Outcome Statement - 2023 Continental Youth Consultation

12th High Level Dialogue
Continental Youth Consultation

The Role of Youth in Delivering Peace Dividends Through the AfCFTA Implementation

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia 3 October 2023
I. INTRODUCTION

1. The African Governance Platform has institutionalized the Continental Youth Consultation prior to the High-Level Dialogue, with the theme of the 2023 Consultation being “the role of African youth in delivering the peace dividends through AfCFTA implementation.” The overriding objective of this Consultation was to empower youth in enhancing their contributions to democratic governance, peace, and socioeconomic development in the context of AfCFTA. It equally sought to increase awareness of relevant frameworks, promote youth's potential in these areas, and provide valuable insights for a peaceful and integrated Africa.

2. The sub-themes discussed during the Consultation centred on empowering African youth to play a central role in both democratic governance and socioeconomic development, with a particular focus on their involvement in the AfCFTA implementation to foster peace dividends and facilitate access to AfCFTA benefits while promoting peace in Africa.

3. This Outcome Statement presents the general trends, challenges, and recommendations of the Continental Youth Pre-Forum to the 12th High-Level Dialogue.

II. ATTENDANCE

4. The youth consultation brought together AU Organs and Institutions, Regional Economic Communities, Civil Society Organizations including Youth networks and Women’s organizations; the AU Permanent Representatives Committee (PRC) Sub-Committee on Human Rights, Democracy and Governance (HRDG); the Peace and Security Council (PSC), Representatives of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia; Development Partners and Agencies; Private Sector (Multinationals/Local), Philanthropy Organizations and Individuals; Academia, think tanks, and Research Institutions and the Media.
III. HIGHLIGHTS

The vital contribution of youth to peace dividends through the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is a central theme that underscores the potential for unity, solidarity, and human cohesion across African nations. This potential is closely linked to the role of young people as catalysts for innovation, creativity, and entrepreneurship, bridging the gap between peace and development. It is imperative to recognize that peace is a fundamental prerequisite for development, and the future of Africa hinges on its youth.

Young people actively engage in cross-border trade initiatives, fostering regional integration that, in turn, promotes conflict prevention and resolution. To harness this potential fully, there is a pressing need to enhance young people’s access to information about AfCFTA. This access will facilitate resource availability and the acquisition of essential skills, safeguarding them from exploitation while enabling their active participation in high-level trade activities.

The youth play an undeniable role in delivering peace, and it is paramount for them to realize that they are leaders of today, not just tomorrow. The statistics highlighting that over 65% of Africa’s population is under 35 years old, with an estimated increase to 840 million by 2040, emphasizes the strength that lies in this youthful demographic. This strength emerges from the diversity within this large cohort.

The migration crisis both within and beyond borders raises doubts regarding the successful execution of the AfCFTA. These doubts stem from the question of conflicting priorities, namely, whether the emphasis should be on addressing crime or establishing a system that fosters trade. This scepticism has remained despite the existence of data disproving assumed high incidence of migration and crime.

The knowledge and skills possessed by young people are invaluable assets for realizing peace dividends through AfCFTA implementation. However, it is disheartening to witness young lives being lost in the Mediterranean in search of better opportunities. This tragic reality must cease to be accepted, and young people should
take their rightful positions in addressing challenges such as housing and healthcare that plague Africa.

Furthermore, youth should lead advocacy efforts to popularize AfCFTA, recognizing its potential to facilitate the movement of goods and services, elevating Africa's standing as a significant global player. In unity and diversity, the youth of Africa hold the key to unlocking the full potential of AfCFTA and realizing the peace and prosperity it promises for the continent.

IV. KEY OUTCOMES

**Ratification and Alignment:** The conversation highlighted that the success of AfCFTA was contingent on two pivotal factors: the ratification of the agreement and its alignment with each country's National Development plans. It was emphasized that countries needed to have their own well-defined development plans in place as a foundation for effectively engaging with the AfCFTA framework.

**Intellectual Property:** The discussion reported that AfCFTA encompassed various aspects in addition to trade, including intellectual property rights. It was recognized that young people were often vulnerable to issues related to intellectual property, emphasizing the importance of safeguarding their interests.

