental health challenges faced by young people in Africa. As environmental conditions deteriorate, many communities, often populated by young individuals, find themselves displaced from their homes. The uncertainty and dislocation caused by these forced relocations significantly contribute to the mental health burdens of Africa's youth[7]. In informal urban settlements, living conditions are often substandard, and access to mental health support is limited, compounding the challenges faced by young people. In addition, young people are also exposed to various vector-borne diseases in these settlements, further compounding mental health issues[8].

Escalation of conflicts

There is growing evidence that the adverse effects of climate change increase both the risk and severity of violent conflict. The specific ways in which these effects impact violent conflict are, however determined by local social, political and economic dynamics[9]. In 2021, the African Union's Peace and Security Council issued a document[10] that underscores the threat of climate change on the continent's future peace and security with its communique on the need for a climate-security-development nexus for Africa. This important document underscores that climate change is a threat multiplier for Africa, leading to greater food and water insecurity, loss of livelihoods, additional pressure on natural resources, growing water scarcity among others. This is already being witnessed in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel region where violence has escalated and young people residing in these areas face heightened risk of exposure to violence, resulting in a range of mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, and PTSD. Witnessing or directly participating in resource related confrontations can leave a lasting psychological scar on young individuals, affecting their overall well-being and making them vulnerable to future mental health challenges[11].

#ICANSURVIVE - How to overcome climate anxiety?

Stay Informed: Educate yourself about climate change to make informed decisions and distinguish between fact and fear.

Set Boundaries: Limit your exposure to distressing climate news to prevent anxiety from overwhelming you.

Act: Channel anxiety into constructive action through climate activism, volunteering, and sustainable practices.

Practice Self-Care: Prioritize self-care with relaxation, meditation, physical activity, and time in nature to reduce stress.

Connect with Others: Join support networks of like-minded individuals, discuss your concerns, and advocate for climate action together.

Practice Resilience: Develop resilience by acknowledging your feelings and accepting that it's okay to feel anxious about the climate crisis. Recognize that taking action is a positive response to these concerns.

Seek Professional Help: If climate anxiety is significantly impacting your daily life, it may be beneficial to seek support from a mental health professional. Therapists can provide strategies for managing anxiety and building mental resilience.

Maintain Hope: Climate action is possible, and many positive changes are happening. Hold onto the hope that collective

3 https://edo.jrc.ec.europa.eu/documents/news/GDODroughtNews202208_East_Africa.pdf
4 https://www.wfp.org/stories/millions-face-hunger-drought-grips-ethiopia-kenya-and-somalia-warns-world-food-programme
5 https://www.iom.int/news/face-climate-change-migration-offers-adaptation-strategy-africa
6 https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2667278221000845
7 https://www.climatechangenews.com/2021/06/04/flooding-drought-fuels-mental-health-crisis-kenya/
8 https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/bjpsych-international/article/mental-health-and-climate-change-in-africa/65A414598BA1D620F4208A9177EED94B
9 Mobjörk, M., Krampe, F. and Tarif, K., 'Pathways of climate insecurity', SIPRI Policy Brief, Nov. 2020
10 https://www.peaceau.org/en/article/communique-of-the-1051th-meeting-of-the-au-peace-and-security-council-psc-held-on-26-november-2021-on-the-theme-climate-change-and-peace-and-security-the-need-for-an-informed-climate-security-development-nexus-for-africa
11 https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9600164/

efforts can make a significant difference in addressing the climate crisis. Focus on solutions and the potential for a more sustainable future.

Policy recommendations - "help us to survive"

Addressing climate change and its impact on the mental health of young people in Africa requires a multifaceted approach. Here are some key policy recommendations to consider:

Member States and Policy Makers:

Climate Mitigation and Adaptation Policies: Member states should prioritize the development and implementation of climate mitigation and adaptation policies that safeguard the future of their young populations. These policies should address the unique vulnerabilities of African youth, especially in regions prone to extreme weather events. The following are of the policies that should be implemented:

- Recognize and leverage mental health arguments for environmentally sustainable policies.

- Incorporate biodiversity and ecosystem awareness and conservation into mental health strategies

- Acknowledge environmental determinants of health within public health policy. For example, create and support equal access to safe and inclusive green spaces.

- Implement and evaluate health national adaptation plans (H-NAPS) that include mental health considerations.

Mental Health Integration: Member states should explicitly integrate mental health considerations into climate policies, strategies and actions plans. Given the increased mental health risks that African youth face due to climate-related challenges, this integration is essential.

Access to Mental Health Services: Member states should invest in mental health services, particularly those catering to the needs of young people. Accessible mental health services can provide much-needed support to African youth dealing with the mental health of climate change.

Youth Empowerment: Policies in Africa should empower youth to participate in climate related decision-making and advocacy. This not only involves them in the solutions but also bolsters their mental resilience by fostering a sense of agency and hope for the future.

Resilience and Disaster Preparedness: Member states must prioritize the resilience and preparedness of communities, especially those with high youth populations. Policies should ensure that early warning systems and disaster response mechanisms are well-prepared to protect young people in the face of climate-related disasters.

Research and Data Collection: Member states should fund and support research into the mental health impacts of climate change on their youth population. This research

is crucial for understanding the specific challenges and vulnerabilities faced by African youth.

Research: Promote interdisciplinary research that will build evidence to support policy design and implementation on the environment and mental health.

Win-Win Policies: Adopt win-win policies that maximise the mental health co-benefits of climate mitigation and adaptation, including nature-based interventions that improve access to green and blue spaces, and sustainable agriculture policies, which also increase access to nutritious food.

Healthcare Infrastructure: Investment in healthcare infrastructure, including mental health services, is paramount. Member states should ensure that their healthcare systems can adequately address the mental health needs of their youth.

