# LEADERSHIP, EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR YOUTH IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN UNION PROGRAMS

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## Abstract

From September 16–19, 2022, the U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres hosted the Transforming Education Summit at U.N. Headquarters in New York on the margins of the U.N. General Assembly. This summit mobilized stakeholders to act and collaborate in solidarity to find solutions for transforming education by 2030. This summit's outcomes were national and international commitments to transform education with increased public engagement and support. Before the conference, the African Union had just concluded its fourth Specialized Technical Committee on Education, Science, and Technology with the theme of utilizing education, science, technology, and innovation to foster recovery in Africa and respond to, strengthen, and build resilience in a post-COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, there was a need to enhance the response from the science, technology, and innovation sectors. Growing globalization and faster technological progress have created many new social, economic, environmental, and COVID-19 problems. Because of this, the Coalition on Media and Education for Development Africa Forum (CAFOR) and its partners have been looking at the needs and opportunities that come from these changes. CAFOR and its partners are also determined to look beyond Africa's Continental Education Strategy (CESA 16–25) and examine how schools can prepare children in Africa for jobs and technologies that have yet to be created to solve future problems with innovation. CAFOR is forward-looking and works towards building stronger partnerships on the continent, ensuring a shared responsibility to identify new opportunities and solutions.

**Overview of Leadership and Contemporary Education in Africa**

Africa has the youngest population in the world, with more than 400 million people between 15 and 35 years old. Such a young population calls for increased investment in economic and social development programs to improve the development index among African countries (UNDP et al., 2016, Youth development | African Union 2016. https://au.int/en/youth-development).

However, the continent faces various leadership challenges, such as corruption, weak institutions, a lack of accountability, and inadequate infrastructure (Mare, 2018). These challenges have resulted in political instability, economic inequality, and social unrest, hindering the continent's development. To address these issues, African leaders need to prioritize good governance, democracy, and human rights. Additionally, they should invest in education and training opportunities while fostering economic growth through sustainable development and regional integration (Ibid.). By focusing on these areas, African leaders can create a conducive environment that encourages innovation, productivity, and political stability while improving their citizens' overall quality of life. After gaining independence, African countries began investing heavily in the education sector, which was necessary due to the low literacy levels in most of the newly independent countries.

Africa is undergoing a significant transformation with the emergence of a new generation of leaders. Their most pressing challenge is securing access to the continent's vast natural resources. This task is becoming increasingly challenging due to intense competition from external players competing to tap into African resources, often for economic gain. The accumulation of personal wealth is now a defining feature of African leadership, unlike the previous era of the immediate post-independence leaders who worked to uplift all African citizens and fought for social equality. Kamarck (2018) noted that this shift in leadership priorities has been a critical driver of resource exploitation across Africa today.



*Figure 1: Some of the first generation of African leaders, plus Thomas Sankara of Burkina Faso. Source: Olatorera, 2021*

Today, a new generation of leaders with deep social consciousness and the desire to serve people genuinely for their common good is needed. Appreciative leadership, moral leadership, democratic leadership, servant leadership, and social justice leadership are some kinds of leadership used to prepare today's leaders (Mare, 2018). There is also a great interest in educational leadership today because of the widespread belief that leadership quality significantly affects school and student outcomes (Ezeani, 2015; Kanyamuna & Bonsu, 2017; Kimenyi, 2015; Leibbrandt, 2013; Mapangu, 2014; Maziya, 2015; Mugenda et al., A., 2013; Musa, 2014).

Educational leaders are crucial in promoting student success through effective leadership styles, policies, and practices crucial to boosting education, addressing existing disparities, and ensuring student success. This essence is particularly relevant in Africa, where there are substantial challenges in the education system. The focus of educational leadership must be on student learning and achievement, development, and well-being. This principle involves developing a clear vision for the school, designing instructional programs that align with the school's objectives, managing resources effectively, creating an inclusive and culturally responsive environment, and promoting ethical and professional standards to facilitate a professional learning community. The Standards for Educational Leadership reflect interdependent domains, qualities, and values integral to student success, including visionary leadership, instructional improvement, effective management, inclusive practice, cultural responsiveness, ethics, and professional norms. Visionary leadership involves developing a shared understanding of the school's goals and creating a path to achieve them. Instructional improvement focuses on developing effective teaching methods and promoting professional development. Effective management involves promoting resource management, fiscal responsibility, and time management. Inclusive practice focuses on creating a welcoming environment that values
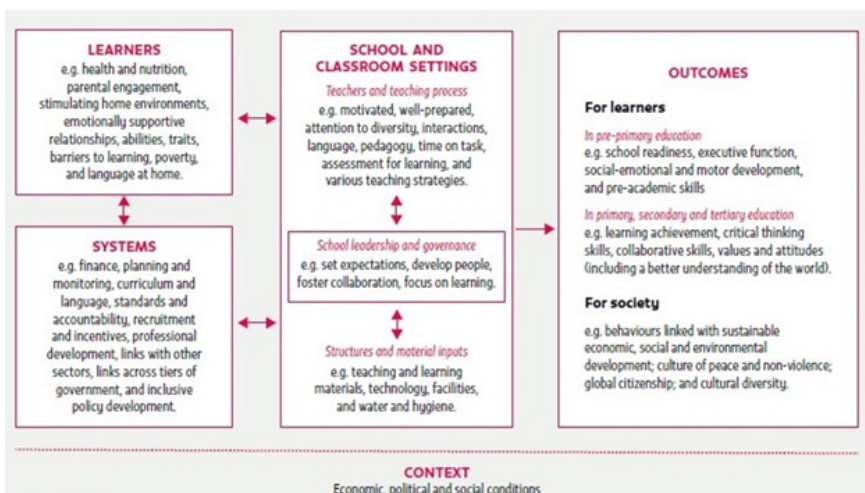


*Figure 2: School leadership is at the centre of a framework of education quality*

diversity, while cultural responsiveness involves recognizing cultural differences and promoting cultural understanding and awareness. Ethical and professional behavior are also essential aspects of educational leadership. Effective education leadership is vital for successful learning outcomes, particularly in Africa. (Kocabas et al. 2020).

Given the enormous challenges the continent faces, such as increasing poverty, poor infrastructure, rapidly growing populations, climate change, and the growing dominance of narrow identity groups and conflict between them, leaders must address these social issues now (Kohler & Erdmann, 2004). Africa's current leaders must give the utmost attention to these challenges and must understand such problems to be committed to the common good. They must utilize their national resources to lead their nations, regions, and the continent to sustainable solutions by implementing solid developmental plans to address these challenges now and over the following decades.

Countries in Africa will continue to experience continuous changes, new challenges, and opportunities. Historically, successful governments were capable of anticipating essential changes in the domestic or global marketplaces of goods and services and responding to them timely and effectively with new ideas and principles of production and organization (Wang & Liu, 2019).

