

African leaders commit to empowering youth, women to transform Africa

African, Japanese and other leaders at the Sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD VI), in Nairobi, Kenya, have agreed on more international actions to empower youth and women to achieve a demographic dividend and transform Africa.



By the Nairobi Declaration they adopted at the end of their two-day summit, they stated that they would speed-up efforts to develop skills through education, technical and vocational training, to promote social transformation.

“We emphasise that youth empowerment and capacity development are central to achieving demographic dividends, preventing forced migration and conflict and promoting peace building,” they declared.

Heads of State, governments and delegations from 54 African countries, Japan, 74 international organisations and 52 other partners attended the conference. More than 30% of Africa is aged 10-24 years – and this will continue until at least 2060.

The leaders underscored the importance of universal health coverage, including access to sexual and reproductive health, including family planning, bearing in mind women’s and girls’ rights.

“More than 30% of Africa is aged 10-24 years – and this will continue until at least 2060. Their health and productivity will make or break demographic dividend for Africa,” Dr Natalia Kanem, deputy executive director (Programme) of UNFPA, the

United Nations Population Fund said. “It is vital and urgent to invest in Africa’s human capital, especially its women and young people, to change Africa’s economic and development pictures quicker.”

“For example,” Kanem continued, “it is estimated that girls completing secondary school in Kenya would add about \$27 billion to the economy over their lifetimes. And if sub-Saharan Africa repeated the experience of some East Asian nations by making the right investments in young people, it could realise a demographic dividend of about \$500 billion a year, for 30 years.”

She spoke at TICAD-related events on the demographic dividend and maternal health. “We need to continuously address the development challenge of adolescent girls who are affected by unwanted pregnancies, leading to unsafe abortions, child marriage, sexual exploitation and gender-based violence,” Kanem continued. “We cannot achieve true social transformation without ensuring that the risk and vulnerabilities of adolescent girls are addressed.”

The Nairobi Declaration emphasised the need for efforts to increase global funding to strengthen country- and community-led health systems to ensure services to all individuals throughout their lives. It was necessary, they stressed, to mobilise more partners, especially the private sector, academia and civil society organizations, to provide education and expand youth and women’s employment in Africa.

The participants also adopted an implementation plan which would, among others, promote comprehensive care in reproductive, maternal and adolescent health by strengthening health workers’ capacity and improving access to family planning.

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