Psychosocial Support: Member states should establish psychosocial support programs that cater to young individuals and communities affected by climate-related events. These programs are vital for helping African youth cope with the mental health stressors associated with climate change.

Global Climate Agreements: The international community should ensure that global climate agreements, like the Paris Agreement, provide support and resources to African countries to combat the climate crisis. This support is critical for African youth, who face the most immediate threats to their livelihoods due to climate change.

Development Partners:

Financial Support: Provide financial support for African countries to develop and implement climate-resilient mental health programs for young people, ensuring they receive the necessary resources and capacity-building.

Mental Health Capacity-Building: Offer training and resources to build the capacity of mental health professionals and community leaders to address climate-induced mental health challenges among African youth.

Research Funding: Support research initiatives that investigate the mental health impacts of climate change on young people in Africa, enabling the development of informed policies and strategies.

Youth Engagement: Encourage the active engagement of young people in climate adaptation and mitigation projects. Promote initiatives that empower them to be part of the solutions and advocates for climate action.

Global Climate Agreements: Advocate for global climate agreements, like the Paris Agreement, to allocate resources and support to African countries to combat the climate crisis. This support is crucial in safeguarding the livelihoods and mental well-being of African youth.
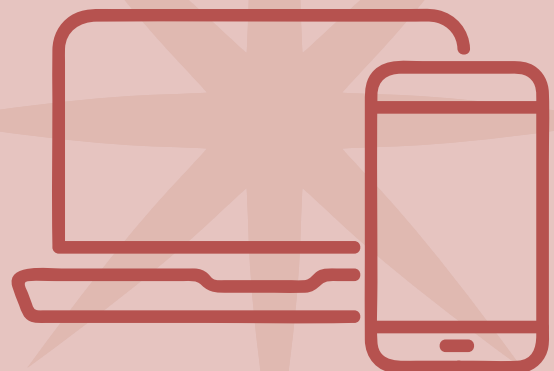
MENTAL HEALTH AND DIGITAL SPACES

The digital revolution in Africa has significantly impacted the lives of young people, where smartphones, social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp, and internet access have reshaped communication, information access, and social engagement[12].

As technology advances rapidly, African youth find themselves at the forefront of the digital age, with their lives intricately woven into the digital landscape. While digitalization has transformed communication, education, employment among others[13], it's a double-edged sword with vulnerabilities for youth, given the ubiquitous presence of digital devices and social media. Mental health, once a silent concern, has gained global attention as a major contributor to disability worldwide, particularly as Africa's youth population continues to grow[14]. The digital transition brings new challenges to safety, as young people become exposed to online threats like exploitation, cyberbullying, and the consumption of inappropriate content. These risks can contribute to feelings of anxiety, depression, and a sense of vulnerability, impacting their mental well-being. Moreover, the digital divide remains a pressing issue in Africa, leaving many young people without access to the internet and necessary digital devices. This inequality creates an opportunity gap, where those with access can harness the advantages of technology, while those without remain marginalized and excluded. This divide can have repercussions on the self-esteem and overall mental health of young people who lack access to digital resources and opportunities they provide. In the following section, we delve deeper into the dark side of digitalization among African youth.

12 https://esaro.unfpa.org/en/news/empowering-young-african-women-and-girls-digital-age-mentally-resilient-future
13 https://blogs.worldbank.org/education/empowering-africas-youth-thrive-digital-economy
14 https://www.vaticannews.va/en/africa/news/2023-08/rise-in-social-media-usage-among-africa-s-young-people-raises-co.html

The Dark Side of Digitalization

The rise of digitalization has not been without its dark side. While technology has facilitated numerous positive aspects of life, it has also exposed the youth to a range of challenges that significantly impact their mental health. These challenges can be understood in several key area:

Cyberbullying and Online Harassment

Cyberbullying is an escalating global concern, with Africa experiencing a surge in this digital-age threat, exacerbated by the COVID19 pandemic. Cyberbullying encompasses various forms, such as harassment, stalking, and intimidation, facilitated by tactics like sending threatening messages, sharing embarrassing content, and spreading rumors. Social media platforms have become hotspots for cyberbullying, as they provide a convenient and anonymous space for perpetrators to target their victims. From Facebook to Twitter, Instagram to WhatsApp, these platforms have witnessed instances of cyberbullying across the continent[15]. Its primary aim is to erode victims' self- esteem and social standing, leading to prolonged emotional distress. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the prevalence of cyberbullying is a growing concern, with a UNICEF in 2019 s revealing that 34% of young people experience it. The lack of awareness and education on cyberbullying prevention leaves many young people ill-prepared to confront online harassment. The consequences are severe, often causing emotional distress, anxiety, depression, and, tragically, suicide. Victims also experience decreased self-esteem, heightened social isolation, and reluctance to engage in school or social activities. The impact extends beyond individual victims, affecting families, friends, and the broader community, perpetuating a culture of fear and mistrust[16].

Social Media and Body Image

The pervasive influence of social media and online platforms has dramatically changed how African young women and girls interact with the world. While these platforms offer a space for self-expression, networking, and even activism, they also intensify the societal pressures these youth face. Social media often magnifies the ideals of beauty and success, creating unrealistic standards young people feel compelled to conform to[17]. This phenomenon, characterized by the idealization of 'perfect bodies', places significant pressure on young individuals, particularly young women, to aspire to these often-unattainable standards. The relentless pressure to meet these expectations can lead to feelings of inadequacy, low self-esteem, and anxiety, all of which have adverse implications for their mental health. In addition, while body shaming is not a new issue, the influence of social media has exacerbated the problem. Young people, particularly teenage girls, are bombarded with constant stream of 'perfect' body images through their social media feeds. Moreover, these images invite comments, some of which can be disparaging

and dismissive[18]. The impact of these pressures and negative comments can lead to low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and other mental health challenges among affected individuals. While there is an acknowledgement of more accepting attitudes towards diverse body sizes among young women in Africa, there is also growing acceptance of Western beauty standards. This shift in perception toward a slimmer body as the ideal can have detrimental consequences on the mental well-being of those who feel compelled to conform to these standards[19].

