

Concept Note

2019 Africa Young Graduates and Scholars (AYGS) Conference

University of Johannesburg

18 - 20 March 2019

About AYGS Conference

The Africa Young Graduates and Scholars (AYGS) conference is an annual event organised by the Africa Institute of South Africa (AISA) in the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC). The main purpose of the AYGS is to serve as a platform for young scholars, policy makers, and key actors in the development sector to produce and share research-based knowledge about the development challenges Africa faces, as well as to publish and disseminate their research findings. The event also enables AISA to strengthen the capacity of young African scholars in various aspects of scholarship. AYGS 2019 will be a 2-day event to be held in February/March 2019. It will start with an opening plenary in the morning of the first day titled *“Africa’s Youth Dividend, Fact or Farce?”* The opening plenary will then be followed by breakaway sessions along the sub-themes of the conference.

Conference theme and call for abstracts

Theme: Youth Development in Africa. Challenges, Solutions and the Way Forward.

Africa has been undergoing substantial demographic changes in the past few decades. Presently, approximately 65% of Africa’s total population is under the age of 35 (Tracey & Kahutia 2017), with youth constituting more than 50% of the populace in most African countries. This sizable youth demographic represents plausible economic development opportunities albeit under conditions of enabling policy and legislation regimes. Conversely, this group can also be a source of social upheaval if its needs are not met, or where there is no discernible evidence of attempts to meet the expectations of these young people. In this context, the African Union (AU) declared 2017 as the year of ‘Harnessing Demographic Dividend through Investments in the Youth.’ The objective of this declaration was to give member states an occasion to review their commitments to meaningfully engage young people in socio-economic development and democratic governance processes, while at the same time enhancing the continent’s ability to reap dividends from the bulge in its youth population. Adding impetus to this focus is that the AU recognises the participation of young people in development as a fundamental human right within the organisation’s African

Governance Architecture – Youth Engagement Strategy (AGA-YES). This continental normative framework is aligned to two major and current development agendas – the United Nations’ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which seeks to ‘leave no one behind’, and the African Agenda 2063, which aspires to build ‘Africa where development is people-driven, unleashing the potential of women and youth’ (Aspiration 6).

AISA in the HSRC recently completed a baseline study on the ‘Entry-points of utilizing the demographic dividend in Sub-Saharan Africa’ in six African countries (Botswana, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Tanzania, and Zambia). The findings of this study reveal a misalignment between the policy environment and the realities of the youth in postcolonial Africa within a globalised world. In spite of the existence of well-designed youth development policies, the technical and financial implementation capacity was found to be woefully limited. The study also found that unemployment is one of the biggest challenges faced by the youth in these six countries. In addition, the research identified the existence of an intergenerational conflict around the issues of inclusion of youth in governance and development processes. The majority of the youth in Africa are minimally involved in civic and political discourses advocating their concerns and opinions on socioeconomic transformation that impinge on their development. Another significant finding of the study is limited and unequal access to quality and relevant education, nutrition, health (physical and mental) that together with other adverse conditions contribute to chronic poverty in large parts of the continent. Scholars warn that these adverse conditions in an environment of a numerically dominant youth population presents significant risks to social stability.

Indeed the youth are increasingly resorting to public protests and varied campaigns as a means of expressing their views and pushing for reforms they perceive could positively impact their present and future quality of life. Popular movements such as the #Fees Must Fall for free education in South Africa and the “Not Too Young To Run” campaign in Nigeria which aimed at reducing the age criteria for running for the presidential office are examples of youth driven protest actions. Such youth-driven efforts signify a reversal of the paucity of youth participation in political and other civic spaces that has broadly characterised the continent. More important is that young Africans have increasingly become aware of their marginal structural position and understand the strength of being organised and informed to reverse the entrenched practices of their exclusion in economic and social development dialogues.

The relatively higher level of education of the youth, and their being more technologically savvy than their predecessors affords them new ways to express their views and to challenge existing norms and circumstances.

To further advance discussions on youth development in Africa, in pursuit of objectives set under Africa's Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and as a follow up to the baseline study conducted by AISA, the 2019 AYGS Conference will be held under the theme 'Youth Development in Africa. Challenges, Solutions and the Way Forward'.