The world has been in a continuous shift, with significant changes in science and technology, scales and types of production, organizational principles, the invention of new goods and services, and various forms of political and socio-economic development. Those involved in or aware of these changes—Asian countries such as China, Malaysia, Indonesia, South Korea, India, and Singapore—acquired the right capabilities and responded positively and timely to the challenges and opportunities those changes brought (Mohamed & Sohail, 2019). They could also predict and prepare for changes, challenges, and opportunities. Moreover, the recent COVID-19
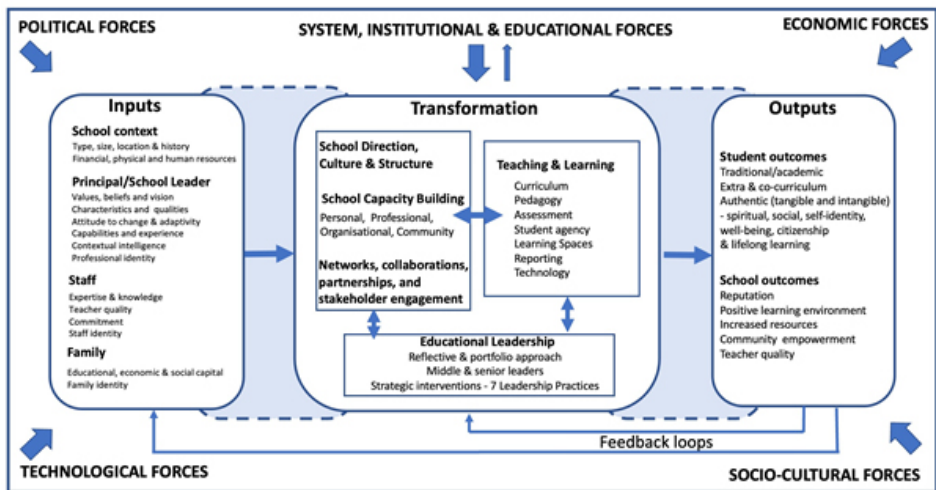


*Figure 3: Successful school leadership model*

pandemic devastated most populations worldwide and brought new technological advancements for businesses.

The first-generation African leaders needed help anticipating and responding effectively to the challenges generated after independence (Doe, 2005). During the 21st century, defined by globalization, it is clear that Africa needs a new class of leaders. The continent needs the kind of intelligent leadership capable of anticipating the possibilities of social, economic, and political change domestically and globally, comprehending the significance of such developments, and effectively responding to these conditions. Africa needs intelligent leaders who respect education, are educated, skilled, and experienced, value knowledge and information, and know how and where to acquire the advice and expertise needed to formulate and implement policies. Africa needs leaders who are committed to the promotion of African perspectives on democracy and good governance. It needs leaders who understand economic development strategies compatible with African socio-cultural realities, have integrity, vision, and competence, and can inspire people to realize this vision for the future. Moreover, leaders must acknowledge the positive contributions of previous generations and recognize the importance of generational linkages. Leaders who commit themselves to developing synergy between generations will be more likely to be successful.

In the last four decades, Africa has transformed tremendously from state-led and government-controlled economies to free enterprise and government-regulated, private sector-led strategies in African countries' economic and social development. There has been a transformation from military rule and one-party authoritarian governments to multiparty politics and democratic governance (Ayittey, 2011).

Today, we can identify two types of leaders: functional and political (Boohene et al., 2017). Functional or operational leaders ensure the efficient and effective performance of various governmental institutions and agencies in civil society and the private sector. These people are trained to do specific jobs in the different areas and levels of the government system. Examples include senior civil servants and people who work in technical services that help health, education, communication, engineering, security, and defense institutions and agencies (Compaoré, 2021).

However, leadership entails identifying, mobilizing, and organizing the relevant talent, expertise, and experience among employees to execute the necessary operations in institutions and agencies. This attribute necessitates creating and maintaining appropriate environments, working conditions, and incentives. However, although some professionals are capable leaders, they still require developing skills to identify and mobilize the workforce needed to perform leadership functions effectively. These efforts involve working with other people and possibly authority agencies and integrating their talent and expertise for collaborative action. Thus, they must understand governance issues and the societal context in which they function.

Education is of utmost importance, and consequently, political leaders in Africa need training considering the contemporary political environment in which knowledge and information are crucial for policies to be implemented effectively in the

government systems. Formerly, African political leaders generally emerged from society in response to political demands. They had minimal training or prior preparation (Kisangani & Bonsu, 2019). Africa is transforming and must be prepared to respond effectively to the global challenges and opportunities likely to emerge in the 21st century (Nyang'oro, 2018). Policymakers must have the relevant information and knowledge to formulate and implement the appropriate policies or decisions to be efficient and influential players in the various domains and levels of governance. Beyond the ability to mobilize, organize, and inspire people to collective action, political leaders must also have a sound understanding of the fundamental economic, political, or social issues they manage. With this understanding, political leaders will be able to fully understand the advice of their senior professionals and perform their functions efficiently and effectively. They would also need help making informed decisions or evaluating their performance objectively.

Thus, to be efficient and effective in their respective functions, both types of leaders – the functional and the political – must understand the economic, social, political, and global issues they face. They also need to understand the governance systems they work in, the principles of good governance, and the kinds of actions that could lead to bad management in their societies (Boohene et al., 2017). As governments are dynamic and engaged in continuous processes to implement policies, responding to needs, demands, and changing societal contexts requires the life-long education and training of both types of leaders in a rapidly changing global environment.

**The Transforming Education Summit**
In September 2022, U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres convened the Transforming Education Summit (TES) at U.N. Headquarters in New York. The summit focused on equity and inclusion, quality, and relevance in response to the global crisis in education. Its goal was to elevate education to the top of the global political agenda and mobilize action, ambition, solidarity, and solutions to recover from pandemic-related learning losses and transform education in a rapidly changing world.

The TES had four specific objectives:
- national and international commitments to transform education
- greater public engagement around and support for transforming education
- a report to document the knowledge and agreements generated by participants at the summit for future action and follow-up after the summit through the SDG4-Education 2030 High-Level Steering Committee and the proposed intergovernmental Summit of the Future in 2023

The summit utilized a focused, inclusive process built from the ground up to accomplish these goals while ensuring meaningful interaction between young people and education stakeholders. It concentrated on three intersecting themes: national consultations for developing a shared vision, commitment, and alignment of action across constituencies to transform education by 2030, thematic action tracks to accelerate

progress on education as part of the 2030 Agenda for transforming education, and financing of education to generate and prioritize shared goals, build capacity, and broker knowledge.

The thematic action tracks focused on inclusive, equitable, safe, and healthy schools, teachers, teaching, and the teaching profession, learning and skills for life, work, and sustainable development, digital learning and transformation, and financing of education to generate and prioritize shared goals, build capacity, and broker knowledge.

Furthermore, leaders from the African Union met and established a common position to explore how schools in Africa can prepare children for jobs that do not exist yet and technologies that are not yet invented to utilize innovations for solving problems that have not yet been anticipated. These leaders must become more future-oriented and work towards building stronger partnerships on the continent to ensure shared responsibility, new opportunities, and solutions to global problems.

The TES resulted in several initiatives, including a proposal for establishing a Global Commission on the Teaching Profession, a Global Youth Initiative, and a renewed focus on promoting disability inclusion in education. Additionally, the International Financing Facility for Education has been established and can generate approximately USD 10 billion in financial resources for lower-middle-income nations in the foreseeable future.

Member states and partners have a follow-up plan built upon five pillars. The pillars are to incorporate national expressions of dedication into their preexisting socio-economic and educational programs, strategies, and frameworks to achieve SDG4, a thorough examination of the transformation of education within the conclusions of the 2024 summit of the future, maintain and expand the worldwide movement that arose from the summit, promotion, and implementation of a Global Youth Initiative, and strategic plans and engagement in advocacy endeavors to guarantee the successful execution of the five theme initiatives that originated from the summit.

In essence, the Transforming Education Summit was a crucial endeavor that has the potential to facilitate progress toward achieving the 2030 agenda for education. It provided a comprehensive framework for guiding principles for education in the 21st century while generating initiatives and a follow-up plan for subsequent actions.

CAFOR and its partners are looking beyond Africa's Continental Education Strategy (CESA 16-25) and examine how schools can prepare children in Africa for jobs that do not exist yet or technologies that are not yet invented, or solve problems that have not yet been anticipated through new kinds of innovation. Therefore, we must be more future-looking in Africa and work towards building stronger partnerships within the continent and ensuring a shared responsibility as we seize new opportunities and find solutions.

