



UNDP AFRICA YOUTH PORTFOLIO MEETINGS

UNDP Regional Service Centre for Africa Youth Portfolio Sensemaking
Boot Camp

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia | 30 June to 4 July 2025

Report and learning brief (October 2025)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Strategic discussions during the Sensemaking Boot Camp at the UNDP Regional Service Centre

From 30 June to 4 July 2025, the UNDP Regional Service Centre for Africa (RSCA) hosted the Youth Portfolio Sensemaking Boot Camp in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. This strategic convening brought together over 30 practitioners, including Youth Focal Points from Country Offices (COs), RSCA advisors, and representatives from the Independent Continental Youth Advisory Council on AfCFTA (ICOYACA). The primary objective was to enhance coherence, leverage synergies, and strengthen the impact of UNDP's youth programming across the continent. Through a series of interactive workshops, portfolio sensemaking exercises, and thematic deep dives, participants analysed current trends, identified programmatic gaps, and co-created actionable strategies to advance youth development in Africa. Key outcomes included the identification of five strategic pillars for future engagement, the strengthening of cross-country collaboration networks, and the formulation of specific recommendations for integrating youth perspectives into broader development frameworks such as the AfCFTA.

This report is an independent ICOYACA summary of participation and learnings and does not represent an official UNDP publication.



Collaborative session identifying regional development challenges and opportunities

1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

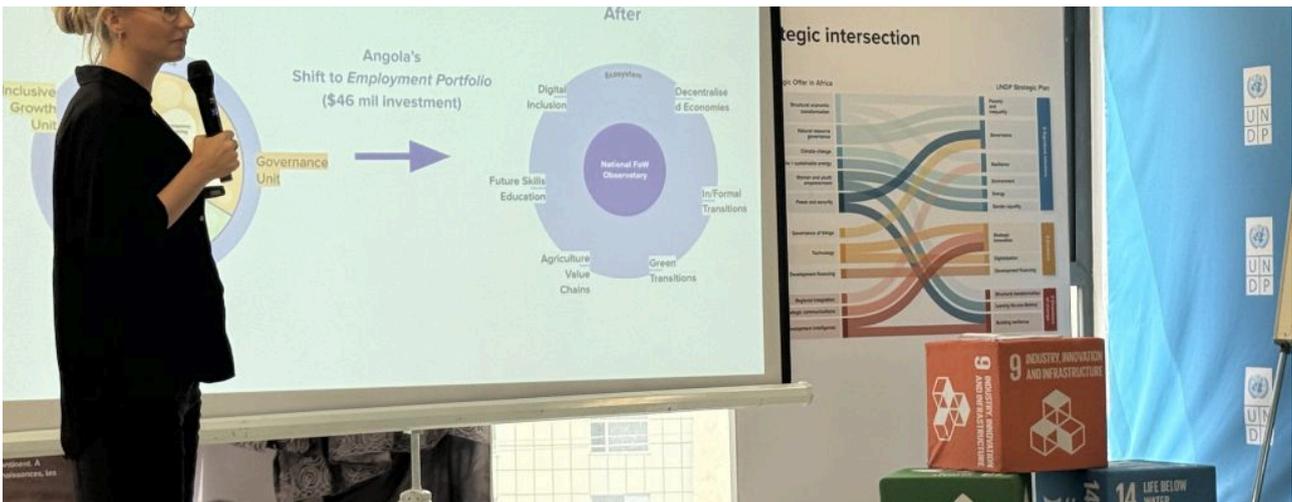
Africa's youth population is projected to double by 2050, presenting both a demographic dividend and a significant challenge for development actors. UNDP Africa has prioritised youth empowerment as a central pillar of its strategic offer, recognising that sustainable development cannot be achieved without the active participation and leadership of young people. The Regional Service Centre for Africa (RSCA) plays a critical role in supporting Country Offices to deliver high-quality youth programmes that are aligned with regional priorities, including the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

However, the rapid proliferation of youth initiatives across the continent has sometimes led to fragmentation and missed opportunities for scale. To address this, the RSCA organised the Youth Portfolio Sensemaking Boot Camp as a platform for reflection, learning, and strategic alignment. The boot camp utilised a "portfolio approach"—shifting from single-point project interventions to a systems-thinking model that connects multiple interventions to achieve transformative change.

2. PURPOSE OF THE BOOT CAMP

The main purpose of the boot camp was to create a space for collective sensemaking among UNDP youth practitioners and key partners. Specifically, the objectives were to:

- **Map and analyse** the current portfolio of youth interventions across the region to identify patterns, synergies, and gaps.
- **Build capacity** on systems thinking and portfolio management approaches for more effective programming.
- **Foster collaboration** between Country Offices and the Regional Hub to enhance knowledge sharing and resource mobilisation.
- **Define strategic priorities** for the next phase of UNDP Africa's youth offer, ensuring relevance to emerging trends such as digital transformation, climate change, and the AfCFTA.