Cybercrime

Cybercrime has become a growing concern worldwide, with Africa being no exception to the escalating threat. The continent's young population, with increasing access to digital technologies and the internet, is particularly vulnerable to various forms of cybercrime. Cybercrime encompasses a wide range of illegal activities conducted over the internet or digital devices, including hacking, online scams, and identity theft[20]. The negative consequences of these criminal activities extend beyond the immediate financial or personal losses, and often lead to emotional distress, anxiety, and depression among young victims. Additionally, the lack of awareness and education regarding online security and cybercrime prevention among young people in Africa contributes to their vulnerability[21]. As a result, many individuals may not know how to protect themselves from online threats, leading to increased stress and anxiety.

Information Overload, Disinformation and Misinformation

The modern digital landscape in Africa, marked by information overload, misinformation, and disinformation, has profound implications for the mental health of young people. Information overload occurs because of the constant influx of data, news and content that individuals encounter through the digital devices and the internet. Misinformation refers to the unintentional spread of inaccurate or false information, while disinformation involves the deliberate dissemination of false information, often with harmful intent. Both phenomena contribute to confusion and anxiety among youth. For instance, during the Ebola outbreak in Central and West Africa, misinformation spread rapidly on social media platforms, causing unnecessary panic and anxiety among young people. Similarly, during the COVID-19 pandemic, false remedies and conspiracy theories went viral[22][23][24], sowing confusion and fear among African youth. The youth may also grapple with the fear of missing out on critical updates, leading to compulsive information checking, digital addiction, and heightened anxiety.

15 https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/cyberbullying-africa-addressing-growing-threat-online-apeti-roger/
16 https://www.masiphephe.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/3.-Thematic-paper-cyber-bullying-in-SA_FINAL.pdf
17 https://issuu.com/GuyanaChronicleE-Paper/docs/guyana_chronicle_e-paper_23-04-2023_4feb127ff3a8de/s/23106963
18 https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/smart-parenting-smarter-kids/202304/body-image-and-social-media
19 https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/jan/01/social-media-triggers-children-to-dislike-their-own-bodies-says-study
20 https://securitydelta.nl/media/com_hsd/report/135/document/Cyber-security-trends-report-Africa-en.pdf
21 https://www.telecomreviewafrica.com/en/articles/features/1662-the-future-of-cybersecurity-in-africa-relies-on-youth-skills
22 https://apnews.com/article/united-nations-health-us-news-ap-top-news-virus-outbreak-dedd5a5f5367b1da634a1e84dbb369ed
23 https://www.cfr.org/blog/disinformation-and-disease-social-media-and-ebola-epidemic-democratic-republic-congo
24 https://web.aflia.net/misinformation-on-covid-19-call-to-action/

#ICANSURVIVE: How to overcome the dark side of digitalisation?

Media Literacy and Digital Resilience: Educate yourself about digital literacy and critical thinking to discern between reliable and unreliable information. Learn to recognize the signs of misinformation and disinformation.

Safe Online Practices: Practice safe online behavior, including setting strong passwords, being cautious about sharing personal information, and reporting any instances of cyberbullying or harassment.

Mental Health Awareness: Stay informed about the potential impact of digital spaces on mental health. Reach out to mental health professionals or support networks when experiencing distress or anxiety related to online activities.

Digital Detox: Regularly take breaks from digital devices and social media to reduce the risk of information overload and digital addiction.

Policy Recommendations - "Help us to survive"

Member states and policy makers:

Education and Awareness: Integrate digital literacy and mental health education into school curricula to empower young people with the knowledge and skills to navigate the digital world safely.

Legislation: Enact or strengthen legislation related to cyberbullying, online harassment, and the responsible handling of personal data. Establish reporting mechanisms for cyberbullying incidents.

Mental Health Support: Allocate resources for mental health services and awareness campaigns aimed at young people, addressing the mental health challenges exacerbated by digital spaces.

Internet Access: Bridge the digital divide by implementing policies and infrastructure improvements to ensure equal access to the internet and digital devices for all youth, regardless of their socio-economic background.

Development Partners:

Capacity Building: Collaborate with member states to build their capacity to combat cybercrime, including providing training for law enforcement and judicial authorities.

Information Verification: Support fact-checking initiatives and organizations that work to verify the accuracy of information disseminated online.

Digital Literacy Programs: Provide funding and resources for digital literacy programs and initiatives that empower young people with the skills to critically assess online content.

Mental Health Initiatives: Partner with governments and NGOs to implement mental health programs that address the challenges posed by digital spaces and provide accessible mental health support to young people.

Research and Data Sharing: Invest in research to better understand the digital landscape's impact on mental health, and promote data sharing and collaboration to address these issues globally.

Social Media Companies:

Content Moderation: Implement robust content moderation systems to swiftly identify and remove harmful content, including cyberbullying, harassment, and disinformation. Invest in AI and machine learning technologies for proactive content filtering.

User Reporting: Create user-friendly reporting mechanisms that allow users to easily report abusive content or harassment. Ensure that reported content is reviewed promptly.

Transparency: Be transparent about content moderation policies and decisions. Communicate clearly with users about how content violations are addressed and enforced.

Algorithmic Responsibility: Examine and refine algorithms that can amplify harmful content or misinformation. Prioritize content that promotes well-being and positive interactions.

Digital Literacy Partnerships: Collaborate with educational institutions and NGOs to promote digital literacy and online safety among users, especially young people.

