



**UNITED NATIONS INDUSTRIAL
DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION**



AFRICAN UNION

**UNIDO/AU High Level Consultative Meeting on
Productive Work for Youth in West Africa with emphasis on the
Mano River Union (MRU)**

*in cooperation with
the Secretary-General's Youth Employment Network (YEN) and
the United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA)*

Aide-Mémoire

**19 and 20 February 2007
Accra, Ghana**



YEN



UNOWA

I. Background

The Director-General of UNIDO commenced a Youth Employment Initiative, whereby UNIDO intends to join forces with key stakeholders in supporting projects and programmes for the generation of employment and self-employment of youth in least developed countries (LDCs). As part of this initiative, a Ministerial Breakfast Roundtable Meeting was hosted by the UNIDO Director-General with the support of the Secretary-General's Youth Employment Network (YEN) at the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) High Level Segment in Geneva, on 4 July 2006. The UNIDO Director-General had invited the participants in the Geneva meeting to follow up the discussions, in order to take stock of ongoing initiatives and initiating operational activities to be undertaken by UNIDO and its development partners. In light of the urgent need to address youth employment in West Africa, this region has been selected as a first priority area.

The UN Office in West Africa (UNOWA), recognizing the magnitude of this issue, devised a practical and concerted regional approach to this challenge. The resulting Report, "Youth Unemployment and Regional Insecurity in West Africa" outlines a series of issues relating to youth unemployment in West Africa and puts forward a number of recommendations for increasing youth employment in the region. Amongst others, it highlights the need to draw on concrete actions that have demonstrated success in the region.

On this basis, UNIDO together with the African Union (AU), and in close cooperation with the Secretary-General's Youth Employment Network (YEN) and the United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA), are organizing a *High Level Consultative Meeting on Productive Work for Youth in West Africa with emphasis on the Mano River Union (MRU)*. The meeting will be held in Accra, Ghana, on 19 and 20 February 2007.

The High-level Consultative Meeting is one of the preparatory events designed to support discussions at the Summit of the AU Heads of State and Governments in July 2007, which will focus on Africa's Industrial Competitiveness and Trade.

Issues addressed

The youth unemployment rate in sub-Saharan Africa stands at an average of 21 per cent. It is driven by weak demand in labor markets, high population growth rates, low literacy rates, poor quality education and skills mismatch.¹ In recognition of increasing youth unemployment, the Heads of State and Government of the African Union, at the 3rd Extraordinary Session of their Assembly in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, in 2004, resolved to "*develop and implement strategies that give young people in Africa a real chance to find decent and productive work and encourage African Member States to support, and adopt the Youth Employment Network (YEN) Initiative and implement its recommendations therein with the support of the UN, ILO, the World Bank and other competent agencies as well as development partners.*"

¹ UNECA (2002): "Youth Employment in Africa" ESPD Background Paper No.1. Addis Ababa. Prepared for the Global Youth Employment Summit, Alexandria, Egypt, 7-11 September 2002.

In his Report to the General Assembly on 19 July 2005, the Secretary-General of the United Nations stated that youth unemployment is “the root cause of destructive and self-destructive behaviour, ranging from activity in neighbourhood gangs to membership of local militias, where unemployed young people desperately seek not only income, but also recognition and a sense of belonging”². The Secretary-General was describing global trends, but there are few regions of the world where this description would be more applicable than West Africa where the situation is particularly difficult as large parts of the sub-region have experienced instability, economic stagnation and conflict for several years.

Youth unemployment is increasingly a major source of concern in the sub-region with 60 percent of the population in many of the countries being under the age of 20. The Mano River Union (MRU) countries of Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea plus Côte d’Ivoire, where the number of young people without proper work exceeds 50%³, demonstrate and symbolize the close link between youth unemployment and sub-regional security. Ever-rising joblessness among youth and the desperation that accompanies it undermines progress in those countries.

The gravity of the damaging effects of long years of civil conflict in Sierra Leone and Liberia on the already vulnerable youth has made it difficult for the individual Governments to cope with the magnitude of the complex, multi-dimensional youth equation involving inter alia, job creation and training in urban and rural areas; conflict management, reconciliation and peace building.

In short, the future of the Mano River Union countries and indeed the entire West Africa region is threatened by the growing numbers of youth who lack prospects of ever being able to work for a reasonable living. Until this situation changes, the likelihood of having genuine peace, security and development in the Mano River Union countries is at stake. At the same time, pressures to migrate illegally and dangerously to other parts of the world where opportunities seem more available will continue to mount with varying consequences for the receiving and sending countries.

Context

Overall policy and programmatic youth policies in the MRU and Côte d’Ivoire are, to a large extent, still in the process of conceptualization and consolidation, particularly in the areas of integrating youth in the process of building and maintaining peace and empowering them in the comprehensive cycle of sustainable development initiatives undertaken by the governments within the Union.

In May 2004, a joint UNDP/ECOWAS Secretariat meeting in Accra focused on the nature, modalities and parameters of a referral initiative on reconciliation, peace building and programme interventions. The meeting agreed on a Plan of Action for launching a Youth Peace and Development Forum for the identification of concerns, needs, and priorities and translating these into key programmatic interventions.

² UNOWA (August 2006): “Youth Unemployment and Regional Insecurity in West Africa”, 2nd edition, Dakar, Senegal.

³ Ibid.

Furthermore, in January 2005 a Youth Peace and Development Forum was convened in Guinea-Conakry with the theme of Integrating Youth in Peace and Development Initiatives in the Mano River Union & Côte d'Ivoire. The objectives of the Forum included: the development of a framework for the formulation of a comprehensive sub-regional programmatic initiative to enhance youth participation in reconciliation, reconstruction and stabilization efforts in the sub-region; facilitation of the identification and drafting of four implementable and fundable projects with youth cross-border linkages as selection criterion; provide youth with a platform to articulate their views and concerns and the role they could play to promote stability, peace and reconciliation; and enhancement of the capacities of, and opportunities for youth to play a more active role in peace and development in the sub-region.

