

CONCEPT NOTE

Steering Africa's Future

A Youth-led Research to Contribute
Policy Perspectives from Young Africans
during the Summit of the Future
September 2024

**“The choices we make,
or fail to make, today
could result in breakdown
or a breakthrough to a
greener, better, safer future.
The choice is ours to make.”**

ANTÓNIO GUTERRES

United Nations Secretary-General
Our Common Agenda



The [Summit of the Future](#) provides a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reinvigorate multilateral collaboration and develop strategies tailored to current realities for addressing the pressing challenges of our time. Effective global cooperation is increasingly critical to our survival but difficult to achieve in an atmosphere of mistrust, using outdated structures that no longer reflect today's political and economic realities.¹ Africa is central to this transformation, claiming its rightful place at the global leadership table while working to achieve the 2023 Agenda and the African Union's Agenda 2063.

The alignment between the Summit of the Future and Agenda 2063 is profound and strategic. This agenda, guiding Africa's path to prosperity through initiatives prioritizing infrastructure development, human capital investment, and regional integration, envisions a future where the continent plays a pivotal role in global governance and economic stability. The Summit allows Africa to assert its priorities, influence global strategies, and foster partnerships that respect its autonomy. Africa's participation is crucial for shaping an agenda that supports Agenda 2063's aspirations, positioning the continent at the forefront of inclusive global governance and sustainable development.

To unlock the Summit's full potential to impact Africa's development, we must recognize internal and external dynamics shaping the continent's trajectory. Internally, Africa grapples with diverse socioeconomic challenges, necessitating nuanced policy frameworks tailored to local contexts. Externally, global economic and geopolitical factors influence Africa's development landscape, demanding robust international cooperation and tailored solutions. With a continent poised to be the youngest in the world for the next 30 years,² young Africans have a critical role in leveraging the Summit of the Future's global influence to prioritize policy perspectives tailored to Africa's realities that can be quickly implemented to boost the continent's development.

Provisioning youth participation in their resolution for the Summit of the Future³, the United Nations General Assembly recognizes that young people are the driving force behind innovation, progress, and calls to harness young people's energy and passion to create a future that truly reflects their aspirations⁴. The United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (OSAA) is working with partners, including Member States, Pan-African intergovernmental and civil society organizations, youth advocates and United Nations system entities, to bring *Africa's Youth Voices* to the Summit through an action-oriented initiative that focuses on three engagements:

¹ [Summit of the Future 2024: What will it deliver?](#) United Nations, 2024

² [Unlocking Africa's Youth Potential: Empowering the Next Generation](#). United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (OSAA), 2024

³ Modalities for the Summit of the Future ([A/RES/76/307](#)). United Nations General Assembly, 2022.

⁴ [Youth at the Summit of the Future](#). United Nations, 2024.

1. A youth-led knowledge production exercise pegged to the Summit's priorities on 9, 16 and 23 September
2. A consultative platform mainstreaming young Africans' participation in the Summit of the Future (Date to be determined)
3. Public engagements to amplify the Summit's messages to young Africans at the [SDG Media Zone](#) during the 76th Session of the UN General Assembly from 23 to 27 September

Young Africans are pivotal in shaping the continent's future, with 60 per cent of Africa's population under 25, making it the world's youngest continent⁵. Young people's active involvement in policymaking is crucial, as they represent a significant portion of Africa's workforce and potential leaders. In a year focused on "[educating and skilling Africa for the 21st century](#)," youth engagement in knowledge production is crucial to supporting African countries' investment in skills development. This can propel the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector forward, create jobs and position Africa to harness the Fourth Industrial Revolution⁶.

On 9, 16, and 23 September, against this backdrop and as part of a three-pronged youth-focused engagement it organizes, OSAA is working with young African experts, advocates and leaders across the diaspora and on the continent to facilitate a youth-led knowledge production exercise anchored to the five priorities of one of the Summit's key outputs: the Pact of the Future. This knowledge production exercise is organized across four areas pegged to the five chapters of the Pact, namely:

- Global governance and financing for development
- International peace and security
- Science, technology, innovation and digital cooperation
- Youth and future generations



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⁵ [Unlocking Africa's Youth Potential: Empowering the Next Generation](#). OSAA, 2024

⁶ [Empowering Tomorrow's Leaders Revolutionising Education in Africa for the Fourth Industrial Revolution and Beyond](#). OSAA, 2024