Mental Health Initiatives: Develop features and resources that encourage positive online behavior, and provide links to mental health support for users in distress.

Fact-Checking Partnerships: Partner with fact-checking organizations to verify information and prevent the spread of misinformation and disinformation.

User Privacy: Enhance user privacy controls and data protection to prevent unauthorized access to personal information.

Research and Data Sharing: Contribute to research on the impact of digital spaces on mental health and collaborate with external researchers to address these challenges effectively.

Public Awareness Campaigns: Launch public awareness campaigns to educate users about online safety, responsible content sharing, and the importance of reporting harmful content.

MENTAL HEALTH AND EDUCATION

In the dynamic landscape of Africa, the intersection of young people, mental health and education forms a crucial narrative that shapes the future of the continent. The youth in Africa represent not only its future but also its potential for transformation and progress. Global Partnership for Education (GPE) argue that higher shares of domestic finance are needed to meet SDG 4 goals in Africa, particularly given post-COVID challenges[25]. However, as young people across Africa navigate the complex educational systems and structures, the state of their mental health. Plays a pivotal role in determining their success and overall well-being. While education is a fundamental right and a pathway to empowerment, economic growth, and societal development, young people across Africa are facing an array of challenges that affect their mental health within educational settings.

25 https://www.globalpartnership.org/blog/we-need-more-and-better-education-financing-africa-full-recovery-covid-19

Education Challenges and Stressors in Africa

Academic Stress: In many African countries, education is highly competitive and often viewed to overcome socio-economic challenges. Young people face immense academic stress due to high expectations, limited access to educational resources, and the perception that academic success is the only path to a better future. The pressure to excel in exams, maintain high grades, and secure scholarships is leading to significant stress and mental health issues among students, including anxiety and depression[26].

Peer Pressure: Educational institutions, including schools and universities, have emerged as breeding grounds for intense peer pressure. Young people are being compelled to conform to social norms and expectations set by their peers. This pressure to fit in, meet certain standards, or follow particular trends can lead to feelings of inadequacy, low self-esteem, and a constant fear of judgement, which negatively impacts mental well-being.

Transition: Transitioning from one level of education to another or changing schools can be particularly mentally challenging for young people across Africa. Young people are finding themselves navigating new environments, adjusting to different academic expectations and forming new social connections. These transitions can be accompanied by anxiety, uncertainty, and the pressure to adapt quickly. The stress of adapting to new surroundings and academic demands can significantly impact a student's mental well-being during transition periods.

Limited Access to Quality Education: Access to quality education in Africa is far from uniform, with many regions facing challenges related to educational infrastructure, qualified teachers, and essential learning resources. The lack of well-equipped schools, adequately trained educators, and access to up-to-date learning materials can lead to frustration, reduced motivation, and stress among young learners. This educational inequality further exacerbates mental health disparities, as students in underserved areas often contend with the added burden of inadequate resources and opportunities, hindering their academic and personal development.

Violence and Conflict: In regions marred with violence and conflict, such as Sudan, Somalia, and areas plagued by groups like Boko Haram, young people encounter significant challenges at the nexus of education and mental health. In Sudan, prolonged conflict and civil wars have disrupted education, leaving many youths with limited access to education, fostering a sense of despair, including PTSD. Similarly, in Somalia, characterized by instability and extremist threats, young people are experiencing trauma, loss, and ongoing violence, hindering their educational pursuits contributing to the development of mental health issues[27]. In Nigeria and neighboring countries, Boko Haram's actions, including attacks on schools, have created a climate of fear, impending students; access to quality education and contributing to cycles of disadvantage and significant mental health concerns, including PTSD[28].

#ICANSURVIVE: transforming education and mental health:

Self-Care and Stress Management: Practice self-care and stress management techniques. This includes mindfulness, relaxation exercises, and time management. These skills can help to cope with academic stress and peer pressure.

Mental Health Awareness: Seek help and support when experiencing mental health challenges. Sharing personal stories and struggles can reduce the stigma around mental health issues.

Peer Support Networks: Create peer support networks within schools, colleges, universities or communities. These networks can provide a safe space for discussing challenges, sharing experiences, and offering emotional support to each other.

Advocacy and Activism: Engage in advocacy and activism to raise awareness of educational inequalities and mental health issues. Join or create youth-led organizations that work toward positive change in your communities.

Community Engagement: Get involved in community activities related to education and mental health. Participate in awareness campaigns, volunteer at local organizations, and be a part of community-based solutions.

Policy Recommendations - "Help us to survive":

Member States:

Invest in Education: Allocate a significant portion of the national budget to education, focusing on improving infrastructure, teacher training, and access to quality learning materials.

Mental Health Policies: Develop and implement comprehensive mental health policies within the education system, including training educators to identify and support students' mental health needs. Investing in child and mental health in Africa now will literally pay off in the future. The latest UNICEF State of the World's Children Report reveals that school-based interventions addressing anxiety, depression and suicide provide a return on investment of US$21.5 for every US$1 over 80 years. According to the report, the biggest results were in lower-middle-income countries, with a return of US$88.7 on every dollar invested[29].

26 Consultation with young people during the listening tour campaign in Ghana and Nigeria (2022).
27 https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00Z7HZ.pdf
28 https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/c0722a25-4163-5755-917a-03b94f37ad40/content#:~:text=The%20conflict%20has%20had%20a,and%20in%20some%20cases%20killed
29 https://www.afro.who.int/news/access-mental-health-and-psychosocial-support-services-remains-unequal-children-and

Educational Reforms: Reevaluate and reform the education system to reduce the pressure on students. Shift the focus from exam-oriented approaches to a more holistic, skill-based, and well-rounded education.