As we reflect on the Transforming Education Summit and its related topics regarding education in Africa, it is essential to remember that education should prepare future leaders in all domains. Education should equip all learners with the necessary learning agency, a sense of purpose, and competencies to shape their own lives while contributing to economic and social development. For the summit to

achieve these outcomes, it should prioritize the rapid reversal of the downward trend in domestic and international resources for education in Africa. The discussion must also address the substantial education financing gap on the African continent, which poses a significant challenge amid the slow recovery from COVID-19 and tight budgets. Therefore, African leaders must focus on the five thematic tracks outlined above as they aim to transform education in Africa. (The Future of Education and Skills: Education 2030, OECD, n.d.).

The Transforming Education Summit resulted in significant partner involvement and the presentation of national commitments by 133 member states. The Vision Statement by the U.N. Secretary-General presented guiding principles for education in the 21st century, and global initiatives were implemented to address education crises, promote sustainable education, and advance gender equality. The creation of the International Financing Facility for Education strengthened the case for more significant investment in education, and the involvement of young leaders and stakeholders reinforced the global movement to improve education. The High-Level Steering Committee (HLSC) will play a vital role in integrating the summit outcomes into SDG4 coordination efforts, and a TES follow-up plan built on five key pillars was endorsed. These pillars include national pledges of commitment, examining the transformation of education at future summits, expanding the global movement, collaborating with institutions and educators for financing education, and establishing a high-level panel to address the shortage of teachers.

Leaders must understand the overall goals, challenges, opportunities, and potential solutions for tackling the continent's education financing crisis. The TES recommends that addressing the gaps in education financing would entail policy actions in three key areas: (1) mobilizing more resources, mainly domestic; (2) increasing efficiency and equity of allocations and expenditures; and (3) improving education-financing data. This summit will help countries build upon previous global commitments on education financing based on the U.N. 2030 Agenda and SDG 4, which set out a universal rights-based agenda for a new social contract for education around lifelong learning for all, which has become more urgent because of pandemics, crisis and conflicts across the continent.

**The African Union Perspectives for Transforming Education in Africa**
The African Union was established during a significant change in the world order. African leaders struggled to keep up with current affairs and often reacted rather than governed. The various heads of state of the members of the African Union ultimately decided that they needed a plan to make Africa the global player they believed it could be. As a result, they created Agenda 2063.

*(a) Setting up Africa to prosper in the 21st century*
Agenda 2063 is rooted in pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance, providing a robust framework for addressing past injustices and recognizing the 21st century as the African century.

The agenda is a flexible document that can adjust to social conditions over time. Agenda 2063 begins with a ten-year implementation plan, which lays out the concrete steps and achievable milestones in the journey toward 2063 to fulfill the African Union vision (African Union Commission, 2013).

**(b) Agenda 2063 is a paradigm shift for the continent if implemented on all fronts.** The successful execution of Agenda 2063 and Agenda 2030 (global Sustainable Development Goals) in Africa will require a harmonized framework (Cole, 2019). This framework will ensure that both agendas align to create coherent, meaningful, and impactful results. The vision of Agenda 2063 is to transform Africa into a thriving continent with high-quality growth that generates employment opportunities for all, particularly women and youth. This transformation will be achieved through sound policies, excellent infrastructure, and a favorable environment for private sector development, investment, and business growth. Africa needs visionary and determined leadership to drive the shift towards sustained and inclusive economic growth for this to be possible.

To achieve this vision, Africa must move beyond its current sources of economic growth and opportunity and promote productivity to encourage sustained and inclusive economic growth. CAFOR is committed to supporting this transformation in various ways, such as education-related skills, science, technology, research, innovation, and skills that can drive growth and innovation for Africa in the 21st century. Furthermore, the African Union has developed several youth development policies and programs at the continental level, such as the African Youth Charter, Youth Decade Plan of Action, and the Malabo Decision on Youth Empowerment. These initiatives aim to ensure that African countries benefit from their demographic dividend and promote youth participation while protecting their rights, such as freedom of movement, speech, association, religion, ownership of property, and other human rights.

In conclusion, harmonizing Agenda 2063 and Agenda 2030 will facilitate realizing a prosperous and transformed Africa that provides economic opportunities for all its people. This transformation will require visionary and determined leadership, investment in education, science, technology, research, and innovation, and a favorable environment for private sector development and growth. The African Union's commitment to youth development policies and programs will also play a crucial role in ensuring that the younger generation contributes to the continent's growth and development.

The Youth Decade Plan of Action emphasizes five crucial factors that require attention to empower young people (African Union Youth Division, 2017). These include education and skills development, ensuring youth employment and entrepreneurship opportunities, governance, peace and security, youth health, including sexual reproductive health rights, as well as agriculture, climate change, and environment-related concerns.

In addition to the Youth Decade Plan of Action, the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Continental Strategy offers an extensive framework

for developing national policies and strategies that cater to the challenges posed by technical and vocational training, education, and economic growth. The strategy aims to create national wealth and combat poverty by leveraging youth entrepreneurship, innovation, and employment. Besides, the Department of Women, Gender, and Youth supports the African Union's efforts to promote youth development.

### (c) Challenges to realizing Agenda 2063
The stakes are high for the realization of this vision. Several economies on the continent remain fragile, and infrastructure remains underdeveloped. Many African economies still rely on raw materials, with a limited diversification of their productive structures.

Poverty rates remain unacceptably high, and inequality is high. According to the United Nations, six of the ten most unequal countries in the world are African (United Nations, 2020). Recent global food crises and continuing struggles with hunger in some parts of Africa, particularly in the Horn region, stress the need for greater food security. Africa must also harness more natural resources and human and financial capital to invest in future development.

### (d) A demographic challenge
As indicated previously, Africa's population is young and growing, and a rapidly expanding number of job seekers will soon enter the labor markets. Population growth rates are even higher in cities, where an estimated 40% of Africa's population lives. Africa's challenge is not only to create employment fast enough to keep pace with this population growth but also to provide everyone with the skills to join a productive workforce.
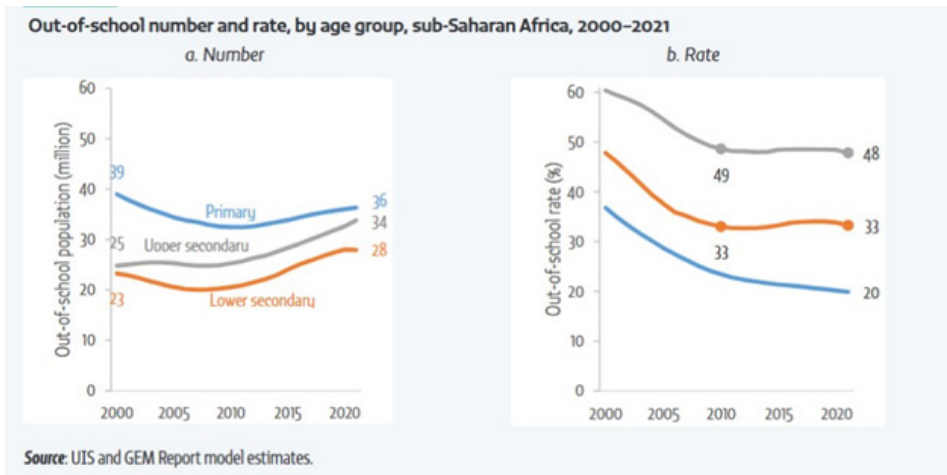


Figure 4: Out of school number and rate, by age group, sub-Saharan Africa, 2000–2021

### (e) Investing in people first through education

Agenda 2063 demands that Africa invests in skills, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics so that the people of Africa can drive the continent's development (African Union Commission, 2015). In this respect, Agenda 2063 has set up pillars for the priority areas to make this vision a reality.