**Regional Economic Communities:** The role of Regional Economic Communities was emphasized as they possessed valuable regional knowledge that was essential for designing and implementing effective AfCFTA strategies.

**Stable Governance:** Recent unconstitutional government changes were noted to be associated with economic factors, highlighting a concerning trend that underscores the interdependence of political stability and economic development. This underscores the importance of stable democratic governance as a foundational pillar for the successful implementation of the AfCFTA.
Youth as Beneficiaries: It was reported that the primary beneficiaries of AfCFTA should be women and youth. Young people were identified as key drivers of the AfCFTA's success due to their active participation in daily trading and their adeptness in technology and digitalization; however, more needs to be done.

Implementation: While it was reported that economically influential countries were taking the lead in AfCFTA implementation, concerns were raised about the challenge of extending this momentum to other nations. It was noted that multinational corporations appeared to be benefiting more from the AfCFTA than the youth and smaller businesses within Africa, thereby raising a call to action for the youth to equally harness the potential of this tool.

Financial Literacy: The conversation reported the importance of including financial literacy education for youth within trade discussions. This education was viewed as essential in equipping young people with the knowledge and skills necessary for effective investment decisions.

Engagement Platforms: Youth involvement in AfCFTA was reported as essential, and responsive leadership that catered to the needs of young people was highlighted as crucial. To achieve this, the discussion reported the suggestion of effective intergenerational dialogues, the creation of youth-led platforms, and the utilization of digital tools for engagement.

Policy Literacy: It was reported as crucial for young people to have a thorough understanding of policies, how they were formulated, and how they are implemented. The idea of creating national AfCFTA committees or youth business consortiums was suggested as a way to actively involve young people in the AfCFTA and ensure they derived benefits from its operationalization.

Infrastructure Standardization: Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) were reported as critical drivers of economic and sustainable development, aligning with Agenda 2063. The standardization of border infrastructure to facilitate seamless business operations was reported as central for the effective implementation of AfCFTA.
Youth in Peace-building: It was reported that youth were sometimes manipulated and used as resources for conflict. To counter this, there is a need to engage youth in peace-building initiatives that divert their energy away from conflict and towards constructive activities.

Government-led incentives: Governments were encouraged to provide incentives for youth innovation and invest in building the capacities of young people, aligning with the goals of AfCFTA.

Youth-Centric Accountability: It was suggested that there should be accountability mechanisms specifically designed to involve the youth in discussions concerning law and policy, ensuring their interests were represented.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Prioritize AfCFTA Implementation
Recognize the potential of AfCFTA to foster unity, cooperation, and economic growth. Develop and implement concrete action plans for youth participation in AfCFTA.

Encourage Active Youth Engagement
Actively involve young people in decision-making and co-leadership roles. Empower young people through opportunities for education, employment, and improved access to finance, technology, and markets. Utilize youth centric platforms to adequately communicate and dialogue with this demographic.

Foster Resilience and Inclusivity
Acknowledge the role of young people and communities in conflict prevention and resolution. Work towards creating inclusive societies.

Address Youth-Specific Challenges
Address unique challenges faced by young people, such as inadequate access to information, limited representation, skills development, and protection from violence and discrimination.
**Promote Youth-Led Peace Initiatives**
Promote youth-led initiatives focused on peace promotion through dialogue, mediation, and advocacy. Raise awareness about conflicts and their resolutions.

**VI. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the Continental Youth Consultation underscored the strong link between the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and peace in Africa. Without peace, there can be no sustainable development. It was emphasized that the success of the AfCFTA relies on ratification, alignment with national development plans, and stable governance, all contributing to economic growth and political stability.

The youth are leaders today, with their diversity and potential being assets for AfCFTA and peace. Addressing issues like risky migration and involving them in solving local problems is vital. The youth equally need support through education, resources, and protection from exploitation thereby enabling them to fully harness the power of this tool.

Africa’s youth, united in diversity, hold the key to unlocking the AfCFTA’s full potential, paving the way for peace and prosperity. Governments, regional organizations, and society must prioritize their involvement and empowerment of the youth, recognizing the essential link between peace and youth participation. This joint effort will drive economic growth, nurture unity, and create a brighter future for Africa.