Address Educational Inequality: Implement targeted programs to bridge the educational gap between regions, with a particular focus on underserved areas, to ensure that all young people have equal opportunities.

Conflict Resolution and Peace Education: Prioritize conflict resolution and peace education initiatives in conflict-affected regions, working towards creating safe environments for education.

Data Collection and Research: Invest in research and data collection to better understand the specific challenges faced by young people in different regions and tailor policies accordingly.

Youth Engagement: Actively involve young people in policy discussions and decision-making processes to ensure their voices are heard and their perspectives considered.

Policy Makers:

Legislation: Advocate for and draft legislation that supports mental health awareness and support within the education system.

Curriculum Development: Include mental health education as a part of the curriculum, teaching students about stress management, emotional well-being, and seeking help when needed.

Teacher Training: Ensure that educators receive training on identifying and addressing students' mental health challenges and are equipped to create supportive and inclusive classroom environments.

Monitoring and Evaluation: Implement mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the impact of education policies on students' well-being and make necessary adjustments based on feedback and data.

Public Awareness Campaigns: Promote public awareness campaigns on the importance of mental health and the value of a well-rounded education system.

Development Partners

Support Educational Initiatives: Collaborate with African governments to support educational initiatives, focusing on improving access to quality education, teacher training, and infrastructure development.

Mental Health Support: Offer resources and expertise to help establish mental health support systems within African educational institutions, including counseling services and training programs.

Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding: Provide funding and expertise for conflict resolution and peace education programs in regions affected by violence and conflict.

Data and Research Support: Fund research on the impact of education challenges on young people's mental health in Africa and support data collection efforts.

Youth-Led Initiatives: Invest in youth-led organizations and initiatives that aim to address education challenges and mental health issues in Africa.

Advocacy and Awareness: Partner with local organizations and governments to raise awareness about the importance of mental health and the need for a balanced education system.

MENTAL HEALTH AND SOCIAL ISOLATION

The COVID-19 pandemic has swept across the globe, creating one of the most significant crises in recent history. It has left indelible marks on the health systems, economies and societies. Countless lives have been lost, and countless more have seen their livelihoods crumble[30]. Families and communities have been strained and separated, and among those are the young people of Africa. One of the most pronounced consequences of this crisis has been social isolation, a direct result of the necessary public health measures put in place to curb the virus's spread. In this context, the isolation brought by the pandemic has brought forth profound and wide ranging implications for their mental health.

The heightened social isolation has led to a surge in mental health issues. Anxiety, depression, and feelings of hopelessness have become more prevalent, fueled by the uncertainties of the pandemic. The young individuals of Africa struggled to cope with the emotional toll of the situation, affecting their overall mental well-being. The following challenges emerged from extensive listening tours and consultations with young people across Africa. These voices from the heart of the continent shed light on the profound impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the well-being of African youth.

30 https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-mental-health-cannot-be-made-light-of

Social Isolation and Loneliness: The foremost challenge young people in Africa have grappled with is the profound sense of social isolation and loneliness. The COVID-19 measures like social distancing and quarantine measures implemented as a response to the pandemic have disrupted the fundamental social interactions that are a hallmark of youth. This isolation has left many feeling disconnected and adrift, unable to engage in social activities or maintain the relations they rely on for support, thus exposing young people to anxiety and depression.

Academic Disruption: For young people across Africa, academic disruption has been a tangible and challenging reality. These disruptions have manifested in various ways, such as school closures, limited access to quality education, and difficulties with remote learning. As a result, many young individuals have experienced heightened levels of stress and anxiety due to the genuine fear of falling behind academically. The loss of daily routines, social interactions, and extra-curricular activities, which were previously taken for granted, has indeed contributed to elevated stress and feelings of inadequacy. The pervasive uncertainty surrounding academic progress and future prospects has also led to genuine anxiety about career opportunities and personal success.

Reduced Social Engagement: The deficiency in social engagement opportunities has inflicted a profound toll on the mental health of young people across Africa. The prolonged isolation from friends and peers, who traditionally serve as crucial sources of social support, companionship, and emotional resilience, has fostered a profound sense of detachment and emotional emptiness. This feeling of loneliness led to depression, anxiety and an overwhelming sense of despair. In addition, the forced social withdrawal that ensues from the absence of social engagement opportunities has resulted in a retreat from normal social activities. This withdrawal, born out of necessity rather than choice, led to feelings of disconnection from the world, and in some cases, a loss of self-identity. This profound social withdrawal has further eroded their mental health, as it can engender a sense of purposelessness, contributing to feelings of depression and self-doubt. Therefore, the collective effects of isolation, loneliness, social withdrawal, and social interaction anxiety have constituted a perfect storm for mental health issues among young people in Africa.

Disrupted Family Dynamics: Extended periods spent at home due to the pandemic have disrupted family dynamics among young people across the continent, leading to increased stress and conflicts within households. This strain on family relationships has resulted in emotional distress and tension, negatively impacting the overall well-being of young people across Africa.

Digital Dependency: In the context of COVID-19 induced social isolation among young people in Africa, the increased reliance on digital devices has led to digital fatigue and had a pronounced impact on their mental health. The extended periods of online engagement, stemming from the necessity of remote learning and limited social interactions, have heightened levels of screen time and digital dependency. This overuse of digital devices has, in turn, led to a range of mental health challenges among young people. The constant exposure to screens and virtual environments has been associated with heightened anxiety as a result of relentless influx of conspiracy theories, disinformation, and misinformation etc.

#ICANSURVIVE: Social isolation and mental health:

Connect with Your Peers: Reach out to your friends and make an effort to stay connected, even if it's online. Social support is crucial for your well-being.

Take Regular Breaks from Screens: Reduce screen time and avoid the constant flow of information. Step away from your devices to protect your mental well-being.