One of the pillars of Agenda 2063 is the need to invest in the people of Africa as its most precious resource. According to Agenda 2063, these resources include nutrition and health, access to shelter, water, and sanitation, expanding quality education, and strengthening science, technology, innovation, and research (Cole, 2017). Unfortunately, there is a disconnect between the skills school systems produce and the skills the private sector requires. Educational quality is often low, and African students rank lowest internationally in reading and computational skills (Chimombo & Egesah, 2016). The continent's education systems need to enhance skills in traditional professions – such as teachers, nurses, doctors, and lawyers – and in sciences, technology, engineering, and mathematics to support the rapidly changing demands of African economies. Developing skills for micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises is also urgent.

### (f) Achieving the vision of Agenda 2063 through education

The goal of Agenda 2063 is to realize Africa's goal to be a stable, integrated, and prosperous continent with competitive, diversified, and growing economies participating fully in global trade and investment (African Union Commission, 2015). African Union leadership and partners see education as a fundamental human right outlined in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 28 of the
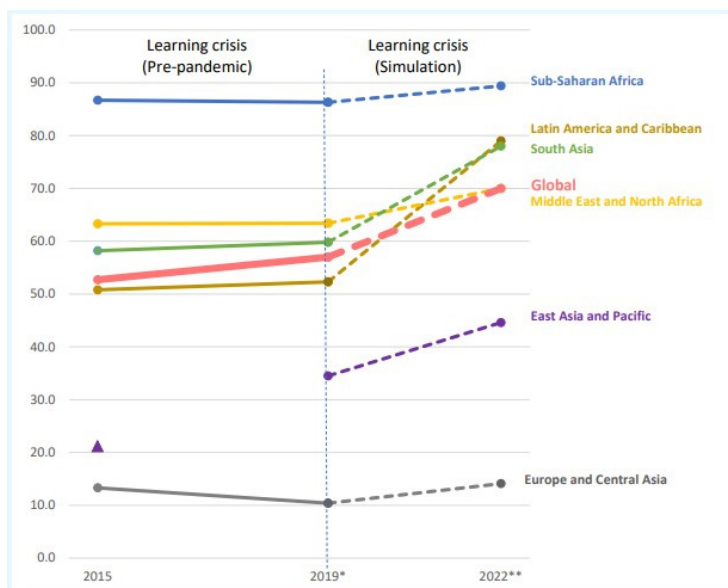


Figure 5: Learning poverty globally and by region – 2015 and 2019, with 2022 simulation estimates. Source: World Bank, 2022

Convention on the Rights of the Child, and Article 11 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (OAU, 1990). These frameworks emphasize the need for governments to provide free and compulsory primary education.

Additionally, Aspiration 6 of the African Union Agenda 2063 envisions "an Africa where development is people driven, unleashing the potential of its women and youth" and "Africa's youth are guaranteed full access to education, training, skills, and technology' principles which are both outlined in the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 2016–2025).

### (g) Transforming Education in Africa

The African Union Commission, in line with the Transforming Education Summit in New York, has set out an agenda for transforming education in Africa. The goals of this agenda include

- working towards achieving the Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016 to 2025,
- advocating for education to be the A.U. theme of the year for 2023 and
- taking deliberate measures to increase financing and invest systematically in education in line with international and regional benchmarks.

In 2024, the African Union will focus on Education in Africa, providing a unique opportunity to re-ignite Member States' commitment to achieving CESA and SDG4 targets. This initiative will build on previous commitments, including the STC-EST4, AU-HLSE Declarations, the Urgent Call for Action by the SDG4 High-level Steering Committee, and the U.N. Secretary General's Vision Statement on Transforming Education. The African Union has proposed as its theme for 2024, "Educate an African fit for the 21st Century – Building resilient education systems for increased access to inclusive, lifelong, quality, and relevant learning in Africa" (AUC, 2023: 7). The African Union Commission will coordinate efforts to rally governments and development partners to re-imagine education and skill development models needed for the 21st-century Africa we desire.

The Education in Africa theme for 2024 will emphasize implementing system-wide transformative strategies that are effective and sustainable while stimulating recovery from COVID-19 and building resilience. Furthermore, it will inspire the implementation of previous declarations emanating from critical continental and global education moments, including the fourth ordinary session of the Specialized Technical Committee on Education, Science, and Technology, the U.N. Transforming Education Summit, the

**In 2024, the African Union will focus on Education in Africa, providing a unique opportunity to re-ignite Member States' commitment to achieving CESA and SDG4 targets.**

High-level Side Event on Transforming Education in Africa, and the Youth Manifesto on Transforming Education in Africa.

The sub-themes underpinning the proposed focus will encompass the entire education and skills development spectrum, from early childhood education and development to tertiary and vocational education and life-long learning. These areas will highlight the role of teachers as essential change agents who need to be adequately supported and empowered to play their role in the transformation.

Various national, regional, continental, and global activities are planned (AUC, 2023) to commemorate this crucial initiative. These activities will foster the implementation of vital resolutions toward building responsive and resilient African education systems. The Department of Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation of the A.U. Commission will provide the technical leadership, coordinating with the Committee of Ten Heads of States on Education in Africa to make impactful changes through collaborations among member states, regional economic communities, development partners, U.N. agencies, education stakeholders, and the private sector (Ibid: 7).

Initiating education as the theme for 2024 will sustain the momentum generated by the Transforming Education Summit (TES), place an African Union spotlight on recovery from COVID-19, and build resilient systems to increase access to inclusive, quality, and relevant education in Africa. This strategic focus will aim to achieve concrete, observable actions implemented in African Union Member States, contributing to the education transformation in Africa.

### (h) African Union agenda to strengthen the implementation of the Year of Education in Africa

The agenda calls for measures to strengthen education budget transparency, efficiency, and accountability mechanisms, as well as allocate more funding to neglected but critical sub-sectors such as early childhood care and education, re-integrating out-of-school girls and boys into the education system, and green technical and vocational education and training. The agenda also seeks to reform the teaching profession, focusing on quality teacher training, recruitment, and management policies that improve learner outcomes and help improve teacher retention and fulfillment.

Additionally, the agenda highlights the need to upscale the implementation of evidence-based, innovative, feasible, and sustainable solutions that address the evolving context of education and training. This plan includes digital learning solutions, disability-inclusive education, special programs for children and adolescents at high risk of dropping out of school, programming for displaced and crisis-affected children and youth, safe and gender-responsive learning environments, and multi-sectoral adolescent girls' education and related programming. The agenda also emphasizes the importance of focusing on foundational learning from an early stage, with an emphasis on teaching Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) and essential reading in preschool and primary school.

Finally, the agenda seeks to establish and strengthen multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder education partnerships at the country, regional, and continental levels. This movement should also leverage schools as multi-sectoral and multi-level platforms by forging strategic partnerships across crucial development actors and sectors like agriculture, health, telecommunication, green and digital transition, climate change, the private sector, and youth to transform education to insulate against future shocks. This agenda is a comprehensive strategy for transforming education in Africa, with specific measures designed to achieve ambitious goals.

**Youth and training for job markets in Africa**

Africa is currently in the middle of a developmental crisis. Countries on the continent need to address the critical issues to effectively respond to the demands of new policy and development frameworks. Africa is the second largest and most populous continent globally, with an estimated population of 1.4 billion, equivalent to 17.89 % of the global population (U.N., 2023). The continent's population is the youngest and fastest growing worldwide. Over 40% of Africans are under 15, and 20% are between 15 and 24. By 2050, one-third of the world's population will live in Africa, up from nearly one-fifth in 2012. Sub-Saharan Africa will have a higher youth–to–population ratio over the next 35 years, highlighting the need to prepare for an increasingly young labor force (Smith, 2019). Whether these young people join the labor market successfully will have significant implications for Africa and its neighbors. Therefore, it is imperative to have a good understanding of how young job seekers engage with labor markets.