Presentation of the portfolio approach and systems thinking methodology

3. METHODOLOGY

The boot camp employed a participatory and iterative methodology, combining expert presentations with hands-on group work. Key methodological elements included:

- **Sensemaking Workshops:** Facilitated sessions where participants "unpacked" their respective portfolios to reveal underlying assumptions and connections.
- **Deep Dive Sessions:** Thematic discussions focused on critical issues such as youth employment, governance, and peacebuilding.
- **Peer-to-Peer Learning:** Structured opportunities for Country Offices to share success stories and challenges.

4. PARTICIPATION

The event was attended by a diverse group of stakeholders committed to advancing the youth agenda in Africa.

Participants included:

- **UNDP Country Office Youth Focal Points:** Representatives from over 20 African countries, bringing local insights and operational experience.
- **RSCA Regional Advisors:** Specialists in governance, inclusive growth, environment, and gender, providing thematic expertise.
- **ICOYACA Representatives:** Members of the Independent Continental Youth Advisory Council on AfCFTA, ensuring the inclusion of youth voices in trade and economic policy discussions.
- **External Partners:** Selected experts from academia and civil society who contributed external perspectives on youth development trends.

"Over 30 practitioners convened to align youth programmes across Africa"

Role of ICOYACA

ICOYACA's participation was particularly significant, highlighting the growing partnership between UNDP and youth-led governance structures. ICOYACA representatives contributed by sharing grassroots perspectives on the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and advocating for greater youth inclusion in trade facilitation processes. Their inputs helped to ground the portfolio discussions in the lived realities of young African entrepreneurs and advocates.

5. KEY OUTCOMES AND INSIGHTS BY PILLAR

The sensemaking process crystallised five strategic pillars that will guide UNDP Africa's youth programming moving forward. These pillars represent the convergence of country-level needs and regional strategic priorities.

PILLAR 1: SKILLS DEVELOPMENT, ENTREPRENEURSHIP, AND LIVELIHOODS

- **Insight:** There is a mismatch between current skills training and market demands, particularly in the green and digital economies.
- **Implication:** Programmes must pivot towards "future-ready" skills and integrate mentorship and access to finance.
- **Action:** Scale up the "YouthConnekt" initiative and link it more closely with private sector partners.

PILLAR 2: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND YOUTH PARTICIPATION

- **Insight:** Young people are increasingly disillusioned with traditional political processes but are highly active in informal civic spaces.
- **Implication:** UNDP should support digital democracy platforms and intergenerational dialogues.
- **Action:** Develop a regional "Youth in Governance" framework to support young parliamentarians and local councillors.



Mapping regional youth trends



Identifying systemic barriers

PILLAR 3: YOUTH ADVOCACY AND SYSTEMS REFORM

- **Insight:** Ad-hoc advocacy is less effective than systemic policy influence.
- **Implication:** Strengthen the capacity of youth councils (like ICOYACA) to engage in evidence-based

6. ICOYACA'S STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENT APPROACH

For ICOYACA, the boot camp reinforced the importance of strategic alignment with major development partners. The council aims to position itself as the primary conduit for youth engagement on trade and economic integration in Africa. Moving forward, ICOYACA will leverage the insights from this boot camp to refine its "AfCFTA Youth Inclusion Strategy," ensuring that its advocacy efforts are backed by robust data and aligned with broader regional development goals.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS FOR ICOYACA

1. **Strengthen Partnership with UNDP:** Formalise a partnership agreement with the RSCA to co-implement specific components of the regional youth offer.
2. **Capacity Building:** Request targeted training from UNDP on policy analysis and portfolio management for ICOYACA executives.
3. **Knowledge Management:** Establish a joint knowledge repository to capture and disseminate best practices in youth programming.
4. **Regional Advocacy:** collaborate on a high-level advocacy campaign to promote the ratification of the African Youth Charter and the implementation of AfCFTA protocols on women and youth.

8. CONCLUSION

The UNDP Africa Youth Portfolio Sensemaking Boot Camp was a pivotal moment for recalibrating youth development efforts on the continent. It moved the conversation beyond "beneficiaries" to viewing young people as architects of the future. For ICOYACA, the event provided invaluable tools and networks to amplify its mission. As Africa moves towards the 2030 deadline for the SDGs, such coherent, systems-based approaches will be essential for unlocking the full potential of the continent's youth demographic.

