

# Prioritising youth development across the continent

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia - Lack of education and mismatched skills remain major obstacles to Africa's development agenda and with an estimated 364 million Africans between the age of 15 and 35 years, Africa has the world's youngest population.



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The African Union Commission cautions that the future of Africa's economic growth and the future of millions of Africans, is in jeopardy, if the underlying issues that hinder development are not adequately addressed.

With Africa expected to double its population over the next 25 years and the working-age population expected to grow by approximately 450 million between 2015 and 2035, the African Union Commission deputy chairperson, Ambassador Kwesi Quartey, says it is critical to urgently address the lack of education and mismatched skills, as major causes of rising numbers of unemployment.

Speaking during the opening of the EU-Africa Business Forum in Brussels, Belgium, the deputy chairperson underscored the need to find linkages between education, training and the labour market, especially as the African Union focuses on the theme of the year, *Harnessing the demographic dividend through investments in the youth*.

He noted that institutions of higher learning in Africa need to review and diversify their systems of education and expand the level of skills, to make them relevant to the demands of the labour market. Ambassador Kwesi stated that realising growth in technical fields that support industrialisation, manufacturing and development in the value chains will remain stunted, if the youth are not facilitated and adequately prepared for the job market.

## Job creation

"Our institutions are churning out thousands of graduates each year, but these graduates cannot find jobs because the education systems are traditionally focused on preparing graduates for white collar jobs, with little regard to the demands of the private sector, innovation or entrepreneurship," he stated.

He further added the need for Africa to make deliberate efforts to have, “Every child in school by 2020, to ensure each African child has great start and foundation in life”.

The EU-Africa Business Forum, held under the theme *Investing in job creation*, with special focus on agribusiness, sustainable energy and digitisation, provided a platform for high-level dialogue aimed at expanding investments between Europe and Africa. The deputy chairperson in this context urged the private sector to invest in the value chains in agribusiness. With Africa’s agricultural market projected to reach 1 trillion dollars by 2030, and the human population projected to reach 2.7 billion in 2060, Ambassador Kwesi noted that growing labour force presents significant growth opportunities and an expanded consumer market for Africa.

“Agriculture is a sector where the role of both, the public and private sectors is much needed to contribute towards our continental goals, such as eradicating poverty and hunger, boosting intra-African trade and investments, industrialisation and creating jobs for our growing population. Let us support our small scale farmers and the Small and Medium size entrepreneurs,” he added.

## **Investment**

The Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA), envisages investments of 360 billion dollars by the year 2040, with priority investments of over 67 billion dollars by 2020. These investments are aimed towards key infrastructure sectors of energy, trans-boundary water supply, transport, information and communications technology (ICT). In this regard, Kwesi encouraged the private sector to invest in the energy sector to reduce the overall cost of doing business in Africa.

“If we look at infrastructure, reducing the costs in the agriculture sector relies on investing on quality and integrated rural infrastructure, such as irrigation systems, roads, rails and the ports. To realise these infrastructural projects, Africa needs a reliable, sustainable and affordable energy sector.” he added.

With an estimated 364 million Africans between the age of 15 and 35 years, Africa has the world’s youngest population. This provides an immense opportunity for investing in the next generation of African leaders and entrepreneurs. Key pillars of Agenda 2063 and the Common African Position, have given primacy to youth development, science, technology and innovation as critical aspects of socio-economic development of the continent.

Through the private sector development strategy, the African Union encourages investments such as creating and supporting business start-up incubation centres across Africa, as foundations for mentorship and sharing of valuable business insights, to help youth and women entrepreneurs.

The deputy chairperson observed that there remains a huge untapped potential that can be capitalised with the establishment of ICT parks and ecommerce.

The EU-Africa Business Forum is part of a series of events organised by European Development Days (EDD) across Africa and Europe, on three key topics, green energy, agri-business and digitalisation. Outcomes from the forum will include a business declaration to be presented at the 5th Africa-EU Summit of Heads of State and Government, due to take place on 29-30 November in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire.

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