There is also a significant gender discrepancy emerging as young women enter marriage early, withdraw from the labor force, and focus on raising families. Afri-
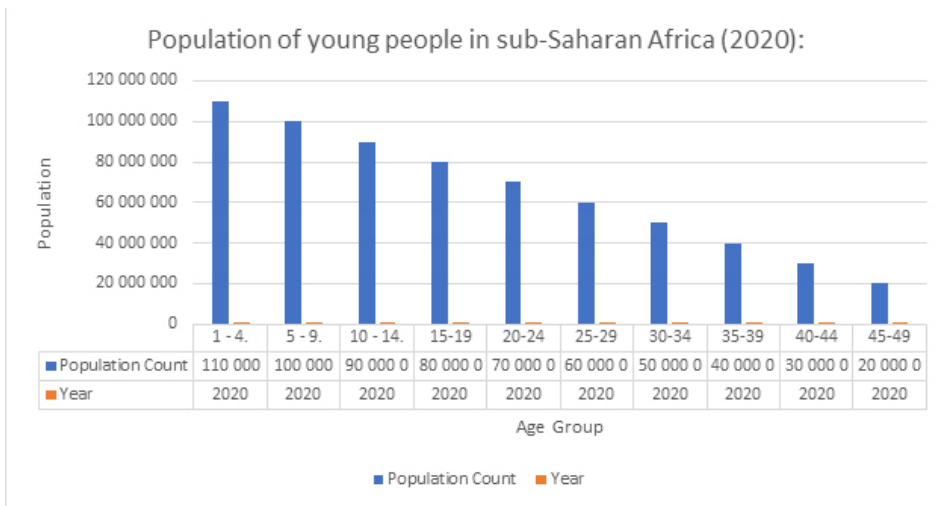


*Figure 6: Population data of young people in sub-Sahara Africa 2020. Source: World Bank, 2022*

can women in most countries do not enjoy the same economic, social, and political opportunities as men. Regarding education, work, and health, women lose out as fewer girls than boys go to school and complete the learning cycle. Women earn less than men for paid labor, and harmful practices such as child marriage and sexual and physical violence adversely affect women's health and development. Africa's widespread youth unemployment threatens to undermine social and political stability and make young people vulnerable to radicalization.

Africa has vast, untapped economic potential, but young people struggle to gain employment opportunities – 60% of the unemployed are younger than 25, with women being the most impacted (World Bank, 2018). Limited access to education and the practical training needed to build skills perpetuate the cycle, and the economic prospects propel young Africans to seek a better life elsewhere. This phenomenon, in turn, further damages local economies as significantly more developed nations are steadily drained of their workforce.

Africa is pursuing a transformation agenda under the recognition of the African Union's vision for "an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena" (African Union Commission, 2015). Therefore, it is evident that success will only be possible if leaders purposefully harness the potential of the continent's young people. As African leaders give credence to this view, they have identified youth development in science, technology, and innovation as the main pillars of Agenda 2063. Innovation in Africa is not new, and human survival requires constant change and adaptation. For most Africans, innovation is necessary, enabling them to navigate difficulties and challenges in life. With African fortunes and prospects looking up and the continent making strides to achieve its transformation agenda, there is an urgent need to intro-
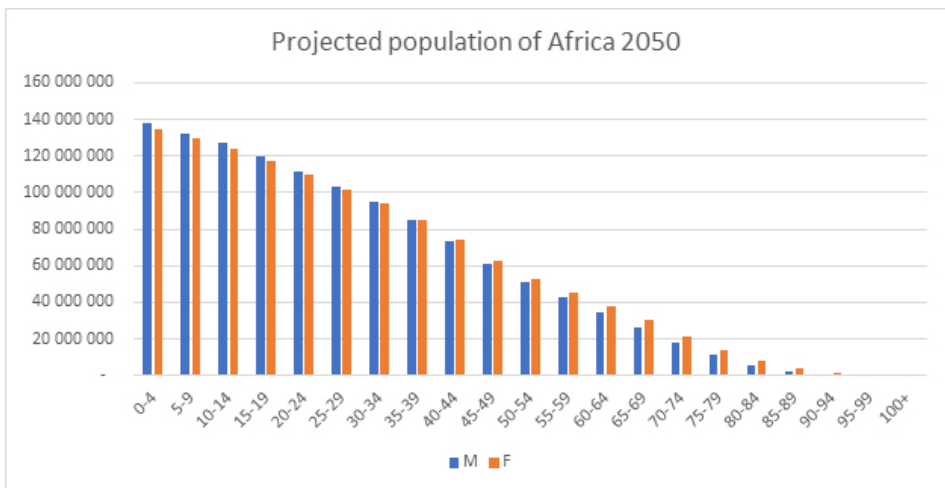


*Figure 7: Projected population of Africa for 2050. Source: Pyramid population 2022*

duce and intensify the use of science and technology in traditional innovation. There is also the overarching question of how innovations in science and technology can be helpful to build on the momentum of economic growth in Africa. This vision can elicit ideas on how a technological change can harness the potential of African youth to advance the African development agenda and counter the steadily rising youth unemployment rates.

African youth want to work but need education, information, skills training, and opportunities to get good jobs. Many in Africa believe it is time to break away entirely from the past, look at situations from a different perspective and a new vision, and find permanent solutions to youth employment problems on the continent (Ihejirika & Onyemere, 2018). In recent forums, African youth have expressed their desire to learn marketable skills in school and urged African governments to revise educational policies to align with workforce demands (Africa Renewal, 2018). African youth know and feel that merely graduating from school does not guarantee jobs. African youth would like to see educational programs revamped to better equip them with the knowledge and skills needed to compete in the workforce (Harrison, 2019). Young people have recently been talking about getting support in making career choices. They have emphasized the need for more effective mentorship programs, counseling, and career guidance centers to help students, business owners, and graduates.

Others discuss having the right skills for present-day employment, including creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making. Many agree that schools should develop such skills through high-quality teaching, reduced drop-out rates, improved access to higher education, quality vocational and technical training, and building bridges between formal and non–formal educational systems and the labor market. Schools should also offer specialized on-the-job training (Magara, 2019).

Although the employment landscape in Africa today reveals that the continent's workforce is more educated and employed in a diverse set of sectors than is commonly perceived, finding workers with appropriate skills and experience is difficult (African Development Bank Group, 2017). However, compared to the other issues, these are generally regarded as much lower-ranked obstacles to business growth on the continent. This remedy reflects the fundamental nature of constraints in finance, infrastructure, and overall macroeconomic conditions. Companies in Africa have complained about the lack of worker qualifications and skills, sometimes presenting an issue for hiring. Employers cite a need for more technical skills as an obstacle to hiring. In some cases, they have even pointed out that job applicants commonly lack soft skills such as time management, punctuality, and communication.

The Office of the African Union Commission Chairperson's Youth Envoy, the Department of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (ESTI), and the Women, Gender, and Youth Directorate conducted extensive consultations with young people across the continent.

As a result, they gathered young people's views and opinions on various issues and recommendations concerning the transformation of education in Africa (Office of the African Union Commission Chairperson's Youth Envoy et al., 2019). These areas align with Aspiration 62 of the African Union Agenda 2063, which states the following: "An Africa whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women, and youth, and caring for children." Article 11 of the African Youth Charter also highlights the relevance of youth participation. African youth expressed the following concerns:

The consultations revealed several concerns expressed by African youth:

1. There must be more opportunities to acquire skills relevant to the 21st-century job market or contribute meaningfully to achieving the African Union Agenda 2063.
2. Millions of African children, adolescents, and youth are out of school or unable to continue their education after primary school, leading to a lack of basic literacy and numeracy skills. The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened this situation.
3. African youth need a sense of purpose and agency, connecting them with their communities and the private sector to solve global challenges. This concept should be a core curricular goal across the continent.
4. Conflict continues to disrupt education in Africa, with children and young people being the most affected.
5. Educators need more relevant materials, adequate compensation, and support and respect for students.
6. Too many African youth and schools lack access to technology, and there is a need for more mechanisms to protect students online and provide adequate instruction about online safety.