CONTEXT

The UN Special Adviser on Africa said, “The time is now for Africa to take control of its economic narrative and for the world to rally its full support behind the continent’s work in doing so⁷.” The continent stands at a pivotal moment, with enormous opportunities to accelerate its sustainable development and assert itself in its rightful place at the global leadership table. Despite past challenges, the continent’s potential is immense. Africa has the resources and capacity to bridge its \$350 billion annual funding gap to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The continent can leverage its vast natural resources, burgeoning middle class, youthful population and innovative financial strategies to drive sustainable growth. By reforming the International Financial Architecture (IFA), enhancing the representation of developing countries, and harnessing the potential of domestic institutional investors, Africa can mobilize the necessary resources to meet its development goals. Addressing illicit financial outflows, estimated at \$500 to \$600 billion annually, further offers a significant opportunity to invest in the continent’s future. Through strategic foresight, Africa can transform these opportunities into concrete actions, positioning itself as a leader in global sustainability efforts and ensuring long-term economic resilience.

The continent is also uniquely positioned to lead the transformation of global governance, particularly within the International Financial Architecture (IFA). As the world seeks to address modern challenges, the outdated structures of the IFA—rooted in the post-World War II Bretton Woods framework—must evolve to reflect today’s realities. Africa’s vision, as outlined in Agenda 2063, offers a roadmap for these necessary reforms. The upcoming Summit of the Future provides a critical platform for advocating for comprehensive changes, including restructuring quotas and voting rights in institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, and enhancing African representation. By promoting sustainable development-focused financial mechanisms and bolstering African financial markets, the continent can drive a global agenda that prioritizes economic justice and inclusivity. Africa’s leadership in reshaping the IFA is essential not just for its own development but for fostering a more equitable and resilient global economy that benefits all nations.

PROPOSAL

Adding the youth perspective to the exchanges enriches the conversation and highlights the urgency of addressing these issues for future generations. Young people in Africa represent a significant portion of the continent’s population, and their voices, insights and aspirations are crucial in shaping a sustainable and equitable future. We are engaging them to make the work of reforming the multilateral system more robust and inclusive while ensuring that the vision for a better future incorporates the voices and dreams of the next generation.

⁷ Challenging the Global Narrative on Africa’s Debt. OSAA, 2024 (Forthcoming)

Effective Governance

While several African countries experienced improvements in governance over the last decade⁸, there is substantial room to grow. Strategic youth engagement is essential to Africa's development, serving as a critical lever in shaping effective country systems that align with the continent's long-term objectives. By actively participating in political processes, young Africans can drive governance reforms that prioritize their interests, ensuring that resources are strategically allocated to sectors like education, health, and job creation. This proactive involvement not only amplifies youth voices in decision-making but also strengthens Africa's capacity to achieve sustainable and inclusive growth, positioning the continent for global leadership.

Impact of the Debt Challenge

For many African youths, the overwhelming burden of debt on their nations translates to direct consequences in their daily lives. The allocation of resources towards debt servicing, often at the expense of health and education, leaves this demographic facing increased challenges in accessing quality education and healthcare. Youths often engage in discussions around the implications of debt on their futures, expressing concerns that current financial decisions are jeopardizing their potential and quality of life.

The Cost of Quality Education

Education is a key area impacted by debt sustainability issues. With governments often forced to cut budgets, young people feel these impacts firsthand—in larger class sizes, reduced educational resources, and limited opportunities for skill development. Youth are increasingly aware that without an adequate education, their prospects for employment and economic prosperity diminish, perpetuating cycles of poverty. Engaging youth in conversations around education funding allows them to advocate for their rights and express their need for investment in their future.

A Vision for Africa's Sustainable Development

Young Africans are at the forefront of advocating for financial reform, leveraging digital platforms to challenge unfair lending practices and champion financial justice. Through innovative local solutions like community-based microfinance and digital banking, they are redefining the financial landscape. Their strategic vision calls for an inclusive international financial framework prioritizing transparency, sustainability, and accountability. Engaging youth in this transformative process is crucial for ensuring a prosperous and equitable future for Africa.

⁸ [Study Report: Unlocking the Potential of the Fourth Industrial Revolution in Africa](#). Technopolis and Research ICT Africa and Tambourine Innovation Ventures, 2019.