Practice Self-Care: Prioritize self-care, which includes activities like exercise, deep breathing, and mindfulness to help manage stress.

Speak Up: Don't suffer in silence. If you're struggling, talk to someone you trust or seek help from a mental health professional. Your voice matters.

Advocate for Mental Health: Stand up for mental health awareness. Challenge stigma and discrimination by speaking out and educating others.

Get Involved: Engage in community activities, volunteering, and social causes. Your involvement can combat loneliness and give you a sense of purpose.

Build Resilience: Learn how to bounce back from setbacks and tough times. You have the power to build your resilience and overcome challenges.

Express Yourself Creatively: Use creative outlets like art, music, and writing to express your emotions and build a sense of accomplishment.

Set Goals: Set goals for your personal and academic growth. Working towards your ambitions can give you a sense of direction and purpose.

Stay Informed Responsibly: Be critical of information you consume online. Fact-check, and don't let misinformation fuel your anxiety.

Policy Recommendations - "Help Us To Survive":

Member States and Policy Makers:

Mental Health Services: Invest in and expand accessible, affordable, and culturally sensitive mental health services, including telehealth options, to address the surge in mental health issues among young people.

Education Support: Develop comprehensive strategies to mitigate academic disruption, including remote learning solutions, addressing the digital divide, and providing mental health support within educational institutions.

Awareness and Education: Implement mental health awareness campaigns and integrate mental health education into school curricula to reduce stigma and increase young people's understanding of mental well-being.

Community Support: Foster community-based programs and support networks to address social isolation, enhance family dynamics, and provide safe spaces for young people to engage in social activities.

Digital Well-being: Promote digital literacy and responsible online behavior, emphasizing critical thinking and media literacy to combat the negative impact of digital dependency.

Policy and Legal Frameworks: Develop and strengthen policies and legal frameworks that prioritize the mental health and well-being of young people, including protection from online harm and cyberbullying. Include young people in relevant policy-development processes to create more targeted and effective policies[31].

Development Partners:

Financial Assistance: Provide financial support for mental health initiatives and programs targeting young people in African countries. This assistance can fund the expansion of mental health services, awareness campaigns, and the development of accessible resources.

Capacity Building: Offer training, workshops, and resources to build the capacity of local healthcare professionals, educators, and community leaders in addressing mental health issues. This includes training in providing counseling and therapy, as well as promoting mental health awareness.

Research and Data Collection: Support research and data collection efforts to better understand the specific mental health needs of young people in different African regions. This data will help inform targeted interventions and policies. UNICEF reports that many organizations worldwide are increasing their efforts to support young people's participation in the design, implementation and monitoring of research, programme, advocacy or communications work relevant to issues that concern them. Participation provides crucial opportunities to:

- recognize and engage with young people as right holders and agents of change

- build on young people's strengths, insights and skills

- develop more ethical, relevant and effective programs and policies[32].

Collaboration: Facilitate partnerships between governments, local organizations, and international entities to create a coordinated response to the mental health challenges faced by young people. Encourage the sharing of best practices and resources.

Advocacy and Policy Support: Assist in advocating for mental health as a priority in national policies and legislation. Encourage the development of policies that address the mental health needs of young people and promote destigmatization.

Technology Access: Support initiatives aimed at improving digital access and literacy among young people in Africa, as this can facilitate access to mental health resources and reduce the negative consequences of digital dependency.

Community-Based Programs: Fund community-based mental health programs that engage young people in peer support, mentorship, and social activities. These initiatives can help combat social isolation and promote emotional resilience.

Crisis Response: Provide resources and expertise to help countries establish and improve crisis response systems, including helplines and online support, to address immediate mental health needs during emergencies.

Evaluation and Impact Assessment: Support the evaluation and assessment of mental health programs to ensure that resources are allocated effectively and that interventions are having a positive impact on the well-being of young people.

Long-Term Commitment: Demonstrate a long-term commitment to mental health initiatives in Africa, recognizing that the impact of COVID-19 on young people's mental health is ongoing and that sustained support is essential.

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31 Global Mental Health Action Network
32 UNICEF (2022) 'Young people's participation and mental health'. Available at https://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/africa-regional-studies/publication/financing-africa-through-the-crisis-and-beyond

MENTAL HEALTH AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Africa is home to the youngest population in the world, boasting of over 400 million individuals between 15-35 years. However, a concerning reality is that, according to the African Development Bank (AfDB)[33], one-third of these young people are unemployed and discouraged, another third find themselves in insecure employment, and one in six can secure wage employment. The potential of young people is a driving force behind our collective prosperity. This is particularly relevant to Africa, where the population is expected to comprise of 40% of the world youth within just three generations[34]. By 2050, the vast number of young Africans is projected to make up more than a quarter of the global labor force. It's important to note that Africa's youth population is expected to continue growing for the next 50 years, while other continents are experiencing aging populations. However, many young Africans, who have the potential to drive the continent's transformation, often find themselves marginalized and alienated. Despite policy commitments to youth development at both national and regional levels in recent years, these commitments have not always translated into action on the ground. A significant number of young people still face unemployment and struggle to access essential public resources and quality social services.

Their involvement in policy development and program design remains limited, and their participation in politics and economic spaces is often sporadic[35]. This marginalization and lack of consistent engagement can lead to various mental health issues among young Africans. Feelings of exclusion, disillusionment, and disempowerment can contribute to stress, anxiety and even depression. This concerning reality emanated from the engagements that the AU-Youth Envoy had with over 50 000 young people across Africa and the Diaspora. It is crucial to recognize that the success of African countries in the future will be measured by the actions taken to promote transformative and inclusive development, ensuring that policies align with the needs and aspirations of upcoming generations.