In conclusion, the consultations revealed several concerns regarding the education transformation in Africa. These concerns highlight the need for reforms in education that promote youth agency, support and respect for students, adequate compensation and resources for educators, and access to technology for African youth and schools.

African youth want to see that Transforming Education in Africa requires a paradigm shift. They are calling upon governments, the African Union, and development actors to transform Africa's education systems in at least five areas in the AU DOTSS framework involving:

- Digital and electricity connectivity of all schools on the continent.
- Online learning to complement classroom learning.
- Teachers become facilitators and motivators of learning who teach children and young people how to learn and motivate them to learn.
- Safety to learn online in schools and communities.
- Skills-focused learning ensures children have relevant foundational literacy, numeracy, and digital skills. They should also have 21st-century problem-solving skills and must leave school with job-specific skills.

African youth have called for creating an African Union and United Nations Youth Council to work on initiatives to implement these recommendations and follow up on the summit outcomes with a document that moves from theory to practice with less talk and more action.

The AU DOTSS framework is an initiative developed by the African Union to tackle crises across the African continent.

In the education sector, DOTSS is an acronym for digital connectivity, online and offline learning, teachers as facilitators and motivators of learning, safety online and in schools, and skills-focused learning. *The framework has been fundamental in the COVID-19 pandemic, with many African countries utilizing DOTSS principles to respond to the outbreak. However, it has broader implications beyond the pandemic and serves as a foundation for responding to other health and education emergencies across the continent.* African youths call on all education sector actors to be committed to multilateral agreements to deliver on their promises to transform education and engage youth as partners.

**Strengthening the response from science, technology, and innovation.**
The African continent represents 20% of the earth's surface and is home to 1.4 billion people – likely reaching 2.53 billion by 2050. It boasts 60% of the world's arable lands, large swathes of forests, 30% of the world's reserve of minerals, and the youngest population of any continent (World Bank Group, 2022). Nevertheless, despite these riches, it produces only 3% of the global GDP, accounts for less than 3% of international trade (i.e., primary commodities and natural resources), and shoulders 25% of diseases worldwide. The picture is particularly bleak for research and innovation: Africa contributes just 2% of world research output, accounts for only 1.3% of research spending, and produces 0.1% of all patents (World Bank Group, 2021).

The AU's Agenda 2063 and the Common African Position on Agenda 2030 identify science, technology, and innovation (STI) as critical enablers for achieving development blueprints (UNECA, 2018). 2014 saw the adoption of a 10-year Science, Technology, and Innovation Strategy (STISA – 2024). African governments should build STI capacity through the policies and processes that guide investment decisions in STI, innovation capacity, and STI products and services.

A lack of investment in science and technology has undermined Africa's economic transformation at the structural level (the shift of workers and resources from low- to higher-productivity sectors) and the sectoral level (the growth of productivity within industries) (UNECA, 2018). This lack of investment has had far-reaching consequences. Without the economic and scientific infrastructure necessary for innovation, the continent has relied on the colonial development model of resource extraction, which is both unsustainable and primarily responsible for its debilitating poverty and aid dependency. These challenges have been compounded by economic fragmentation, as smaller markets constrain the long-term investments and patient capital that would foster innovation and drive technology transfer in the context of globalization. Patient capital refers to long-term investments made by investors or

firms in businesses or projects that require a longer time frame to generate returns on investment. It is often used to support social and environmental initiatives with a tangible, positive impact on society, such as funding sustainable energy projects or providing resources to underserved communities. Patient capital investors are willing to wait a more extended period before expecting returns, often spanning several years or even decades, in exchange for the potential for more considerable, more sustainable gain.

The lack of investment in science and technology in Africa has adversely affected the economy at both the structural and sectoral levels. These consequences include continued reliance on unsustainable resource extraction and aid dependency and limited innovation and technology transfer due to economic fragmentation and lack of patient capital.

Africa's economic transformation has been hindered by a lack of investment in science and technology at both the structural and sectoral levels, as reported by UNECA in 2018 (Cole, 2019; Kiss, 2022). The effects of this underinvestment are far-reaching and include continued reliance on the unsustainable colonial development model of resource extraction, high levels of poverty, and economic fragmentation that constrain long-term investment and patient capital. With the necessary infrastructure for innovation, Africa can foster the growth and development of technology.

**Key Emerging Issues**

*(a) Digitalization*
The digital transformation in African countries presents significant economic growth and social development opportunities. By digitizing their economies, African countries can boost productivity, increase efficiency, and create new jobs in the digital sector (Monga, 2017). Additionally, digital technologies offer innovative solutions to overcome some of the barriers to development, such as limited access to education, healthcare, and financial services. However, challenges like inadequate infrastructure, limited digital skills, and regulatory barriers hinder the adoption and diffusion of digital technologies (Ogunleye, 2019).

Governments and private sector players need to invest in digital infrastructure, such as high-speed internet, digital platforms, and cyber-security, to overcome these challenges and offer opportunities provided by digital transformation. Additionally, national policies should prioritize the development of digital skills and capacity building in the education system and workforce. African countries can also learn from other emerging economies, such as India, China, and Brazil, which have successfully harnessed digital transformation to spur economic growth (Monga, 2017). In conclusion, the digital transformation of African economies presents a significant opportunity to drive development. Still, it requires a concerted effort from stakeholders to overcome the challenges and maximize the benefits.

### (b) The state of STIs in Africa

Despite reorienting its development policies to include STIs at various levels, Africa's STI capacity still needs to improve. In 2015, only 12 African countries out of 141 surveyed ranked among the top 100 innovation achievers in the 2015 Global Innovation Index. Only one of 31 African countries surveyed in the 2016 Network Readiness Index was among the world's top 50 network-ready countries (Makinde, 2018). Africa needs better STI infrastructure and only has a small pool of researchers, limited science and engineering programs, weak intellectual property frameworks, and low joint scientific output relative to the rest of the world. Therefore, the continent still needs to improve its overall STI efforts due to the low investments in STI capacity development. It accounts for about 5% of the global gross domestic product but only 1.3% of global spending on research and development (UNESCO, 2015). Indeed, about 84% of the African countries surveyed in 2016 ranked *low* or *very low* in capacity development outcomes.

### (c) STI capacity gaps in Africa

Africa Capacity Report 2017 shows that STI capacity is one of Africa's biggest challenges. A survey of 44 African countries undertaken by the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) in 2016 to assess capacity needs in STI priority areas showed that African countries consider training as a *high* or *very high* priority area in STIs. Investment in STI development is meager in Africa. African countries are taking a short-term approach to developing STI skills, as evidenced by low public spending on research, development, and scientific infrastructure.

Most African countries need a more robust institutional capacity to develop and sustain STIs because only some public institutions have qualified human resources in science and engineering. African countries must have a more remarkable ability to retain a few qualified scientists and engineers. The migration of skilled African scientists and other experts – the "brain drain" (Tarrósy, 2011) – has further depleted Africa's STI capacity (UNECA, 2016). For instance, from 2007 to 2011, an estimated 450,000 tertiary-educated Africans migrated (UN-DESA & OECD, 2013). Another critical challenge is the lack of accurate data to target STI policies and strategies. The lack of a robust standard set of African STI indicators has constrained the continent's ability to make evidence-based STI decisions. The inability to manage the data affects the ability to update the STI policies and strategies and determine how much to allocate to build STI capacities and frameworks. There is also a vast disparity between female and male participation in research in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education and higher and tertiary education.