INTERNATIONAL PEACE AND SECURITY

CONTEXT

Addressing Africa's international peace and security landscape requires a strategic and integrated approach, emphasizing the nexus between peace and development. Key imperatives include prioritizing job creation as a cornerstone of national and regional development strategies, as high unemployment and informal employment exacerbate social unrest. Economic diversification, moving away from commodity reliance, and investing in human capital are essential for generating sustainable employment and addressing structural inequalities. Strengthening fiscal capacities, improving public services, and expanding social protection programs are foundational for economic stability. Moreover, addressing structural inequalities, particularly among vulnerable groups, and supporting conflict-affected states are critical to achieving sustainable development. Resilience-building initiatives and prevention-focused development projects aligned with the 2030 Agenda and Africa's Agenda 2063 are vital for promoting long-term peace and stability. African nations can forge a path toward sustainable development and lasting peace through coordinated efforts across economic, social, and governance domains.

PROPOSAL

Incorporating a youth perspective into the discussion on international peace and security in Africa is critical, as young people are key stakeholders and pivotal agents of change in promoting stability and development across the continent. Multiple deprivations, including lack of access to basic services, economic opportunities and resources, disproportionately impact young Africans, creating a breeding ground for inequality, social tensions, instability and ultimately conflict⁹. It is important that *Africa's Youth Voices* are heard as the world comes together during the Summit to take concrete steps to respond to these challenges impacting their future.

Job Creation as a Pathway to Stability

Youth unemployment is a pressing issue that directly contributes to social unrest and conflict. Young people often voice their frustration regarding the lack of employment opportunities and decent work, which fuels grievances and disillusionment and often leads to social unrest. By prioritizing job creation within national and regional development strategies, policymakers can address the aspirations of the youth, providing them with the means to contribute positively to their communities. Initiatives such as youth entrepreneurship programs and vocational training can empower young people to create their own opportunities, reducing the likelihood of social unrest and fostering a culture of innovation.

⁹ [Report of the Secretary-General on the Promotion of Durable Peace and Sustainable Development in Africa](#). United Nations, 2023

Tackling Inequality and Boosting Resilience

Young Africans are pivotal in tackling structural inequalities by advocating for inclusive governance and equitable resource access, particularly for marginalized communities. Their active engagement in decision-making processes ensures that policies reflect their needs, especially in conflict-affected regions. Simultaneously, they champion social protection programmes that build resilience, recognizing the importance of mental health and economic stability. By integrating youth perspectives, African countries can develop more effective strategies to address inequality and enhance social protection across the continent.

Young People as Catalysts for Change

Young people in Africa represent a significant portion of the population, and their involvement in peace and security initiatives is vital. They increasingly take on roles as activists, community leaders, and innovators, challenging the status quo and advocating for solutions that address their realities. Youth-led movements have proven effective in raising awareness about social injustices, promoting dialogue on conflict resolution, and driving peace initiatives. Recognizing and empowering young people as catalysts for change can facilitate sustainable peace and development across the continent.

A Vision for Africa's Durable Peace

Youth engagement in building stable, resilient and prosperous communities is critical for Africa's future. By involving young people in decision-making through inclusive political processes, youth councils, and dialogue platforms, their unique perspectives can shape effective policies. Governments and international organizations must recognize the strategic importance of youth in conflict resolution. As active contributors, young Africans drive stability and sustainable development, ensuring they are not just future leaders but essential change-makers in building and sustaining durable peace across the continent.





SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, INNOVATION AND DIGITAL COOPERATION

CONTEXT

In navigating Africa's path through the complexities of science, technology, and innovation (STI) alongside digital cooperation, several pivotal considerations emerge. To effectively compete in the global digital economy, Africa must strategically harness technological advancements and evolving regulatory landscapes by developing robust policies. Key to this is creating secure digital infrastructures, fostering digital skills, and establishing effective regulatory frameworks. This approach is vital for advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Agenda 2063. African nations should transition from digital consumers to producers, enhancing their role in the global digital supply chain and aligning with local development priorities. Initiatives such as the African Union Commission's [Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa \(2020-2030\)](#) and proposals like the Summit of the Future's [Global Digital Compact](#) highlight the global emphasis on digital cooperation. Effective integration of digital technologies can boost productivity and economic growth but requires addressing labour market changes. Embracing digital transformation not only enhances economic prospects but also fosters inclusive development, ensuring Africa's participation and leadership in the global digital economy of the future.

PROPOSAL

Young people are at the forefront of technological adoption and innovation on the continent, and their insights, aspirations, and creativity can help shape a more inclusive digital future. Young Africans are digital natives, having grown up with technology and the internet. This familiarity equips them with unique skills and perspectives on leveraging digital tools for social change, innovation, and entrepreneurship. Youth are increasingly driving tech startups, creating apps that solve local problems, and finding innovative ways to use technology for community development. Therefore, policies that promote youth engagement in the digital economy are vital for harnessing their potential as innovators and leaders in their communities.