33 https://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/the-youth-africas-most-valuable-resource-for-economic-transformation-18411
34 https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Youth/UNEconomicCommissionAfrica.pdf
35 ibid

Skills Gap and Mental Health Issues among Young Africans

Despite improvements in youth access to education, African youth continue to face various challenges related to the accessibility, quality, and relevance of education. These challenges mainly revolve around the lack of job-related skills, including technical, technological and entrepreneurial capabilities. Unfortunately, technical and vocational education and training, which plays a crucial role in industrialization, often receives insufficient attention in Africa's educational policies. Inadequate access to quality education and a lack of job-related skills can lead to feeling of inadequacy, hopelessness, and stress among young Africans. These contribute to mental health issues as young individuals are struggling with the pressure to secure meaningful employment and a better future.

Unemployment and Mental Health Issues among Young Africans

Undoubtedly, young people are Africa's biggest economic resource, and this presents a golden opportunity to boost Africa's economic growth and development. However, many young people across the continent are unemployed and experience a lack of economic opportunities on the continent. One of the challenges facing many African governments is how to provide better economic opportunities for more than 250 million youth on the continent. While 10 to 12 million young people enter the labor market each year, only 3 million formal jobs are created by African countries, leaving the majority of the youth unemployed or forcing them to settle for low-paid and low productive jobs in the informal sector to make ends meet[36]. Much of youth unemployment in Africa is attributed to skills gaps, where young people lack the requisite abilities to meet employers' demands. Many educated young people across Africa lack entrepreneurial skills necessary for self-employment. Thus, persistent youth unemployment and underemployment is leading to a sense of hopelessness, financial stress, and feelings of inadequacy as young Africans are facing uncertainty and financial strain.

Limited Access to Capital and Mental Health Issues among young Africans

While Africa's financial systems have progressed over the past 20 years, liberalization, privatization, and stabilization is yet to translate into more accessible financial services, especially credit, that reaches the majority of Africans, particularly the youth. On average, banks in Africa are well capitalized and liquid. Still, the benefits of deeper, broader, and cheaper finance has not yet been reaped. Even though it weathered the 2008 global financial crisis, Africa will be affected by long term-trends that started before the crisis and have been reinforced by the crisis, especially the shifts in the distribution of global economic power[37]. Across Africa, young entrepreneurs are facing significant finance challenges in building and scaling up their businesses. Due to the structural concerns around risk, young people are failing to access already limited finance available in Africa. Additionally, due to often limited experience, young people do not have the right

skills to scale up existing enterprises, or the right information and networks to access financial resources to help them and their businesses grow. This lack of access to finance to scale up their business lead to feelings of powerlessness and frustration among young Africans, thus compounding their mental health issues.

#ICANSURVIVE: Economic Empowerment and Mental Health:

Embrace Entrepreneurship: Recognize the value of entrepreneurship as a means to create jobs and drive economic growth. Seek entrepreneurship training and guidance to develop the necessary skills to start and manage businesses effectively. Explore innovative solutions and business ideas that address local and regional challenges.

Leverage Digital Platforms: Embrace digital technology and platforms to access opportunities and expand your skillset. Use digital tools to network, learn, and connect with potential partners and customers. Stay informed about digital advancements and trends that can benefit your endeavors.

Explore Promising Sectors: Consider sectors with growth potential, such as financial services and technology, where young African entrepreneurs are creating transformative solutions. Identify opportunities for innovation within these sectors and seek mentorship from experienced professionals.

Advocate for Improved Business Environment: Engage with policymakers and advocate for more favorable policies related to business registration, operation, and regulation.

Build Resilient Businesses: Prepare your business to withstand uncertainties and shocks, as demonstrated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Invest in resilience-building measures, such as diversification and contingency planning.

Explore Intra-Regional Opportunities: Collaborate with peers from different African countries to expand your business networks and explore new markets.

Address Infrastructure and Supply Chain Challenges: Advocate for improvements in infrastructure, power supply, and logistics supply chains.

Work with relevant stakeholders to address challenges that may affect the efficiency of your business operations.

Stay Informed About Continental Initiatives: Keep abreast of continental initiatives like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and their potential impact on entrepreneurship.

Consider how your business can benefit from the removal of trade barriers and the expansion of regional markets.

Prioritize Building Relevant Skills: Continuously develop your skills beyond formal education to remain competitive in your chosen field. Seek opportunities for training and upskilling in areas that align with your entrepreneurial goals.

36 https://www.leadersofafrica.org/analysis/youth-unemployment-dilemma-in-africa-recent-data/
37 https://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/africa-regional-studies/publication/financing-africa-through-the-crisis-and-beyond

Policy Recommendations - "Help Us To Survive":

Member States and Policy Makers

Youth Engagement: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063 highlight the significance of upholding the rights of young people and addressing their diverse needs. In fact, involving young individuals is a crucial component for effectively realizing the transformative agenda in Africa. Consequently, to fulfill these ambitions, it is imperative for member states and policy makers to grasp the requirements, interests, obstacles, and potential of Africa's youth.

Unlocking Trade Opportunities: Member states and policymakers should implement robust educational programs to equip young entrepreneurs with the knowledge to navigate cross-border complexities and invest in skill development for effective international business engagement.

Investments in Vital Skills: Promote skills in science, technology, agriculture, and management for employability and entrepreneurship.

Public-Private Partnerships: Facilitate partnerships between the public and private sectors to create job opportunities. Encourage businesses to actively participate in workforce development initiatives and collaborate on job creation projects.

AfCFTA Ratification and Implementation: Member states should prioritize the swift and efficient ratification of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) as a pivotal step in fostering youth economic development. By expediting the approval processes and collaborating closely with stakeholders, governments can create an environment that enables young entrepreneurs to capitalize on the opportunities presented by AfCFTA.

Harmonization of Trade Policies: Promote the harmonization of trade policies among member states to create a seamless and conducive environment for intra-regional trade.