### (d) The crucial role of governments in Africa's STI capacity building

STI capacity is built around state-of-the-art equipment and other infrastructure that require huge investments that yield little returns but are preconditions for making information and communication technologies (ICTs) affordable and usable. A soci-

ety-wide effort to leverage ICTs requires concerted government efforts. Therefore, governments need to provide clear STI policy guidance.

### (e) Recommended Policy Options for African Governments from ACBF
STI capacity building rests on African governments' commitment to assume a leadership role as regulators of the economy and provide the necessary support. ACR 2017 recommends several policy options for African governments to consider building their science, technology, and innovation capacity.

- Design gender-sensitive STI policies, bridge the gender gap by promoting women's participation and leadership in STI, and encourage young women and girls to pursue science and engineering programs.
- African governments and the AU should pursue sustainable and innovative funding alliances with bilateral and multilateral donors, governments, private foundations, and businesses.
- Governments should establish partnerships with emerging local firms and start-ups at the bottom of the pyramid to create financing mechanisms, such as industry funds, association-based financing, and tax incentives to mobilize resources for STI.
- In partnership with the private sector, academia, non-state actors, and civil society organizations, African governments can conduct surveys and diagnostic analyses to identify the critical STI skills essential for economic growth. It is crucial to align skills development with market needs and Agenda 2063 priorities. Emphasis should be on technical and vocational education and training (TVET), including apprenticeships and on-the-job experiences.
- Establish a regional database of critical skills for Agenda 2063 to support STI and create a vast pool for intra-African cooperation using African skills. The ACBF, AU-NEPAD, and other partners like CAFOR can coordinate this initiative with African governments to complement their efforts in STI.
- Africa should curtail the brain drain by developing strategies for retaining, harmonizing, and utilizing its STI capacity by providing incentives (monetary or nonmonetary) to Africans with critical technical skills in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.
- African governments should step up their efforts to develop academic and scientific mobility programs across African and emerging economies.
- African governments should focus on boosting investment in STEM education by incentivizing students to choose STEM fields over the humanities and social sciences. This phenomenon can be achieved through an allocation ratio of 70 STEM students to every 30 students in the humanities and social sciences. In addition, it is crucial to invest in high-quality universities with state-of-the-art laboratories and information and communications technology infrastructure to enhance institutional capacity (ACR, 2017).

**Building solid partnerships, ensuring shared responsibility,
and securing solutions**

The Coalition on Media and Education for Development Africa Forum (CAFOR) is a non-profit membership organization comprising institutions, organizations, experts, and individuals who are committed to ensuring that education systems in Africa are relevant to young Africans with newly acquired skills that correspond with labor market needs on the African continent. The African Union Commission hosts CAFOR at its Addis Ababa headquarters in Ethiopia. CAFOR's mission is to promote communication as a Core Element of Education and Youth Development, focusing on Youth Labor Force Participation (Coalition on Media and Education for Development Africa Forum, 2019).

The vision of CAFOR is to place communication at the center of education, focusing on youth skills development and the labor market in Africa. This domain will include advocacy, capacity building, analysis, research, and documentation of best practices. CAFOR will mainly focus on work and training in areas that equip young people with exceptional skills to meet modern-day challenges. CAFOR already has an energetic African professional workforce of more than 70 members that supports programs within member states of the African Union. This group comprises professionals from many disciplines, including scientists, technologists, social science researchers, education specialists, journalists, business managers, lawyers, youth leaders, teachers, university professors, diplomats, and project and program managers serving various institutions.

The COVID-19 pandemic slowed down many of CAFOR's activities in the recent past. Despite this setback, CAFOR continued to dialogue with various partners. CAFOR will deploy multi-faceted strategies to ensure that African youth are skilled and employable. The core tenants of the strategic framework include the following:

I. The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Africa Union: CAFOR signed a five-year strategic MOU with the AU at the beginning of 2019 (CAFOR, 2019).

II. Policy and regulatory support: CAFOR will provide technical, strategic, and advocacy support to establish a system to address the regulatory environment on educational reforms for youth to ensure increased employability.

III. Setting up a continent-wide forum: CAFOR will function as a broker of ideas and set up a knowledge-sharing platform.

IV. Multi-stakeholder partnerships: CAFOR will assist by promoting such alliances to work on:

*(a) Multidisciplinary model*: Partnership between academicians and researchers and between universities and various training institutions to develop better curriculum and pedagogy methods.

*(b) PPP model*: Partnership between public and private institutions to provide better facility access.

*(c) A partnership between industries* and firms with educational institutions and universities to map supply and demand.

It is within this context that CAFOR abides by the following:

I. **Partners' collaboration:** CAFOR will prepare a sector strategic report covering challenges, reforms undertaken, partnerships needed, best practices from different countries, and required funding.

II. **Support the African Union's Agenda 2063:** CAFOR and its networks are working closely with the various departments of the African Union Commission to popularize Agenda 2063 at the regional and country levels. CAFOR also supports the African Union in working with African institutions such as the African Development Bank (AfDB) and the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) to strengthen scientific research and innovation through African networks of excellence.

III. **Supporting key continent-wide education strategy:** CAFOR will provide technical, financial, and advocacy support to implement the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA) and the Continental Strategy for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET).

IV. **Support to its members:** CAFOR has a strong network of members from 40 participating countries. An additional 15 countries will join by the end of 2024, covering all 55 member states of the African Union. CAFOR also has an extensive network of more than 1,000 members comprising the media and other professional entities. It intends to disseminate all the initiatives to other experts and professionals who work primarily in the development sector. Strategically, members of CAFOR can support the implementation of various policies through their active membership in the organization. CAFOR also independently supports all its members on multiple initiatives, including policy, regulatory issues, capacity building, advocacy, and development of communication strategies to increase employment for the youth.



*Figure 8: CAFOR Roundtable conference on planning for the 2024 year of education in Africa. Source: CAFOR, 2023*

**V. Support implementation of the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):** By implementing its strategy, CAFOR will contribute to directly achieving SDG 4 (Quality Education) and indirectly assist in fulfilling other key SDGs, including SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 3 (Good Health and Well Being), SDG 5 (Gender Equality, a CESA objective), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth, another CESA objective), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequality).

**VI. Technological Testing of Innovations:** CAFOR will promote new technological innovations that will assist teachers and students in exploring research opportunities.

### CAFOR Projects

In 2020, CAFOR developed eleven project concepts intended for implementation over five years until the conclusion of the CESA initiative (CAFOR, 2020). This course of action was in keeping with the MOU between CAFOR and the African Union. However, owing to the delay caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the timeline of nearly all these projects has been extended by an additional three years until 2027.

The eleven projects are as follows:
1. The African Digital Library and Learning Platform
2. The TVET Digital Library and Learning Platform
3. The Digital Teacher Training Initiative
4. The African Learning Platform
5. Quality Education
6. Popularizing the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25)
7. Strengthening Institutional Capacity for the operationalization of CAFOR
8. Education in Emergencies and Conflict Situations
9. The Africa Street Children Pilot Project
10. Training of Journalists and Communication Officers in Ministries of Education in Africa
11. AI for education-focused mental health and well-being

The first four on this list are CAFOR's innovative flagship projects that involve digitalization. Each of these projects assumes a different approach to implementation with unique characteristics. The COVID-19 pandemic and its negative impact on Africa's education systems call on all education stakeholders at the regional and continental levels to act quickly to scale up and implement innovative initiatives that improve the resilience of Africa's education system and ensure continuous learning.

