

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



STATEMENT

BY

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AT THE SECOND DR. THEO-BEN GURIRAB LECTURE

***THEME: "THE ROLE OF THE YOUTH IN
THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AGENDA 2063:
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES"***

**WINDHOEK
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Programme Director;

Distinguished Panelists;

Distinguished invited Guests;

The Media Fraternity;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

As the convener of the Theo-Ben Gurirab Lecture, on behalf of Mirco, I once again welcome you to this session, held under the Theme, “THE ROLE OF THE YOUTH IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AU AGENDER 2063 CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES” The theme of this Lecture Series feeds well into the overall theme of the African Union for this year; which is about “Harnessing the Demographic Dividends through Investing in the Youth”.

Given Africa’s demographic structure with a highly youthful population, the significant contribution of the young people to the Continent’s socio-economic development cannot be overemphasized. According to the UN World Population Prospect (2015), Africa’s population reached 1.2 billion in 2015 and is projected to grow rapidly, reaching 1.7 billion in 2030 and more than double by 2050, to 2.5 billion and 3 billion in 2063. More remarkable is the fact that about 46% of the 1.3 billion increase in Africa’s labour force over the period 2015-2063 will be young people aged between 15 and 34 years.

Harnessing the demographic dividends of the youth, therefore, presents a strategic opportunity for Africa not only to realize the goals and aspirations of Agenda 2063, but also to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. It equally presents a good opportunity to build the resilience of young people in addressing the root causes of many of the key social and economic challenges facing our continent.

Undeniably, the youth is our future and hence we invest in them. At the same time, it must be accepted that the youth are an important asset that Africa has that must be invested on if the Africa economy can be under the control of Africans for Sustainable Development to be realised. As Kwame Nkrumah said “Until the economic power of Africa is in our hands, the masses can have no real concern and no real interest for

safeguarding our regimes and for bending their strength to fulfillment of ends. With our united resources, energies and talents we have means, as soon as we show the will to transform the economic structure of our individual state from poverty to that of wealth, from inequality to the satisfaction of the popular needs.

I have been asked to speak on the topic: “*Educating the Youth to Innovative Ideas for the Implementation of Agenda 2063*”. I would like to emphasize that education is a critical sector whose performance directly affects, and determines the quality and future of Africa’s sustainable development. It is the most critical means every nation has to develop human resources and impart appropriate knowledge, competencies, skills, innovation and creativity required for sustained growth of the economy. Against that background Africa has to invest into education for her to become competitive in the world economy. Education is also the means by which Africa can inculcate a culture of peace, tolerance, gender equality and positive African values.

In my view, capacity-building and skills development aimed at tapping the full potential of African youth falls into two sets:

- skills acquired through education, training
- exposure to new technologies, skills needed to turn innovative ideas into reality, through research.

Hence, capacity-building and skills development among African youth needs to be tackled through a two-pronged approach.

One, to mainstream science and technology into formal education from the primary to all tertiary levels. This requires building the capacity of teachers to enable them to incorporate technology in the curriculum; enhancing education infrastructures that have fully equipped laboratories, thus, enabling practical, hands-on education; and setting up higher education institutions that specialize on innovation and technology in order to equip Africa with a competitive workforce. As the cost of such endeavors would be a challenge for many countries on the Continent, Governments could consider public-private partnerships to provide the infrastructure necessary for technology- based education.

Two, need to pay attention to **vocational education and training**. For too long, some African countries and society did not attach great importance to the role of vocational education and training, especially in value

addition through manufacturing, agro-processing and creative industries. Thus, for Africa to achieve the goals and aspirations of Agenda 2063, a **paradigm shift** is needed on the Continent to change the negative mind-sets and perceptions about vocational education. Neglect of vocational training is the main reason why African countries export primary commodities.

The integration of technical and vocational education as part of educational programmes, from pre-school to University, will empower the young people to harness their natural abilities to create opportunities for self-employment and the creation of jobs for others. Vocational training should therefore be positioned as a pathway to a professional career that can be embraced by young people and position Africa to amass the wealth of technical skills that will be required to achieve our developmental aspirations. At the core of Vocational education and training should be a curriculum that fosters a positive attitude in African youth towards entrepreneurship, instead of thinking that engaging in vocational training is a poor substitute for getting a job.

In many countries on the African Continent, the integration of formal and non-formal learning in a comprehensive lifelong learning policy is still far from being a reality. Non-formal education and traditional knowledge have an important role to play in responding to youth unemployment, raising the visibility of skills acquired outside the formal education system and fostering complementarity between non-formal and formal learning. This is why Member States are putting in place tools for assessment and evaluation of the competencies acquired through non-formal education to guarantee the recognition of such competencies and employability in the labour market. This will support development by helping to transform young peoples' potential, creativity, talents, initiatives and social responsibility, through the acquisition of related knowledge, skills, attitudes and values.

The common familiar narrative, stereotypes and outdated perceptions that Engineering, Science and Technology subjects are too challenging for women and girls to study, can no longer stand. It is thus imperative for girls and young women to pursue careers in these subjects in order to break education barriers. At the same time, active policy responses are required to prevent school drop-outs, and support reintegration of drop-out students in schools, especially young girls.

Equally, every effort should be made to ensure that young people with disabilities enjoy their right to education and employment, in order to minimize risks of social exclusion.

In the same vein, long-term strategies need to be pursued to facilitate **adequate access by the youth in rural areas to advance new technology to stimulate innovation and creativity**. Greater exposure to technology that is adapted to their daily activities through quality education and policies, aimed at promoting computerization of rural schools, and employment opportunities, will also help to bridge the development gap between rural and urban youth. In other words, quality education should be equally accessible particularly in rural area where the majority of children live.

Africa has also to create an environment that will retain the African skills in the continent. It has been documented that Africa may appear to lack skilled labour force. The World Bank study has reported that some 70000 highly qualified African scholars and experts leave the continent every year to work abroad mostly in developing countries.

Africa cannot achieve sustainable development and economic growth if there is no peace and security on the Continent, nor can we achieve durable peace and security without sustainable and inclusive socio-economic development. Therefore, as Africa forges ahead to realize the flagship project of Agenda 2063 of silencing the guns by 2020, there is a greater need to promote a culture of peace and conflict free environment on the Continent. This is an area where the young people can play a positive role. Training of African youth in conflict prevention, mediation, management and resolution, as well as peace-building, is therefore critically important. African youth can be involved in mediation processes in different ways, including as part of mediation teams and observers of electoral processes on the Continent.

Finally, it should be acknowledged that the creativity, energy and innovation of African youth will be the driving force behind the Continent's political, social, cultural and economic transformation. It is, therefore, important that the youth are inculcated in positive value systems with a mind-set geared towards **Pan-Africanism** and sustainable development. Their knowledge of where Africa is today and the history that made the present is indispensable to chart Africa's future. Pan-Africanism thus needs to be integrated into national educational policies, curriculums and classroom pedagogy from primary to university level.

For Africa to succeed in its transformational agenda, African countries need to harmonize their national education policies and strategies with the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (2016-2025) and the Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa (STISA-2024), as part of the domestication of AU Agenda 2063.

I would like to end by encouraging the Namibian youth to familiarize themselves with AU Agenda 2063 and be part of the implementation process of this important Agenda. As the Namibian Youth, you must not lag behind your peers in Africa. Take advantage of the available opportunities and make friends with the rest of the African Youth.

I THANK YOU