Inclusive Economic Policies: Adopt inclusive economic policies that consider the diverse needs of the population. Policies should create an enabling environment for businesses to thrive, leading to increased job opportunities.

Build Africa's Human Capital: Building Africa's human capital requires an urgent and collective commitment to investing in the next generation, as the continent's future hinges on the development of its people. Accelerating collective action is paramount to transforming Africa towards greater prosperity and ensuring a sustainable future on a livable planet. The Africa Human Capital Plan, launched in 2019, stands as a testament to this commitment. Notably, the World Bank's historic commitments of $34 billion in human development operations in Africa, including $11.5 billion in new investments specifically championing the empowerment of women and girls, underscore the global recognition of the imperative to nurture and empower Africa's human capital. This substantial investment aligns with the vision of creating a skilled, healthy, and empowered youth demographic, laying the foundation for a resilient and prosperous Africa[38].

Development Partners:

Skills Development and Education: Development partners should collaborate with African governments to implement robust educational programs addressing the skills gap among youth. Emphasis should be placed on technical, technological, and entrepreneurial capabilities to enhance employability.

Entrepreneurship Training: Prioritize entrepreneurship training and guidance to empower young Africans in creating, managing, and scaling businesses effectively. This includes exploring innovative solutions and mentorship opportunities within promising sectors like finance and technology.

Digital Empowerment: Support the adoption of digital technology among youth for skill expansion. Encourage the use of digital platforms for networking, learning, and connecting with potential partners and customers, fostering a tech-savvy generation.

Advocacy for Improved Business Environment: Engage in policy advocacy with African governments to create a more favorable business environment. This involves promoting policies related to business registration, operation, and regulation that support entrepreneurship.

Resilience-building Measures: Encourage the development of resilient businesses by investing in measures such as diversification and contingency planning. This prepares young entrepreneurs to withstand uncertainties, ensuring sustainability.

Intra-Regional Collaboration: Facilitate collaboration among young entrepreneurs from different African countries to expand their networks and explore new markets. This promotes a sense of unity and fosters cross-border business opportunities.

Access to Capital: Collaborate with financial institutions to address challenges faced by young entrepreneurs in accessing capital. Develop innovative and accessible financial services to support scaling up businesses and enhance financial inclusion.

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38 https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2023/06/27/investing-in-youth-transforming-afe-africa

Recommendations on Future Emerging Issues:

In the midst of Africa's diverse social, political, and economic landscapes, the #ICanSurvive toolkit emerges as a beacon of resilience and advocacy, addressing the intricate mental health challenges faced by the continent's youth. Crafted through extensive engagements with over 50,000 young individuals across Africa and the Diaspora, this toolkit is a testament to the collective commitment to understanding and alleviating the profound impact of various stressors on the mental well-being of the youth. Rooted in the objectives of raising awareness, empowering young minds, advocating for policy changes, strengthening mental health services, and fostering resilience, the toolkit is a strategic response to the pressing need for comprehensive mental health support. As we explore future emerging issues, the toolkit remains a dynamic and forward-thinking resource, positioned to anticipate and proactively address the evolving mental health landscape for the well-being of Africa's young generation.

Mental Health and Technological Advancements: As technology continues to advance, future emerging issues may include the impact of artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and other technological innovations on the mental health of young people in Africa. Research and interventions should be proactive in addressing potential challenges and harnessing the benefits of these technologies for mental well-being.

Mental Health and Global Health Crises: Given the experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is essential to anticipate and address the mental health implications of future global health crises. Developing comprehensive strategies for psychological support, online mental health services, and community resilience can be crucial in mitigating the impact of such crises on young individuals.

Mental Health and Urbanization: With ongoing urbanization trends in Africa, future mental health challenges may arise from the rapid transformation of rural areas into urban centers. The toolkit should consider exploring the psychological impact of urban living, potential stressors related to migration, and the need for mental health services tailored to the urban context.

Mental Health and Political Instability: Recognizing the potential influence of political instability on mental health, future engagements should delve into understanding the psychological effects of political unrest, civil conflicts, and governance issues on young individuals. Advocacy efforts can then focus on policies addressing the mental health consequences of political instability.

Mental Health and Gender Dynamics: Future considerations should include an in-depth exploration of how gender dynamics intersect with mental health challenges. Understanding the unique stressors faced by young men and women, as well as individuals with diverse gender identities, will be essential for developing inclusive mental health interventions.

Mental Health and Cultural Shifts: As African societies undergo cultural shifts and transformations, it is crucial to anticipate the impact on the mental health of young people. The toolkit should consider how changing cultural norms, values, and societal expectations may contribute to or alleviate mental health challenges, promoting culturally sensitive approaches to support.

Mental Health and Environmental Sustainability: Given the heightened awareness of the connection between mental health and environmental issues, future considerations should focus on the mental health implications of sustainable development efforts. Understanding how environmental conservation and sustainable practices impact the well-being of young individuals is vital for holistic mental health advocacy.

Mental Health and Access to Healthcare: Future challenges may arise concerning access to mental healthcare services, particularly in remote or underserved areas. The toolkit should explore innovative solutions such as telemedicine, community-based mental health initiatives, and strategies to overcome barriers preventing young people from accessing necessary mental health support.

Mental Health and Educational Reforms: Anticipate potential shifts in educational systems and reforms that may impact the mental health of young individuals. Consider how changes in educational approaches, curricula, and assessment methods may contribute to or alleviate mental health stressors among students.

Mental Health and Economic Inclusion: Future engagements should explore the evolving landscape of economic activities and their impact on the mental health of young people. Consideration should be given to issues such as gig economy challenges, evolving job markets, and the role of economic policies in fostering mental well-being and inclusion.

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