



Concept Note

AFRICAN ECONOMIC CONFERENCE 2019

Jobs, Entrepreneurship and Capacity Development for African Youth

2–4 December 2019

Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt



African Development Bank Group



Economic Commission for Africa



United Nations Development Programme

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The 2019 African Economic Conference (AEC), jointly organized by African Development Bank, the Economic Commission for Africa and the United Nations Development Programme, will be held in **Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, from 2nd to 4th December**. The theme of the conference, “**Jobs, Entrepreneurship and Capacity Development for African Youths**” is perfectly aligned with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) No. 8: “*inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all*”. In addition, it dovetails well with the aspirations of the African Union’s Agenda 2063 in which “*youth unemployment will be eliminated, and Africa’s youth guaranteed full access to education, training, skills and technology, health services, jobs and economic opportunities (...)*”. As *path breakers of the African knowledge society*, youth will contribute significantly to innovation and entrepreneurship on the continent if the necessary resources are mobilized to allow them to realize their full potential.
- 1.2. This year’s theme also fits with the agenda of the AEC’s partners—the African Development Bank, the United Nations Development Programme and the Economic Commission for Africa. These institutions recognize that a skillful, productive, innovative and entrepreneurial youthful population, adequately prepared for current and future challenges of an increasingly dynamic labor market, can help remedy youth unemployment and contribute to inclusive and sustained economic growth.
- 1.3. The Conference seeks to bring together youth representatives, researchers, policymakers, and development practitioners from Africa and from around the world to discuss recent developments on the issues of jobs for youth, skills and entrepreneurship in Africa. The Conference will provide a unique opportunity to assess the effectiveness of ongoing reforms on addressing youth skills gap in Africa and developing their entrepreneurial capacities. In addition, the Conference will discuss the latest evidence and emerging challenges on youth jobs, skills and entrepreneurship in Africa to inform country strategies and identify evidence-based innovative and implementable policies. Finally, it will encompass in-depth presentations of policy-oriented research by both established academics and young talented researchers from the continent who will debate and recommend policy options to address the persistent mismatches between labor market requirements and skills acquired by Africa’s young people.

2. Context

- 2.1. Africa’s youth population is growing rapidly and is expected to double to over 830 million by 2050. This increase in working-age population presents an opportunity to boost productivity and facilitate inclusive growth across the continent. However, much of this demographic dividend remains largely untapped. Although 10–12 million youth enter the workforce every year, only around 3 million formal jobs are created annually in Africa. In addition, the potential benefits of African youth population remain unrealized. About one-third of African youth aged 15–35 are unemployed and another one-third are vulnerably employed, mostly in the informal sector. Despite recent commitments to women empowerment, women are the most affected: they experience both higher unemployment

and underemployment than men and face greater obstacles to job opportunities and equal pay.

- 2.2. One explanation for the high youth unemployment rates in Africa is the mismatch of the skills and entrepreneurial capabilities of the youth and employers' needs. Furthermore, where jobs exist, resources for investment in upskilling and re-skilling are often limited. For Africa to harness its demographic dividend for sustained and inclusive growth driven by youths equipped with decent and green jobs, relevant skills and sufficient capacity, increased investments are needed. These investments will also ensure that African youths acquire skills that meet current and future labor market demands. Reforms are therefore urgently required to create opportunities and build capacities of African youths, increase their productivity and promote innovation and entrepreneurship. These reforms should also promote youth empowerment for increased political and economic participation. As key agents of change, African youth must be empowered to take a central role in the design and implementation of youth development policies as well as in the institutions tasked to promote and support youth innovation, entrepreneurship and capacity development. A skilled and empowered young workforce is a precious asset that can help African economies accelerate the momentum of their structural transformation and economic development and leverage the benefits of the fourth industrial revolution.
- 2.3. Although progress towards addressing the challenge of youth unemployment and underemployment has been slow and uneven across the continent, several multilateral institutions, governments and other stakeholders continue to advocate for the urgency of reforms through various policies including, the Africa Development Bank's Jobs for Youths in Africa (JfYA) (2016–2025) strategy and the UN's Youth Policies in Africa. These strategies are aimed at creating decent and green jobs, improving skills and building entrepreneurial capacities of African youth in key economic sectors such as agriculture (on-farm production and off-farm processing), industry (construction, manufacturing, mining and utilities) and ICTs (telecommunication, digital products and services). A major constraint to the effective implementation of these reforms is the limited empirical evidence on the nature and extent of the youth skills deficit in Africa. Furthermore, limited evidence on the continent's informal sector, current skill base and emerging labor market demands (such as the digital economy and increased automation) and gender differences in labor market participation (particularly in high skill and senior positions) have largely hindered our understanding of the continent's youth skill gap. A central question facing Africa today is therefore *how to bridge Africa's youth skills deficit and develop the entrepreneurship capacities of youth amid the structural changes underway in most countries and the dynamics of the labor markets?* This complex question forms the overarching theme for the AEC 2019.
- 2.4. The AEC 2019 responds to a growing call for action to improve skills, increase jobs and build entrepreneurial capacities of African youths. The Conference will serve as a platform for researchers to present their recent work on jobs for youth, skills acquisition and entrepreneurship in Africa and propose pragmatic and evidence-based policy recommendations to address the challenges they have identified. It will also serve as a platform to engage youth in discussions on their perspectives on current and emerging challenges in the labor markets. Specifically, the conference will give African stakeholders,

