

Development News

Youth and Enterprise

United Nations agencies have launched a new campaign to make it easier for the 70 million unemployed youth to get financing and learn new skills to start a business.

The global campaign – launched by the the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Trade Centre (ITC), the UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) – will run through August of this year.

It will aim to “effectively enable young entrepreneurs to success and improve the sustainability and quality of self-employment opportunities for youth,” according to ILO.

The UN agency added that the main challenges to be addressed include “the lack of enabling policy and ecosystems, the limited access to capital, the insufficient tools to enhance skills development and knowledge transfer.”

The campaign will focus on strategies to promote “an enabling regulatory environment” for young people, make use of technology and networks, aim to allow greater access to finance, and provide greater support for young people.

The UN estimates that while 70 million youth are unemployed, an additional 150 million work yet live in moderate to extreme poverty.

Today's launch comes on the first observance of the International Day for Micro-, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, which seeks to raise public awareness of these business which generally employ fewer than 250 people. This year's theme is “youth entrepreneurship and self-employment.”

The Day was created in April to observe the Day and raise public awareness of their contribution to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which aims to alleviate poverty and preserve the people and the planet.

According to the data provided by the International Council for Small Business (ICSB), formal and informal Micro-, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs) make up over 90 per cent of all firms and account on average for up to 70 per cent of total employment and 50 per cent of GDP.

The World's Population

The world population is now nearly 7.6 billion, up from 7.4 billion in 2015, spurred by the relatively high levels of fertility in developing countries – despite an overall drop in the number of children people have around the globe – the United Nations today reported.

The concentration of global population growth is in the poorest countries, according to [World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision](#), presenting a challenge as the international community seeks to implement the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, which seeks to end poverty and preserve the planet.

“With roughly 83 million people being added to the world's population every year, the upward trend in population size is expected to continue, even assuming that fertility levels will continue to decline,” said the report's authors at the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

At this rate, the world population is expected to reach 8.6 billion in 2030, 9.8 billion in 2050 and surpass 11.2 billion in 2100.

The growth is expected to come, in part, from the 47 least developed countries, where the fertility rate is around 4.3 births per woman, and whose population is expected to reach 1.9 billion people in 2050 from the current estimate of one billion.

In addition, the populations in 26 African countries are likely to “at least double” by 2050, according to the report.

That trend comes despite lower fertility rates in nearly all regions of the world, including in Africa, where rates fell from 5.1 births per woman from 2000-2005 to 4.7 births from 2010-2015.

Women in politics

When Ellen Johnson Sirleaf stands down later this year as president of Liberia, it will mean that for the first time in more than a decade, no African country will be led by a woman. While strong female leaders are still emerging to play a critical role in African politics, it is a reminder that we cannot take our foot off the pedal.

I know from first-hand experience how tough it can be for African women to win the top political positions. I'm the youngest woman in the Ugandan government and the youngest female minister in [Africa](#).

In Uganda and across Africa as a whole, women are the backbone of society and the economy. The continent is dominated by small-scale farming and "informal" traders, close to 80% of whom are women and are often the sole providers for their families. Yet, despite our central role shouldering this economic and social burden, we often struggle to gain a seat at the decision-making table.

The African Women Leaders Network, which launched in June, aims to help, supporting the role of women in leadership across Africa. The network, backed by the UN and African Union, will provide practical, grassroots training and mentoring for women trying to reach leadership posts traditionally held by men. It will also be a meeting place for ideas and people from across the continent.

But do not forget that we African women start from a position of strength. Before rushing to criticise Africa – as though we are one single country – for lacking democracy and for low female participation, observers should recognise the progress already made. Women [occupy only 24% of parliamentary and ministerial seats across sub-Saharan Africa](#). However, this far outstrips the percentage of female representation in developed countries such as the United States, where [less than 20% of congressional seats](#) are held by women, or Japan where [fewer than 10% of legislators](#) are female.

Evelyn Anite: 'The increase in the number of women in African politics is making a real difference to the lives of the people they represent.' Photograph: Courtesy of Ministry of Finance for Infrastructure and Privatisation

Some African countries are in fact trailblazers in the promotion of women's leadership. Rwanda, for example has the highest female representation in the world: [61% of its MPs are women](#). South Africa has well over 40% parliamentary representation by women. A further seven African countries have parliaments where more than 30% of their members are female. Uganda ranks 31st out of 195 countries globally, with 34% of our MPs being women. The UK, with 30% female representation, ranks 46th.

These changes have not happened by accident, but are the result of deliberate policy decisions and grassroots demand. In some cases, they came about through hard-fought constitutional amendments. At least 16 African countries already have parity legislation in place. Uganda and Kenya have led the way in reserving seats in parliament for women and young people's representatives.

Through the use of these reserved seats, and quotas for female candidates, many African governments have taken legislative action to increase women's participation, something most western governments have refused to do themselves.

Such measures have been a vital first step towards gender equality. However, top-down legal and constitutional changes are not enough on their own. To deliver lasting change, women must be provided with the practical skills they need to gain positions of power. The increase in the number of women in African politics is making a real difference to the lives of the people they represent. It is no coincidence, for instance, that countries with high numbers of women in politics led the way in achieving many of the [millennium development goals](#), such as reducing maternal and infant mortality.

The truth is that in what has traditionally been a man's world, African female parliamentarians and ministers must deliver on the trust their voters have shown them or face their wrath. Whether they have a reserved seat or not, non-performers of any gender do not survive long in politics. We are always accountable to the electorate. It is not uncommon for almost half of incumbent MPs to lose their seats at the ballot box in a Ugandan election – a much higher rate than in most western countries'