AYGS 2019 Conference will explore youth development challenges in Africa by soliciting for scholarly papers from emerging academics and researchers from the continent. The conference is set to run in two parts comprising a workshop followed by a presentation part focusing on the socio-economic development challenges and opportunities facing the youth in African countries from various academic standpoints. The AYGS 2019 is designed to build the capacity of emerging scholars, particularly from previously disadvantaged universities in South Africa and young academics from the rest of the continent. Special focus will be placed on the participants' awareness of and ability to engage with topical youth development challenges and opportunities facing the region in a scholarly manner; ability to conceptualise researchable topics around these issues, choose and deploy appropriate research methodologies and methods; ability to translate research results into publishable knowledge products; and ability to initiate and implement projects successfully. Prospective participants for AYGS 2019 are invited to submit an ABSTRACT on the conference sub-topics, demonstrating reasonable theoretical appreciation of the subject matter and/or possibility of using available empirical data to subsequently develop a full paper that will be presented at the conference.

Conference Sub-themes

1) Addressing youth unemployment through innovation. Country case studies.

Youth unemployment hovers around an average of 65% in Africa. This situation has been attributed to several reasons including lack of innovation, low levels of economic expansion, poor quality of technology, and sheer lack of creativity on the part of African governments among others. Papers under this sub-theme will be required to identify drivers of unemployment in their respective countries and how innovation could be used to address this challenge.

2) Skills development for the youth in Africa in a globalised world.

This sub-topic will seek to address the issue of skills mismatch as a source of structural unemployment in Africa. There is an alleged misalignment between skills development and training in Africa's educational institutions and what private sector/industry requires. In addition, the skills needed today are different from the skills needed in future, specifically for the fourth industrial revolution. How can African countries address the skills mismatch challenge (including entrepreneurship skills), and proactively develop skills for its future development needs that enhances the continent's global competitiveness? Papers under this sub-theme will also be required to share some domestic and international best practices Africa could emulate.

3) Financing youth start-up businesses for entrepreneurship and job creation in Africa. Domestic and international best practices.

The lack of start-up capital and low levels of financial inclusion have been cited as part of the reasons why the youth are unable to start their own small-scale businesses after school instead of looking for non-existing jobs. To address this challenge there has been a limited number of entrepreneurship hubs largely aimed at offering "hand holding" services for start-ups in addition to funding. Papers under this category will be required to explore factors driving low financial inclusion and the difficulty of accessing start-up capital and more important, suggestion of innovative ways to deliver start-up capital to support youth entrepreneurship

projects. The conference would like to know which innovative financial models have been used in Africa and around the world as examples of success stories.

4) Mobile phone technology and Social media as tools for youth development in Africa.

Mobile phone penetration has been estimated to be approximately 95% in Africa. Several initiatives have emerged through the use of mobile phones and social media in creating jobs, information dissemination and awareness creation on relevant issues, mobilising people for a common cause and offering training programmes. What potential does mobile phone technology and social media hold for addressing any aspect of youth development challenges in Africa, and what examples could be shared with the conference?

5) Mechanisms for including the youth in socioeconomic transformation and governance processes in Africa.

The voice of the youth in socioeconomic transformation and governance processes that impinge on their development is missing in many African countries. Channels and platforms for advocating youth concerns are scarce in most African countries. The few that exist were established by international not for profit organisations (NPOs) and not by the governments of respective African countries. These channels and mechanisms are therefore not only perceived as part of the anti-government propaganda machinery by African leaders but also do not usually acknowledge the cultural context of the respective communities they seek to serve. Critical questions in this space among others include; which factors (political, cultural and other social) inhibit the voices of the youth in your country? What has worked elsewhere and what are the learning points for other communities? How could the youth in Africa contribute to socioeconomic transformation and governance processes in their respective countries through acceptable value adding mechanisms?

6) Local, national, and regional infrastructures for peace (I4P) and youth inclusion

The debate about youth demographic dividend would be futile if proper mechanisms are not put in place to ensure that young people play meaningful roles in the development of the continent. Social exclusion and a lack of opportunities perpetuate youth disillusionment and the outcome has always been devastating with irreparable consequences.

