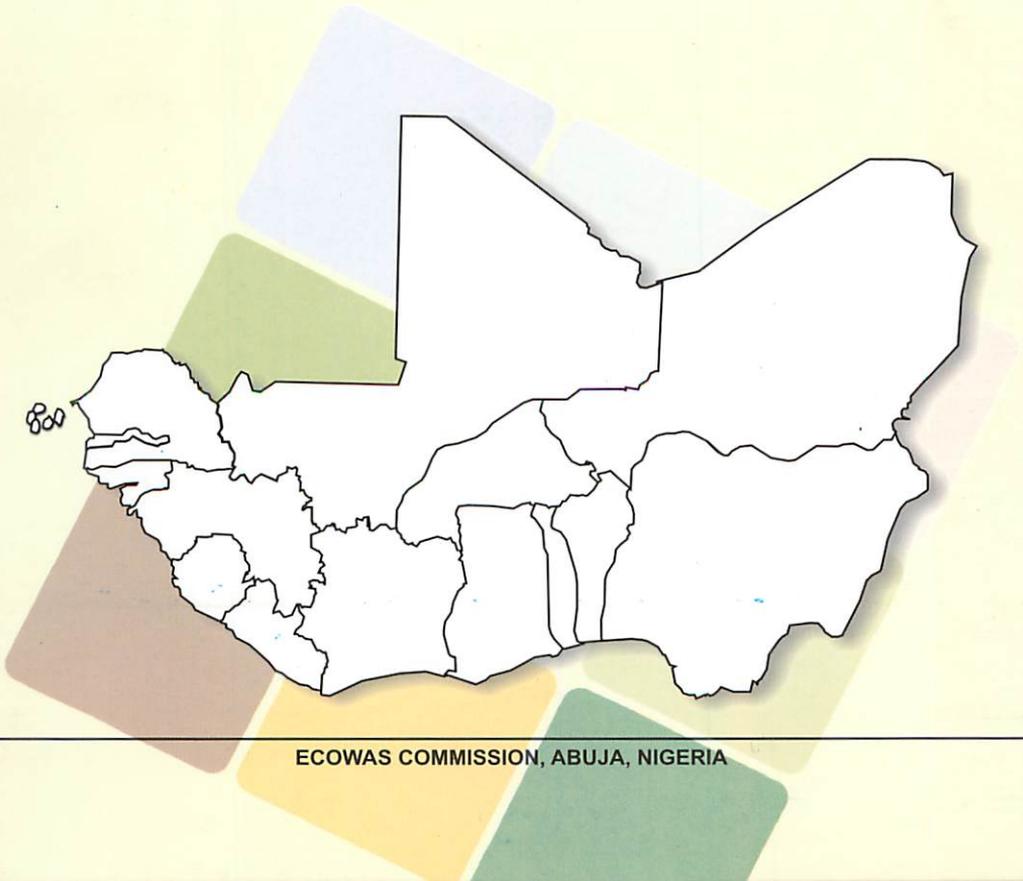




ECONOMIC COMMUNITY OF WEST AFRICAN STATES (ECOWAS)

# **ECOWAS YOUTH POLICY AND STRATEGIC PLAN OF ACTION**



ECOWAS COMMISSION, ABUJA, NIGERIA



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PUBLISHED BY THE  
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# Foreword

Youths are the valued possession of any nation or region. Without them there can be no future. Their needs are immense and urgent. They are the center of reconstruction and development. Youth is a transition period from childhood to adulthood – a developmental journey during which one gains independence and begins to participate fully in society.

The changes that young people must negotiate do not occur as predictably as in the past, therefore, defining youth globally according to some exact age range can be a very difficult task. In line with the regional conditions, realities and contemporary socio-economic and political issues, the ECOWAS Youth Policy has defined youth as all young males and females aged from 15 to 35 years. Young people in this age group require social, economic and political support to realise their full potential. While it is true that young people are characterized by energy, enthusiasm, ambition, creativity, and promise, they are also faced with high levels of socio-economic uncertainty and volatility thereby becoming a vulnerable segment of the population.

The policy seeks to empower young people and promote their participation in all areas of society. It endeavours to ensure all young women and men are given meaningful opportunities to reach their full potentials, both as individuals and as active participants in the development and integration of the ECOWAS region.