Bridging the Digital Divide

Addressing Africa's digital divide is crucial for the continent's development, with youth engagement playing a strategic role. Disparities in internet access, high costs, and limited digital skills hinder economic growth and social inclusion, particularly in rural areas and among women. By empowering young Africans with digital skills and affordable access, they can become key drivers of innovation and economic transformation. Their active involvement is essential for bridging regional inequalities, ensuring that Africa fully participates in the global digital economy, and unlocking the continent's potential for sustainable development. Engaging with Africa's youth is vital for shaping a more inclusive future.

Digital Skills for the Future of Work

As the digital landscape evolves, there is an urgent need to equip young people with relevant digital skills that prepare them for the jobs of the future. Investments in training programs, coding boot camps, and partnerships with educational institutions can equip youth with the competencies required in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields. By 2030, the size of Africa's workforce is expected to be one of the world's largest. With increased access to quality education and STEM skills, Africa's population can unlock the continent's full potential, harnessing the Fourth Industrial Revolution¹⁰. Young people emphasize the importance of inclusive educational approaches that cater to diverse learning styles and backgrounds, as well as the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills that are essential in an increasingly digital world.

Youth-led Digital Transformation

Youth are not merely consumers of technology; they are active participants in shaping its development and application. By encouraging local tech ecosystems and supporting youth-led initiatives, African governments can enhance opportunities for young innovators to create solutions that align with local needs. This approach ensures that digital transformations are not only top-down but also bottom-up, reflecting the aspirations and challenges young people face. Initiatives such as hackathons, innovation hubs, and mentorship programs can cultivate a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation among youth, driving sustainable development from within.

A Vision for Africa's Digital Future

Africa's Youth are the architects of the continent's digital future. Therefore, engaging young Africans in policymaking is crucial for crafting sustainable, ethical digital policies that drive the continent's development. Their insights ensure that AI and similar emerging technologies are harnessed responsibly, promoting social good and inclusive growth. By prioritizing digital skills, advocating for transparency, and leading in policy dialogues, Africa's young people can shape a future where technology serves humanity equitably. Empowering Africa's youth as key stakeholders is essential for realizing a thriving, inclusive digital economy that benefits all.



¹⁰ [Empowering Tomorrow's Leaders Revolutionising Education in Africa for the Fourth Industrial Revolution and Beyond](#). OSAA, 2024



CONTEXT

As Africa navigates the dynamics of youth and future generations, it confronts both challenges and opportunities crucial to sustainable development. With millions of young Africans entering the job market annually, there is an urgent need for targeted policies and investments in youth employment. The continent's entrepreneurial landscape, driven by innovative youth, attracted \$2 billion in investments in 2021¹¹, highlighting its potential for sustainable economic growth. Investing in youth is both a demographic necessity and a strategic imperative for economic resilience and productivity. Education, particularly in STEM, is essential for fostering innovation, industrialization, and integrating Africa into global value chains. However, challenges in policy implementation persist due to limited capacity and financial resources. Africa's future prosperity depends on empowering its youth through robust education systems, fostering entrepreneurial ecosystems, and creating environments conducive to innovation and employment. By prioritizing these investments, Africa can harness its demographic potential for sustainable development and global competitiveness.

PROPOSAL

Integrating an African youth perspective into the discussion on transforming multilateralism is central to supporting Africa's claim to its rightful place at the global leadership table. These youth leaders can provide strategic policy recommendations to address the urgent need for inclusive education, decent work, and meaningful participation in decision-making processes. By prioritizing investments that establish robust social protection systems, we can guide decision-makers toward policies that promote economic resilience, social equity, and intergenerational justice. Harnessing the insights and innovations of young Africans is central to this, to harness Africa's demographic dividend and ensure a prosperous future for all.

Authentic Representation of Youth

African youth expressed concerns at the persistent underrepresentation of their interests in the international arena, from financial institutions to the global discourse on multilateralism. They understand that systemic reform in international cooperation requires not only increased youth participation but also the integration of an authentic representation of *Africa's Youth Voices* in global decision-making processes. Young Africans advocate for this representation across international forums, including intergovernmental bodies and panels within international financial institutions. This inclusion can foster trust, strengthen the fabric of the social contract with governments and multilateral systems and ensure that decisions reflect Africa's priorities.