youth representatives and political leaders the opportunity to (i) provide their insights and thoughts on the debate on youth jobs, skills and entrepreneurship capacities; (ii) assess the impact of past and current reforms and initiatives to address youth jobs challenges in Africa; and (iii) discuss the feasibility of proposed innovative policy options to reap the benefits of Africa's youth bulge and address the challenge of youth skills mismatch in the labor market.

- 2.5. The impending disruptions in skills and jobs unleashed by the Fourth Industrial Revolution require profound mutations of the existing educational curriculum in most, if not all, African countries. With the increased use of digital technologies in modern jobs, investments and changes in policies will be needed to ensure that African youth acquire the knowledge, skills and capacity that adequately prepare them for an increasingly competitive and globalized labor market. The Conference will discuss the future of work on the continent and needed reforms to promote future-oriented skills. As a platform for educators, governments, private sector and other stakeholders, the Conference can effectively promote discussions on future labor market demands and changes in policies (including education curriculums) and investments in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM); and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) to adequately prepare youth for these changes.

3. Objectives of the Conference

3.1 The African Economic Conference is now the leading forum for the discussion of Africa's current economic issues. The specific objectives of the African Economic Conference series are to:

- Promote knowledge management as an important driver of policy dialogue, good policy planning and implementation;
- Foster dialogue that promotes the exchange of ideas and innovative thinking among researchers, development practitioners and policymakers;
- Encourage and enhance research on economic and policy issues related to the development of African economies by promoting evidence-based policymaking;
- Provide an opportunity for young African researchers, Africans in the diaspora and organizations to share knowledge with policymakers; and
- Serve as a platform for researchers, policymakers and private sector operators to meet and reach consensus on regional and continental integration as an instrument to accelerate Africa's inclusive and sustainable development.

3.2 Since its inception in 2006, the AEC series has fostered dialogue and the exchange of knowledge on a variety of issues and challenges that Africa is facing (see Box 1).

Box 1. Past Themes of the African Economic Conference

1. AEC 2006 - Accelerating Africa's Development Five Years into the 21st Century.
2. AEC 2007 - Opportunities and Challenges of Development for Africa in the Global Arena
3. AEC 2008 - Globalization, Institutions and Economic Development of Africa
4. AEC 2009 - Fostering Development in an Era of Financial and Economic Crises
5. AEC 2010 - Setting the Agenda for Africa's Economic Recovery and Long Term Growth
6. AEC 2011 - Green Economy and Structural Transformation in Africa
7. AEC 2012 - Fostering Inclusive and Sustainable Development in Africa in an Age of Global Economic Uncertainty
8. AEC 2013 - Regional Integration in Africa
9. AEC 2014 - Knowledge and Innovation for Africa's Transformation
10. AEC 2015 - Addressing Poverty and Inequality in the Post-2015 Development Agenda
11. AEC 2016 - Feed Africa: Towards Agro-Allied Industrialization for Inclusive Growth
12. AEC 2017 - Governance for Structural Transformation
13. AEC 2018 - Regional and Continental Integration for Africa's Development

4. Format of the Conference

4.1 The Conference, jointly organized by the African Development Bank (AfDB), the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), will be the fourteenth edition of the AEC Series. It is specifically aimed at providing a platform to address youth job challenges and discuss issues on youth skills and entrepreneurship in Africa.