The Target Groups for this policy are: - Students in Tertiary Institutions; Young Women; Youth with Disabilities; Youth in Crime; Talented/Gifted Youth; Rural Youth; Young People Living in the Street; Out of School Young Men and Women; Unemployed and Under-employed Youth; Young Men and Women Living with HIV/AIDS; and Youth and Armed Conflicts .

This Youth Policy is made up of five chapters structured as shown below:

- Chapter 1: Background and Introduction
- Chapter 2 : Rights, Responsibilities, and Obligations of the Youth
- Chapter 3 : Target Groups
- Chapter 4 : Priority and Key Strategy Areas
- Chapter 5 : Policy Implementation

**The Strategic Plan of Action** outlines the range of activities necessary to translate the ECOWAS Youth Policy into feasible programmes and projects for the overall achievement of the policy's mission and vision statements. The Key Strategy and Priority Areas include Education, Employment, Health, Environment, Drug Abuse Prevention, Science and Technology, Young Women, HIV/AIDS, Sports and Recreation, Participation and Decision Making, Conflict Prevention and Peace Building, Poverty, Migration, Crime, Family Life, Agriculture, Arts and Culture.

This Policy was adopted by the Authority of Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS at their 35th Ordinary Summit meeting held on 19th December 2008, in Abuja Nigeria. I hereby commend this policy to all stakeholders and urge that all hands be put on deck for its effective implementation.

**His Excellency,  
James Victor GBEHO  
*President of the ECOWAS Commission***

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# Abbreviations

ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
HIV	Human Immuno-deficiency Virus
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
UN	United Nations
M & E	Monitoring and Evaluation
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
ILO	International Labour organisation
NGO	Non- Governmental Organisation
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
VCT	Voluntary Counselling and Testing
IEC	Information, Education and Communication
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infections
CSW	Commercial Sex Workers
PLWA	People Living with HIV/AIDS
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
UNGASS	United Nations General Assembly Special Session
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
HDI	Human Development Index
WHO	World Health Organisation

# Chapter 1

## Background and Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction

Youth can be characterised as a transition from childhood to adulthood – a developmental journey during which one gains independence and begins to participate fully in society. This period is fraught with challenges for young people themselves and for the rest of the society. It is imperative that societies invest in the future of their youth as they have important contributions to make to the development of their societies.

The overall objective of the ECOWAS Youth Policy is to mobilise youths and get them adequately involved in the regional integration and development process of ECOWAS. The policy seeks to empower young people and promote their participation in all areas of society. Young people make up almost a fifth of the world's population. Close to 85 percent of the over 1 billion young men and women between the ages of 15 and 24 live in developing countries; this figure is projected to increase to 89 percent by 2025. Asia accounts for the majority, with 60 percent of the total, while another 15 percent of this number live in Africa, and approximately 10 percent reside in Latin America and the Caribbean. The remaining 15 percent of youths live in all the developed countries and regions of the world. The difficult circumstances that people experience in many developing countries are often more profound for young people. This is because of limited opportunities for education and training, viable employment and health and social services, and also because of growing incidence of substance abuse and juvenile delinquency. Many developing countries are also experiencing unprecedented rates of rural-urban migration by young people.

The ECOWAS region is estimated to have a population of about 247.9 million constituting about 28 percent of Africa's total population. The youth constitutes more than 33 percent of the population of the region. However, due to isolated efforts by individual countries, and lack of an articulate youth-specific policy in the region, many young people continue to suffer from poverty, discrimination and inequality, and far too great a number still lack access to proper education and health services. Most of those who become

infected with HIV/AIDS are in their teens or early twenties. Some fall prey to early pregnancy or become involved in drug abuse and delinquency. In many parts of the region, rampant unemployment dulls their ambition and undermines morale, while civil conflict has taken its toll in devastating the psyche of many young people in the region.

The need to harness fully the potentials of young people and place them properly within the scheme of ECOWAS developmental objectives underscores the importance of this regional youth policy. This became clearer in August 2003 when youth in the region converged at the first ECOWAS youth forum held in Abuja, and brainstormed on regional concerns and challenges confronting them. The result of the forum pointed to the fact that the youths are indeed craving for recognition and relevance in the regional integration process, a fact that is in consonance with the vision of the founding fathers of ECOWAS.

This regional youth policy is an expression of ECOWAS' commitment to the full development of all young men and women in the region. Through this youth policy, an environment is created wherein all stakeholders in youth development in the region can work towards common goal of promoting cooperation and integration, leading to the establishment of an economic union in West Africa in order to raise the living standards of all its peoples, foster relations among member states and contribute to the progress and development of the African continent.

