

United Nations Summit of  
the Future

Action Days Side Event

Concept Note

September 2024

# Building Foresight Competencies and Networks to Empower Youth in Africa



## UN Summit of the Future Action Days: Side Event

Friday 20 September 2024

Time and Venue: (9.00 h00-12h00) – Permanent House of Nigeria, New York

**Theme:** [#YouthLead for the Pact of the Future](#): Building Foresight Competencies and Networks to Empower Youth Agency

### Overview

The Summit of the Future is a high-level gathering designed to unite world leaders in forging a new international consensus for delivering a better present and safeguarding the future. In convening the Summit, the United Nations (UN) is recognising the critical need for effective global cooperation amidst growing mistrust, declining multilateralism and ineffective international structures. The Summit aims to regenerate trust and commitment to improving the efficacy of international institutions and cooperation for achieving agreed goals and addressing emerging threats and opportunities.

At the Summit in September 2024, world leaders will adopt the Pact for the Future, which will include a Global Digital Compact and a Declaration on Future Generations. The Pact for the Future is a recommitment to a multilateral system that delivers for all today and in future generations. It proposes recommendations for strengthened and inclusive multilateralism to address current and emerging complex challenges, on the basis of universal rights, science, technology, innovation and environmental sustainability.

To enhance engagement of all actors, the Summit includes [Action Days side events](#). The events will be youth-led and facilitated by the United Nations Youth Office in collaboration with relevant networks and stakeholder groups to generate momentum ahead of the Summit. The Action Days aim to challenge conventional thinking, hold leaders accountable to commitments and the urgency to address critical challenges, and focus on future generations.

Recognising African youth as a key impetus driving global cooperation and continental visions i.e. [Agenda 2063: the Africa We Want](#), the Action Days provide an opportune platform to elevate African youth voices in the multilateral system. African youth face a range of pressing social, economic, and environmental challenges, from persistent poverty and inequality to inter-generational unemployment, climate change and environmental degradation. Yet, by 2030, 375 million young people in Africa will reach working age and constitute a substantial proportion of the international work force. Amplifying African youth voices is an imperative for safeguarding the wellbeing of future generations, economies and societies on the continent and internationally.

The South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA) and the African Union African Peer Review Mechanism (AU-APRM) in collaboration with strategic partners including the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Global Affairs Canada, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), South Africa, and the South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) are collaborating to showcase the transformative impact of African foresight-informed youth-led initiatives to empower youth on the continent as part of the Summit of the Future.

This High-level side event aims to engage African youth actors to learn from their initiatives that apply foresight to re-imagine governance, education and social justice, build skills and competencies for

innovation and entrepreneurship, and pioneer systemic innovations for alternative futures. The Action Days Side Event is a valuable platform to showcase, support and encourage some of this work, discuss elements of emerging practice and emphasise the imperative for African foresight-informed youth-led initiatives that centre youth agency in an interconnected and dynamic global system.

## Context

The African Union Agenda 2063 asserts that the primary catalyst for the continent's political, social, cultural, and economic evolution will stem from the inventive spirit, vitality, and ingenuity of Africa's youth. Brookings Institute<sup>1</sup> estimates by current numbers, that 70 percent of Sub-Saharan Africa's population is under the age of 30, representing about 743 million of the 1.061 billion people on the continent. This means one out of three young people in the world will be living in Sub-Saharan Africa by 2050. This demographic bulge has significant implications for the continent's youth who will be the generation shaping future economic activity, socio-cultural environments and public service provision and state stability.

However, of these young people the majority are living in poverty i.e., on less than \$3.10 a day, with young women and minorities disproportionately affected.<sup>2</sup> Given the high unemployment and vulnerable employment rates for African youth, governments and business actors, development institutions, intergovernmental and regional governments should have this critical challenge as one of the top priorities to address. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated African youth precarity and the demands for an urgent response, especially given the prominence of this demographic for futures of the continent and internationally. The decisions taken today at all levels of society about African youth futures will heavily influence prospects for these young people, the African region as well as global contexts.

Prevailing notions of development, as defined by global institutions and implemented in national policies, do not accurately capture the subjective and personal experience of vulnerability of African youth in everyday life. Research on youth often fails to reflect the contemporary realities of African young people and how geographical, social and cultural contexts shape perceptions and outlooks towards the future.<sup>3</sup> As a result, discourses on African youth fall short of providing the necessary responses to address their challenges in context-specific ways.

Merely improving efficiency and productivity or modifying current dominant approaches utilising more technical solutions will not be adequate to address the scale and complexity of the wicked problem to leverage the demographic dividend of African youth. Recent research indicates that African marginalised communities can confront past hardships, experience healing, and embark on a constructive process of reevaluating their sense of empowerment by actively participating in shaping their personal and collective visions for the future.<sup>4</sup>

Africa's youth will play a critical role as one of the youngest populations in the world with potential to unleash new possibilities. They possess the energy, creativity, and potential to drive positive change in their

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<sup>1</sup> Landry Signé, "Africa Youth Leadership: Building Local Leaders to Solve Global Challenges," Brookings, March 27, 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/africa-youth-leadership-building-local-leaders-to-solve-global-challenges/>.