4.2 To achieve its objectives, the Conference will be built on four pillars, with 12 strategic actions. The debates will focus on using the four pillars to propel innovative solutions to the persistent skills mismatch of African youth and to empower their increased participation in the continent's development agenda.

4.3 Each pillar will be the basis for a Plenary Session while the 12 strategic actions will be discussed in 12 parallel sessions. The 4 pillars and 12 agenda actions are presented in Table 1:

Table 1: Four Pillars and Twelve Actions for Youth Skills Development and Empowerment in Africa

#	Four Pillars	Twelve Agenda Actions
1.	Conceptual underpinnings of skills, entrepreneurship and labor market participation of African youth.	1.1. Skills mismatch and jobs for African youths – where are we, what are the lessons and opportunities? What are the skills needed to drive Africa’s transformation?
		1.2. Experiences in upgrading skill sets of African youths (including entrepreneurship) - where are we, what are the lessons and opportunities?
		1.3. Future of work for youth– where are we, what are the lessons, opportunities? How do we support the creation of “decent, green jobs” for youth?
		1.4. Socio-economic and political participation for Africa’s youth – where are we, what are the lessons and opportunities
2.	Institutions for job creation, skills acquisition and capacity building.	2.1. Strengthening institutions to empower, improve the skills and build the capacities of African youths.
		2.2. Reforming the education sector to be more responsive to the dynamics in labor markets by promoting skills in digital technologies, STEM and other future-oriented skills for youth.
		2.3. Institutional reforms to promote innovation and entrepreneurship and participation through property rights etc.
3.	Leverage private sector for increasing youth employment and employability.	3.1. Promote partnerships between educators and private sectors to facilitate apprenticeships and promote innovation
		3.2. Attract private sector investments in youth skills, innovation and value chains to build a critical mass of entrepreneurs.
		3.3 Scaling up innovation in supporting young entrepreneurs and enhancing the role of youth in decision-making
4.	Partnerships to close the existing skills gap and promote the acquisition of future-oriented skills.	4.1. Foster interconnectedness of all stakeholders in the jobs-skills nexus for better implementation of reforms and monitoring of progress.

5. Paper Submission Guidelines and Time Frame

5.1 Interested authors must submit their papers at the following email address: aec2019@afdb.org, copying a.salami@afdb.org and a.m.ndungu@afdb.org. Only full papers addressing the theme of the Conference will be considered for presentation. We also encourage the submission of policy- and solution-oriented papers with strong empirical work. The Conference will give priority to solution-oriented papers.

5.2 Participants and experts submitting papers for the Conference must adhere to the key deadlines stated in Table 2:

Table 2: Annotated Time Frame

Annotation	Deadline
Deadline for paper submissions	21 August 2019
Notification of final acceptance	7 October 2019
Last day for registration	15 November 2019
Conference dates	2–4 December 2019

5.3 Young African female and male researchers are especially encouraged to submit articles. One of the objectives of the AEC series is to provide young African researchers with the opportunity not only to share their work with a broader audience, but also to expand their networks.

5.4 All the papers will be professionally and blindly peer-reviewed by the co-organizing institutions and those accepted for presentation shall be original quality work.

5.5 A distinguished panel will assess the papers presented and award a prize to a young author whose paper has been deemed as the best Conference paper. The winner will be announced at the closing ceremony.

6. Expected Outputs and Outcomes

6.1 The outputs of the conference are expected to include:

- a Conference Report;
- selected papers for a special issue in the *African Development Review*; and
- policy briefs.

In addition, the proceedings of the conference, incorporating relevant comments and feedback from peer review and conference participants, may be published after the Conference.

7. Sponsorship

7.1 Authors will be requested to indicate whether they require support to cover expenses (travel, accommodation and daily subsistence allowance) associated with their participation at the Conference. Only one author per paper accepted for presentation will be eligible for sponsorship. Support is reserved mainly for presenters and young researchers from Africa.