Understanding Youth and Social Innovations
A Roundtable Meeting with Youth Organizations

7 February 2020, UNESCO Office, Harare, Zimbabwe

Background

Southern Africa has a youthful population - approximately 70% of the population in the region is below the age of 35 years. Adolescents and young people (10-24 years) constitute approximately 33% of the population in the bulk of the countries in the region (Hervish and Clifton, 2012).¹

Aspiration six of African Union’s Agenda 2063 for The Africa We Want calls for an Africa whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children. It says that the citizens of Africa will be actively involved in decision making in all aspects. Africa shall be an inclusive continent where no child, woman or man will be left behind or excluded, on the basis of gender, political affiliation, religion, ethnic affiliation, locality, age or other factors. Given the youthful nature of Africa’s population, the continent needs to go the extra mile and invest considerably towards the achievement of this aspiration. A sustainable future heavily depends on the amount of time and resources invested in youth and youth civic engagement today.

A review of the Southern African context reveals that young women and men face important societal challenges and policy shortcomings that lead to various forms of marginalization and vulnerability. This has strong and long-term social, political, and economic impacts on the society at large, especially in settings where public investments in common public services have decreased. Such a situation, combined with the democratization of the ICTs, has given rise to individual or collective initiatives/undertakings that aim at addressing social needs via new approaches and tools. Youth oftentimes are one of the main groups of actors that actively engage in what is nowadays called “social innovation”. The latter can be defined as new social practices that aim at meeting social needs in a different way, and using different devises and channels.

Purpose of the Roundtable

To better understand the nature, the features, and the prevalence of youth’s social innovation in the SADC region, the UNESCO Regional Office for Southern Africa, and the Southern African Research and

Documentation Centre (SARDC) are jointly organising a first Roundtable discussions with youth organisations. While looking into the various fields of intervention – employment, environment, cultural heritage, education, health, community development, etc. – and the multiple features being used – online platform, social media, crowdfunding, applications, etc. – the burning questions raised by such new practices are numerous:

- Can social innovation be sustained and accessible to all in the long run?
- How can social innovation impel new practices in the private and public sector?
- To what extent social innovation can influence/change social relations, especially with regard to governance and citizen/State relation?
- What does social innovation reveal of the political and economic models a society opts for?
- Does social innovation reconcile youth with public affairs, or does it drift them away from them?

The objectives of the Roundtable are (i) to provide a platform for youths organizations to share their work and practices on social innovation; (ii) to engage youth organizations in formulating interventions on youth civic engagement, social innovation, and social cohesion among other themes.

**Expected Outcomes**

- UNESCO and SARDC have a better understanding of the current practices and experiences of youth organisations
- UNESCO and SARDC are in a position to formulate and initiate a project in partnership with youth organisations in the SADC region.

**Participants**

For logistical reasons, the Roundtable will be open to youth organizations operating locally in Harare, and by videoconference to youth originations in other SADC countries. Academia (such as University’s Innovation Hub), and UN organizations will also take part.

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