*Figure 9: CAFOR team visit to FDRE TVET data center in Addis Ababa in preparation for the CAFOR TVET project. Source: CAFOR, 2023*

CAFOR believes that education in Africa must equip learners with agency, purpose, and competencies needed to shape their own lives and contribute to the lives of others in the context of economic and social development. In the first instance, Africa's thinking for the Transforming Education Summit must focus on rapidly reversing the current downward trend for domestic and international resources for education in Africa, focusing on the five thematic tracks discussed earlier. The massive education financing gap on the African continent, the slow recovery from COVID-19, and constrained budgets have resulted from these conditions.



*Figure 10: Tegbared TVET Electric engineering workshop visit as CAFOR prepares for 2024. Source: CAFOR, 2023*

*Figure 11: CAFOR touring the Tegbared TVET tailoring workshop in Addis Ababa. Source: CAFOR, 2023*

CAFOR seeks to collaborate with policymakers, academic experts, school networks, teachers, education leaders, students, and social partners to provide an open forum for exchanging ideas, sharing proven and promising practices, keeping up with cutting-edge research, and working towards a new learning ecosystem. Many organizations are already familiar with the consultative process, using it during Africa's emergence within the SDGs through the U.N. Economic Commission for Africa and the formation of CESA. By leveraging these same principles of collaboration and consultation, CAFOR can streamline its processes and achieve its goals more quickly and effectively.

**Implementation progress**

The MOU established with the African Union aims to foster collaboration between the AUC and CAFOR in order to "enhance the integration of continental and global policy agendas (including Agenda 2063, the Sustainable Development Goals, STISA 2024, CESA 16-25, and the TVET Continental Strategy) into sectoral and country-level strategies for Africa's development."

Because of this, CAFOR needs to work even harder with other organizations on the continent that support education, science, technology, innovation, and youth development to get them to follow the A.U.'s overall vision. This position will also help gain traction for enhancing awareness, ownership, and implementation at country levels and among the key constituencies, especially the African youth.

**The MOU Progress**

I. CAFOR has secured new partnerships with numerous countries and agencies around the globe. Governments and agencies are interested in supporting the agreed-upon areas to work on in Africa. CAFOR also welcomed several new members at the country level, bringing the number of African countries active in CAFOR to over 30. The remaining African countries are expected to be inducted into CAFOR's programs by January 2025, eventually including all 55 states of the African Union.

II. CAFOR's Executive Director organized meetings with the most important members of the diplomatic community and partners of the African Union in Addis Ababa. These were comprised of 21 ambassadors from countries outside of Africa, including Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, Hungary, India, Iran, Italy, Japan, Korea, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates. CAFOR staff also met and discussed the African Union's policy instruments, including the CESA and other African Union agendas, with various representatives accredited by Ethiopia and the African Union. These included UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, USAID, GIZ, KOICA, the Korea-Africa Foundation, and the EU Delegation to the African Union. CAFOR also met with senior delegates from China, France, Kuwait, the League of Arab States, and Education Cannot Wait at UNICEF in New York, USA.

III. CAFOR is working to enhance partnerships with African-based organizations, including several youth-led organizations, to implement the CESA and other related communication strategies the organization is developing. It has signed MOUs with three youth-led organizations in Ethiopia and has a unique working relationship with Youth Advocates of Ghana.

IV. CAFOR staff and members participated in more than 60 local and international physical and virtual activities through webinars in several African countries and around the globe. These included conferences, seminars, workshops, and discussion forums focused primarily on education, science and technology, and innovation for youth skills development and employment.

**The CAFOR strategic plan**

CAFOR developed its five-year strategic plan in 2019 with a proposed minimum annual operational budget of $15,000,000. Its ten projects for the next five years have an estimated budget of $350,000,000. As noted, CAFOR has enormous capacity at the field level with highly skilled professionals. These range from university professors to high-level officials in African Government Ministries to business entrepreneurs, senior consultants, and participants in civil society organizations. Within the strategic plan period, CAFOR is seeking to build solid partnerships, ensure shared responsibility, and secure solutions through the following objectives:

- Provide a continent-wide platform for exchanging information, experience, and practices about new technologies and innovations among experts in government ministries, CSOs, NGOs, the media, youth, and communities. CAFOR will promote a community practice involving the youth in agriculture, entrepreneurship, and other vocations to help curb internal and external migration.
- Sensitize and mobilize stakeholders on good communication practices among key stakeholders.
- Build the capacity of media professionals and other interested stakeholders to stimulate robust public debate on education and development issues.
- Promote policy changes and measures to ensure an enabling policy environment for youth to engage in innovative enterprises in Africa.
- Translate ideas into action on the ground by testing technological innovations and institutionalizing what works.
- Promote relationships of trust and meaningful multi-stakeholder partnerships to achieve education goals on the continent.
- Undertake advocacy and lobbying to meet Africa's current economic and social challenges.
- Collaborate with the African Union Commission, the Regional Economic Communities, the United Nations, donors, civil society networks, and other cooperating partners to improve communication, develop education systems, and achieve CESA and SDGs while strongly emphasizing youth.

CAFOR will seek to achieve these objectives with the following strategic activities related to education and skills development for youth in Africa:
- Facilitating research.
- Strengthening stakeholder mobilization and sensitization.
- Supporting capacity-building initiatives.
- Support skills development for youth in emergency and post-conflict situations.
- Engaging in and bolstering lobbying and advocacy efforts.
- Mentoring and fostering collaborations.

**The Way Forward**
In light of the present circumstances, CAFOR will persist in finding fresh opportunities to establish a platform across the continent. The organization will endeavor to coordinate its efforts with all departments in the ESTI wing of the AUC, as well as additional departments such as those of Political Affairs, Peace and Security, and Social Affairs, which manage topics around skills development for youth and technical and vocational education for women.

CAFOR and its partners will work with policymakers, academic experts, school networks, teachers, education leaders, students, and social partners to provide the space to exchange ideas, compare proven and promising practices, discover cutting-edge research, and contribute to developing a new learning ecosystem. It will

consider the relevance of this framework across the African continent and ensure its consistency with Africa's broader policies that countries can implement.

In science, technology, and business creation, CAFOR will meet the targets of the second ten-year plan of Agenda 2063 and collaborate with African educational institutions to focus more on investing in science and technology. The African Union's Department of Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation (in which CAFOR operates), as well as the Youth Division within the Department of Women, Gender and Youth, must work with bilateral, multilateral, and non-traditional partners to leverage their contributions to development in Africa via co-financing thematic trust funds and other bilateral initiatives. Work must also continue with the private sector, foundations, non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, and academia. Support for technical and vocational training must link to specific needs in the labor market, in both the formal and informal sectors, including the skills required to create small businesses. CAFOR must support programs for women in technical and scientific fields (UNESCO, 2014).

STI capacity building in Africa depends on political will and government commitments to support the process (Bong, 2021). Integrating the capacity to reform economic, social, and political governance is a prerequisite for ensuring STI in Africa's development agendas. However, governments cannot do this alone; they must collaborate with the private sector, civil society organizations, and academia to build mutual trust, accountability, and effective coordination.

CAFOR is organizing a series of working sessions to support the African Union's innovative practices in education, science, and technology in transforming African education, emphasizing TVET implementation to enhance African youth advancement and employment opportunities. The sessions will focus on developing and implementing effective, long-lasting, system-wide transformational strategies for African education and recovery from COVID-19. CAFOR would build resilience and transformation, riding on global momentum.

For the proposed 2024 theme, "Educate an African Fit for the 21st Century", CAFOR will work closely with the AU and its partners to help structure the theme around sub-themes that cover the full range of education and skill development, from early childhood development and education to tertiary and vocational education and learning throughout life. CAFOR will emphasize the role of teachers as crucial agents of transformation, as teachers need to be adequately supported and empowered to play their part in this transformation. ☀

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