The current dependency theoretical predilection and challenges associated with nation building on the continent has undeniably led to structural violence in many parts of the continent. Strange enough, post violence nation building initiatives are generally exclusive and in most part gendered in outlook. Further, multilateral institutions do not sufficiently address the specific needs of the youth in post-conflict peace processes. It is therefore important to strengthen local, national, and regional infrastructures for peace (I4P) that specifically address the needs of the youth in 21st century. Papers in this thematic thrust should be able to address issues related to local, national, regional, and international mechanisms that address youth needs in 21st century with clear theoretical thrust in discouraging youth from participating in violence or armed conflict, xenophobia, racial discrimination, gender-based violence and arms trafficking.

7) Young women and development in Africa.

Structural discrimination of women on the continent cannot be disputed. Young women from rural areas and informal settlements are particularly marginalized when it comes to accessing basic services and paid employment. Moreover, women's unpaid labour is largely invisible in conventional economic analyses. The data used for statistical purposes does not adequately capture the experiences of women and is oblivious to the male bias of 'objective' social science frameworks. In this section, we invite papers on practical examples of women's economic empowerment in Africa, as well as studies exploring solutions to challenges women face due to gender discrimination and the stereotypical gender roles. Considering the importance of sensitivity to local realities, the papers should acknowledge contextual dynamism of gender and consider local cultural specifications. Papers using feminist approaches to analysis of social and economic development, as well as studies examining existing youth policies with regard to them being gender sensitive/gender blind/or using gender equality merely as 'smart economics' are particularly welcome.

8) Applied Systems Analysis

The integrated approach of systems analysis allows investigation at the nexus of global challenges, enabling synergies and trade-offs among potential solutions to be considered and implemented. Applied systems analysis takes into account the interconnectedness of multiple development goals.

It offers the best chance of overcoming the substantial barriers to sustainability, now and for future generations. Tapping onto the high-level systems analysis capacity-strengthening programme for emerging researchers this session seeks novel papers from emerging scholars on applied systems analysis as a way of confronting the world's developmental challenges. Papers in this section should look into transformation processes in the realm of youth dividends considering entrepreneurship, business to small to medium enterprises, social ecological model, youth gang involvement, governance and peace security frameworks, youth positive development models. Papers looking at a wide range of global change and natural and ecological systems will also be considered in this section.

Submission Guidelines

AYGS 2019 invites contributions from emerging scholars, activists, researchers, policy makers, professionals, and students from Africa who are interested in and concerned with development challenges of the youth in Africa. "Emerging" refers to contributions from Masters' and Doctoral Degree Level scholars or those who completed their PhD within the last 3 years. Submissions should contribute to developing new thinking and fresh debate on youth development in Africa, with a strong balance between practice and academic theory, in an age of globalisation and the imperatives for rapid economic transformation.

All abstract submissions should have the following format:

- Abstract: Maximum of 300 words
- Keywords: Five keywords
- Bio: 100 - word author biography, including email address
- Bio picture: Head-and-shoulders photo in 300 dpi jpeg format

Full paper submissions

For submission of full papers, the writers need to:

- Write with clarity;
- Articles of (6 000 words max) should be based on research findings and contain analysis and relevant arguments. Excellent articles may be subsequently published by the HSRC Press as an edited peer-reviewed output.

Contributions should be submitted in the following format:

File type: Microsoft Word

Font: Times New Roman, font 12pt

Line spacing: single

Justification: left

Referencing: HSRC-AISA style (see style guide attached)

Abstracts and contributions must be written in English and in a style accessible to a wide audience. Please submit your abstracts to AYGS2019@hsrc.ac.za

Timelines:

Deadline for abstract submission: **12 noon Friday 22 October 2018.**

Deadline for final paper submission: **30 January 2019.**

Selection and Editing Process

All submissions are peer-reviewed through a double blind peer-review process coordinated by the Scientific Committee at AISA. **Please note that the selection of the abstract and papers for presentation and possible publication will be based on a criteria set by AISA.**