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STATEMENT

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AT

THE 4TH SESSION OF THE OPEN WORKING GROUP
ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS
AT THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

NEW YORK, 17TH-19TH JUNE, 201

Introduction

Co-Chairs,

I am honoured to make this statement on behalf of West African States. We align ourselves with statements made by the G77 and China as well as by the African Group.

Most of African countries have made considerable strides towards the achievement of the MDGs by the year 2015 and have attached a lot of importance to the thematic areas which are the foci for discussion by the Open Working Group – employment and decent work, social protection, youth and education.

Countries on the continent are still pursuing a number of cross-cutting intervention programmes to date. This notwithstanding, there are some challenges that still need attention and which are worth considering by the International Community. The proposed goals, targets and indicators are believed to be realistic, given the African context.

Employment and decent work

West African countries face numerous challenges in providing decent jobs for the youth, particularly graduates from the tertiary institutions. The challenges include a weak private sector, graduates whose skills do not match the demands of the labour market, overemphasis on universal basic education to the neglect of higher education, some foreign companies failing to respect local content agreements, and lack of access to international markets for processed products from African countries.

To address these challenges, Governments have to invest in quality basic and higher education that will churn out competent graduates for the labour market. The International Community must emphasize not only quality basic education but also quality tertiary education. The emphasis should be on practical, technical, science-based and professional courses as well as knowledge sharing. The facilitation of FDI into African countries that have created enabling conditions for business is an issue the International Community must take up. Such FDI should focus on processing of primary products for export. Foreign companies must also respect local contents agreements in African countries.

Some African countries have put more emphasis on processing raw materials in the agriculture and extractive sectors to create jobs and wean themselves off foreign aid. The International Community needs to support processed products from Sub-Saharan Africa to enter developed markets and some emerging economies.

The following goal and targets could be considered by the Open Working Group:

Goal: Employment and decent work opportunities for all

Target 1: Enhance youth employment through skills development and improved labour market information

Indicators:

1. Governments of African countries must enshrine youth employment issues in their national policies and ensure their implementation. They should generate reliable labour market information and skills development information at the national, regional and district levels and make them accessible to those who really need it. They need to put in place national classifications of occupations and periodically update them

Target 2: Improve labour productivity and rewards

Indicators:

1. African countries should create productivity improvement awareness among all their citizens; develop labour productivity guidelines and manuals; ensure change in people's attitudes to work and increase in productivity by every worker, and reduce incidents that lower worker productivity. Ministers, heads of state departments and agencies must be made to sign performance contracts.
2. The International Community on its part is needed to strengthen the capacity of productivity institutions in Africa to enable them deliver on their mandates. They must as well facilitate exchange programmes between such institutions and those of the developed world. Salaries and wages paid by some multinationals to African employees with the same competences and experience as their foreign counterparts do not commensurate their efforts. This needs to be seriously looked at by impressing on such companies to stop such practices and culprits should also be sanctioned.

Target 3: Promote entrepreneurship and enterprise development that create decent and sustainable jobs

Indicators

1. Number of institutions, especially at the tertiary level that run entrepreneurship courses
2. Number of graduates who have started their own enterprises with decent work conditions
3. Number of decent jobs created and sustained
4. Number of large enterprises that promote decent jobs
5. Bringing sanity into casualisation of employment
6. Number of SMEs that promote decent jobs

- Target 4:** Facilitate joint training programmes and knowledge sharing among developed and emerging economies, low middle income and Least developed countries, especially in the science-based, technical and professional courses.
- Target 5:** Facilitate FDI into developing countries that have enabling business environment
- Target 6:** Respect for local content agreement by foreign companies
- Target 7:** Allow processed products from African countries access to International markets

Social Protection

Provision of social protection especially for women and children requires huge financial outlay and information but countries in Africa have resource constraints to do so. For example, basic and reliable information to aid assessment of the magnitude of challenges facing women and children, decision making, policy formulation and programme implementation is at times non-existent or patchy, thus making it difficult to have any meaningful social protection interventions. Besides, coordination of social protection interventions is lacking, often resulting in duplication of activities and waste of the meager resources. Financial resources are also not adequate to enable African Governments to implement cash transfer schemes that are known to be effective social protection intervention in some parts of the world.

Goal: Social Protection for all

Target 1 Ensure effective programme coordination, collaboration of effort and provision of safety net

Indicators:

1. Social protection involves a lot of cross-cutting issues. Governments of the Sub-Saharan African countries should ensure effective collaboration and coordination of projects carried out by the various Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies and other stakeholders, especially the NGOs.
2. International Community need to help establish centres in African countries to assess the magnitude of challenges facing women, children and the poor in general, create data base for social protection interventions and make the needed information available to all stakeholders e.g. Development Partners. This will help the International Community to well appreciate the issues on the ground and intervene appropriately rather than prescribing one-size-fits-all measures that are often not helpful.
3. African governments are to provide safety nets for the poor, vulnerable and excluded. This will include cash transfer interventions e.g. free tuition, basic health care, and selected utility subsidies; National Health Insurance Scheme for those who cannot afford registration and premium; capitation grant (subsidized fees), school feeding, free school uniform and free exercise books for basic schools
4. The International Community must support in providing infrastructure for basic schools, health facilities and sanitation

services for communities in African countries that are most affected.

Target 2: Increase income-generating opportunities and job security for women in the informal economy

Indicators:

1. African Governments need to increase job security for women in the informal economy and bridge the gap between women and men in the formal and informal sectors and in decent employment
2. They should also improve access to credit by women in the informal economy and help them with workspace with improved occupational health and safety conditions for their business operations.
3. Most of the women in the informal sector are found in the agriculture sector. The International Community must ensure that advanced nations pay fair prices for agriculture produce and processed products from the developing countries.

Youth

Youth development is one important area that countries cannot afford to do away with. Countries need to have national youth policies, organize programmes that bring the youth together to think about issues confronting them, encourage them to network among themselves and gain exposure to healthy lifestyles, among others. Unfortunately, much attention has not been given by African countries to help the youth realize their full potentials. Support for youth development comes as a default, or only when problems crop up.

Goal: Youth Development Facilities and Activities

Target. 1 Resourcing youth organizations

Indicators

1. Governments need to put in place well-resourced youth development centres and recreational facilities at the national, regional and district levels for youth gathering and activities.
2. They need to make adequate budget provision for youth development activities every year to organize skill development programmes, organize programmes that can bring youth from the rural and urban areas and those from the poor and rich families together. Such programmes will help them appreciate and support one another.
3. International Community can encourage exchange programmes among world youth. A lot of benefits can be accrued from this. This includes appreciating what goes on in other parts of the world, sympathizing and empathizing with other people and understanding their situation, and above all reducing racism and stigmatization.
4. International Community assistance in the form of building youth development centres and recreational facilities and providing tools and equipment (e.g. audio-visual materials for training) will have positive impact on the youth in Africa.