<sup>2</sup> Landry Signé. "Africa Youth Leadership: Building Local Leaders to Solve Global Challenges."

<sup>3</sup> Nicola Ansell et al., "Fears for the Future: The Incommensurability of Securitisation and in/Securities among Southern African Youth," *Social & Cultural Geography* 20, no. 4 (May 4, 2019): 507–33, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2017.1344871>.

<sup>4</sup> Steven Lichty and Francis Kamunya, "The Intersection of Trauma-Informed Futures and the Coloniality of Sexuality: Building Futures Consciousness with Kenya's LGBTQI+ Community," *Foresight* ahead-of-print, no. ahead-of-print (January 1, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1108/FS-10-2021-0219>.

communities.<sup>5</sup> The proposed side event will demonstrate innovative approaches for ensuring that youth can be empowered to access the information, opportunities and support necessary for advancing their well-being and shaping their futures.

In particular the proposed side event aims to showcase the ways in which African foresight-informed youth-led initiatives can contribute to interrogating and re-imagining all spheres of governance, from political to social, economic and environmental systems, offering valuable insights for systemic, multilateral institutional reform.

## Objectives

In considering the need for institutional and governance reform, there is an imperative to engage youth in imagining and shaping alternative futures, and fostering youth innovation for transformative action. Foresight-informed youth-led initiatives can substantively contribute to systemic innovations that overcome the challenges and limitations of current systems. The objective of the proposed side-event is as follows:

1. Advance advocacy for the role of youth in promoting sustainable development, the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.
2. Demonstrate the value of building foresight competencies and peer-learning networks to empower youth agency to co-create alternative and transformative futures.
3. Showcase youth initiatives in re-imagining futures and positioning youth as changemakers advocating for transformative action.
4. Engage African youth on their experiences in promoting youth voices and issues in decision-making, policy and strategy processes.
5. Discuss recommendations developed by youth emphasising alignment with the Pact for the Future and the Declaration on Future Generations.

## Proposal

The focus of the proposed side event is on African youth-led initiatives and the needed youth agency empowerment to support structures required for their success. A myriad of initiatives will be discussed as follows:

1. SAIIA is foreseen to share insights from an ongoing [Youth and Social Justice Futures project in East and Southern Africa in partnership with the IDRC](#). The aim is to demonstrate the value of youth-led strategic foresight and participatory futures approaches for empowering youth agency in envisioning and enacting transformative innovations and policies.
2. Aligned to this, the African Union African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) shall present on its efforts to implement Agenda 2063 and SDGs, with a special focus on youth-led initiatives and innovations for transformative impacts in Africa.
3. The UNDP, as a key foresight, futures thinking and competencies capacity building partner will share insights on their national level support for youth initiatives and innovations, underscored by the support of DIRCO.

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<sup>5</sup> C. W. Malan and M. C. Breitenbach, "Youth Participation in the Economy," *South African Journal of Economic and Management Sciences* 4, no. 1 (March 31, 2001): 172–203, <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajems.v4i1.2635>.

4. Public Figures from youth on the continent including African ministers and advocates will also share national experiences in promoting youth-led initiatives within the framework of Agenda 2030 and Agenda 2063.

A key emphasis is the value of innovative foresight methodologies such as Youth Futures Labs (YFLs) for empowering youth agency and advocacy with policy- and decision-makers. Additionally, the utility of youth peer-learning networks for encouraging dialogue, knowledge exchange and collaboration is underscored.

### Strategic Partners

- African Union- African Peer Review Mechanism
- South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA)
- African countries (Nigeria, South Africa, Egypt, Uganda, Kenya, Sierra Leone) and Global Affairs Canada (IDRC)
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

### Expected outcomes from the proposed Action Day side event are:

1. **Empowered Youth Agency:** Amplify the perspectives of African youth in global policy and financial discussions.
2. **Strategic Partnerships:** Strengthen multi-stakeholder partnerships to support the implementation of the Pact for the Future.
3. **Actionable Insights:** Generate concrete policy recommendations and innovative voluntary commitments to drive intergenerational fairness.
4. **Building Youth Advocacy:** Promoting foresight-informed youth-led initiatives needed to act on viable transformative innovations and policies within the framework of Agenda 2030 and Agenda 2063.

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## Supporting Publications

### Reports

[Youth and Social Justice Futures: Re-imagining Future Skills and Training in East and Southern Africa](#)

[SADC Futures of Higher Education and TVET Strategic Framework](#)

[The South African Green Hydrogen TVET Ecosystem Just Transition Strategic Framework](#)

### Policy Briefings

[Uganda: The Future of Work for Youth](#)

[Malawi: Youth-Centric Policies for Future Prosperity](#)

[Tanzania: Empowering Youth Through Innovation and Inclusion](#)

[Zambia: Youth at the Heart of Innovation and Transformation](#)

[South Africa: Realising Youth Futures by Delivering on Promised Goals](#)

[Kenya: Leveraging Youth for Inclusive Development and Resilience](#)

[Training in Uncertainty: Skills Foresight for a Just Green Hydrogen Transition in South Africa](#)

[Skills Governance and the TVET Ecosystem for the Green Hydrogen Economy in South Africa](#)

[the second 10-year implementation plan of Agenda 2063 of the African Union](#)