¹¹ [The African Tech Startups Funding Report](#). Disrupt Africa, 2021

Tomorrow's Skills and Infrastructure

Investing in education and technology is crucial for empowering African youth to engage with a transformed multilateralism and drive sustainable economic growth. Youth advocate for reforms that prioritize digital access, literacy, and entrepreneurship, alongside commitments to developing human capital and infrastructure. By supporting innovative educational programs, enhancing internet infrastructure, and fostering innovation hubs, we can equip the next generation to actively participate in the global economy while ensuring data privacy and ethical standards in technology usage.

Youth Participation in Global Cooperation

Young Africans are advocating for greater transparency and accountability in global multilateral cooperation mechanisms, ensuring that youth can influence policy decisions and hold leaders accountable. They emphasize the need for comprehensive climate policies and funding for sustainability initiatives, including green innovations and climate resilience projects. By integrating youth perspectives into global governance and environmental strategies, Africa can secure its rightful place at the global leadership table, fostering equitable and sustainable development for current and future generations.

A Vision for Africa's Future Generation

Young Africans are pivotal in shaping a prosperous and peaceful future for the continent. Their engagement in innovative local solutions, like community-based microfinance and digital banking, is transforming Africa's financial landscape and driving digital advancement. Their active participation in inclusive political processes and conflict resolution fosters stability and resilience. By prioritizing digital skills and advocating for ethical technology policies, Africa's youth ensure that digital transformation supports social good and inclusive growth. Fully involving young people in these areas is essential for achieving sustainable development and lasting peace across Africa.





EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- This knowledge production exercise provides young Africans on the continent and across the diaspora with an opportunity to contribute actionable recommendations to influence international policymaking impacting Africa's development that are tailored to the realities of the continent, focusing on:
 - **Enhanced Global Advocacy for Africa:** The knowledge products developed during this exercise will elevate Africa's priorities on the global stage, advocating for policies that reflect the continent's unique challenges and opportunities.
 - **Strategic Alignment with Regional Agendas:** The outcomes of this exercise aim to influence the alignment of international commitments with African Union strategies, ensuring that global policies are tailored to support Africa's development goals, including Agenda 2063.
 - **Youth-Driven Policy Innovation:** By integrating youth perspectives, the exercise will foster innovative policy approaches with strong youth agencies that address emerging challenges, such as climate resilience and digital inclusion, driving forward-thinking solutions.
 - **Strengthened National Implementation:** The exercise's knowledge products aim to provide African governments with actionable recommendations to support the implementation of global and regional commitments, enhancing the effectiveness of national policies in achieving sustainable development and peace.
- The exercise establishes a platform to bring *Africa's Youth Voices* to the Summit of the Future, bringing the perspectives of the continent on "Future Generations" and "Our Common Agenda" to the shaping of the Summit's outcomes, including the Pact of the Future document.
- The initiative contributes towards OSAA's wider youth advocacy strategy, intent on creating opportunities for young Africans on the ground and around the world to bring the continental discourse to the New York stage and establish a youth-led, action-oriented policy perspective on Africa for Africa by Africans.
- In line with [OSAA's Strategic Agenda](#), this knowledge production exercise aims to address Africa's sustainable development opportunities and risks by promoting advocacy, providing advisory services, fostering partnerships, and enhancing coordination at all levels while breaking institutional silos.

FORMAT, SCOPE AND DURATION

- During this knowledge production exercise, young Africans collaborating under the umbrella of OSAA's *Africa's Youth Voices* network will present abstracts of knowledge products related to the issues addressed during the Summit of the Future. They will then leverage these resources to develop several knowledge products to inform African policymaking. Young people will provide perspectives into their research approaches while seeking the audience's contribution.
- This knowledge production exercise will take place across four online exchanges held on 9, 16 and 23 September
- Each engagement will take place for 2 hours from 9 am to 11 am New York local time
- The interactive exchanges will be hosted on the Zoom platform and streamed live on the OSAA YouTube channel, providing an opportunity to integrate live audience engagement via audio and chat
- The exercise will focus on the chapters of the Pact of the Future, namely:
 - Global governance and financing for development
 - International peace and security
 - Science, technology, innovation and digital cooperation
 - Youth and future generation

TARGET AUDIENCE

- The primary target group for this initiative is young Africans aged 24 to 35 who are established on the continent and across the diaspora.
- The secondary target group is the public at all levels, including stakeholders in Africa and worldwide who are engaged in issues impacting the continent's development.

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