At the end of their regular consultative meeting in Conakry, Guinea, held in November 2005, the three United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs) of the Mano River Union (Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea) plus Côte d'Ivoire mandated UNIDO to conduct a study on the establishment of a Trust Fund for the promotion for Youth Employment for youth in the four countries. The draft project proposal, prepared by UNIDO in collaboration with other agencies, was unanimously endorsed by the four UNCTs at the second consultative meeting held in June 2006 in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

II. Objectives

The High Level Consultative Meeting will focus on operationalizing the recommendations of the UNOWA report on "Youth Unemployment and Regional Insecurity in West Africa" and will examine past policy and programmes responses to the challenges that young people face in West Africa, particularly the Mano River Union (MRU). Based on the lessons learned and interactive dialogue with stakeholders, it will develop a set of action-oriented recommendations that contribute to the "Follow-up Mechanisms and Plan of Action based on the Declaration on Employment and Poverty Alleviation in Africa" adopted by the Heads of State and Government of the African Union in 2004. It will also serve as input to the discussions at the Summit of the AU Heads of State and Governments in July 2007 that will focus on Africa's Industrial Competitiveness and Trade.

In addition, the meeting is expected to promote partnership on youth issues between agencies and organizations in developing strategies and programmes for addressing youth unemployment and underemployment, mobilizing the necessary resources and setting up effective coordination mechanisms for programme implementation. The meeting also aims to identify bankable and viable project and programme areas/concepts that could be developed for implementation on a pilot basis for eventual replication in each of the target countries of the Mano River Union and Côte d'Ivoire.

Specifically, the High Level Consultative Meeting will:

1. Identify country-specific Best Practices and priority project and programme areas/concepts for the Mano River Union and Côte d'Ivoire;
2. Launch the establishment of a financing mechanism for youth employment projects/programmes in the MRU + Côte d'Ivoire;
3. Establish competent programme implementation mechanisms for MRU + Côte d'Ivoire;
4. Develop a set of action-oriented policy and strategy recommendations as input to the discussions on Africa's Industrial Competitiveness and Trade at the Summit of the African Union Heads of State and Governments in July 2007.

III. Expected Outputs

The specific outputs of the Meeting will be:

1. Selected priority project and programme concepts for possible implementation in each member country of the MRU + Côte d'Ivoire;
2. Creation of a Youth Project/Programme Funding mechanism for the MRU + Côte d'Ivoire;
3. Youth Project/Programme implementation mechanism for the MRU + Côte d'Ivoire;
4. Set of action-oriented policy and strategy recommendations at the national sub-regional and regional levels.

IV. Agenda

The detailed agenda will be communicated in due course.

V. Documentation

Discussion paper

- UNIDO/YEN/UNOWA Study on Best Practices, Policy Environment, Tools and Methodologies in Youth Employment in West Africa

The study includes: good practice and lessons learned of “what has worked and what has not worked in the sub-region and why”; policy as well as programmatic dimension of interventions of various stakeholders; some showcases of policies/programmes that demonstrate the greatest potential for sustainable impact.

The study will be sent upon confirmation of attendance.

Background information

- UNOWA issues paper: “Youth Unemployment and Regional Insecurity in West Africa”, 2nd edition, August 2006, Dakar, Senegal.
Available at <http://www.un.org/unowa/unowa/studies/unemployment-insecurity.pdf>
- African Union: Declaration on Employment and Poverty Alleviation in Africa. EXT/ASSEMBLY/AU/3(III), adopted at the AU Extraordinary Summit on Employment and Poverty Alleviation in Africa, 8-9 September 2004, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.
Available at www.iss.co.za/af/regorg/unity_to_union/pdfs/au/ouagasep04/decl.pdf
- International Labour Office: Guidelines for the Preparation of National Action Plans on Youth Employment.
Available soon at www.ilo.org/youth
- World Bank: Global Inventory of Interventions to Support Young Workers.

VI. Participation

The meeting provides a forum for Ministers from the region, high-level representatives of regional intergovernmental organizations from West Africa, UN agencies, the donor community, private sector representatives, academia, parliamentarians, media, and organizations of the private sector and civil society, particularly youth groups, as well as participants of the Geneva Ministerial Breakfast Roundtable Meeting.

VII. Language

The Meeting will be conducted in English and French.

VIII. Financial and Administrative Arrangements

The participants will be responsible for all travel and accommodation costs as well as passports, visas, the required medical examinations, inoculations and other such miscellaneous items, as well as internal travel to and from the airport of departure in the home country.

UNIDO and the host country will not assume any responsibility for the following expenditures, which may be incurred by participants:

- a) Compensation for salary and any related allowance during the period of meeting.
- b) Travel and any other costs incurred by dependents.
- c) Costs incurred in respect of travel and accident insurance, as well as medical and hospitalization bills in connection with attendance at the meeting.
- d) Compensation in the event of death, disability or illness.

- e) Loss or damage to personal property while attending the meeting.
- f) Purchase of personal belongings and compensation in the event of damage caused to them by climatic or other conditions.
- g) Other unforeseen.

IX. Venue and logistics

The High Level Consultation will be held in Accra, Ghana, at Hotel Labadi Beach, 19-20 February 2007. Detailed information on logistical arrangements will be communicated in due course.

X. Confirmation of participation

All communications regarding the High-level Consultative Meeting should be addressed to UNIDO

XI. Contact Persons

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