Young women and men are, in particular, recognised as a vital resource whose future prospects are inextricably tied to that of the ECOWAS region. Youths are the valued possession of any nation or region. Without them, there can be no future. Their needs are immense and urgent. They are the center of reconstruction and development. Young people can be dynamic agents of social change, but they must be given the right tools to work with.

Young women and young men should not be seen as a problem but as a force for change, and in keeping with this perspective, this regional youth policy should be viewed not so much as a means of addressing problems associated with young people but as a means of ensuring their participation in the building of their communities and societies. This regional youth policy is a framework for youth development across member states. It endeavours to ensure all young women and men are given meaningful opportunities to reach their full potentials, both as individuals as active participants in the development and integration of the ECOWAS region. In initiating this consensus blue print for youth development, ECOWAS recognises the youth

policies of individual member states where it is available. This policy document is an attempt to tap into and harness the resources of young people in the region by providing them with the right tools to work with.

## **1.2 Methodology**

In preparing this consensus document on the youth policy for the ECOWAS region, the youth policies of member states, where available, were taken into consideration. A consultative forum of youth groups, Civil Societies, Non-Governmental Organisations and other stakeholders in the region was convened to harness inputs used in the preparation of this youth policy document.

In addition, this document on ECOWAS youth policy also recognises and draws input from the broader policy initiatives of the treaty establishing the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) ) signed in Lagos on the 28th May, 1975 and revised on the 24th of February 1993 in Cotonou, Republic of Benin, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), the world programme of action for the youth adopted by the United Nations in 1995, and the United Nations Charter itself.

The draft youth policy was also presented to experts from ECOWAS member states in order to harness and include their suggestions in the draft. The document was also presented to a meeting of the ECOWAS staff with a view to receiving input from the staff members present at the meeting.

## **1.3 Definition of Youth**

Youth, as a concept varies from culture to culture and from society to society. In most societies in the West African region the progression from childhood to youth involves some systematic rites of passage. These rites have symbolic significance in that, simply by participating in them, an individual achieves a new status and position. Such new status gains validity through genuine community action and recognition.

One thing is clear the boundaries defining the transition from childhood to youth and from youth to adulthood are shifting, and the crossover into each new stage is now manifested in different ways. The changes that young people must negotiate do not occur as predictably as in the past, therefore, defining youth globally according to some exact age range can be a very difficult task. The age range 15-24 is often used by the United Nations and others for statistical purposes, but in many case this distinction is too narrow. Apart from the statistical definition of the term "youth", the meaning of the

term “youth” have continued to change in response to fluctuating political, economic and socio-cultural circumstances. In many countries in Africa including the West African region, for example, the male transition to adulthood, in terms of achieving the economic and social stability that comes with steady employment, may extend into late twenties and mid thirties.

In line with the conditions and realities, especially historical and contemporary socio-economic and political issues, most countries in the West African region define youth as ranging from persons between the ages 15 to 35 years. For the purpose of the ECOWAS youth policy, the youth shall comprise of all young males and females aged from 15 to 35 years. Young people in this age group require social, economic and political support to realise their full potential. While it is true that young people are characterised by energy, enthusiasm, ambition, creativity, and promise, they are also faced with high levels of socio-economic uncertainty and volatility thereby becoming the most, vulnerable segment of the population.

#### **1.4 Policy Context**

The ECOWAS regional youth policy recognises the broader policy context in which it has been formulated and shall operate. This policy context is largely shaped by broader policy initiatives of the revised treaty establishing the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), signed in Lagos on 28th May, 1975 and revised on the 24th of February 1993 in Cotonou, Republic of Benin, is also reflective of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), the African Youth Charter, the World Programme of Action for the Youths (WPAY), adopted by the United Nations in 1995, and the United Nations Charter itself.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) established in 1975 by a treaty of Lagos, has as its aims promoting collaboration and integration, leading to the establishment of an economic union in West Africa in order to raise the living standards of its peoples, and to maintain and enhance economic stability, foster relations among member states and contribute to the progress and development of the African continent.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) can be interpreted as a set of internationally agreed targets aimed at young people. Most of the Millennium Development Goals are also directly related either to children and the youth of the next generation or to issues of great concern to young people, such as maternal health and HIV/AIDS.

The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) is a pledge by African leaders, based on a common vision and a firm and shared conviction, that they have a pressing duty to eradicate poverty and to place their countries, both individually and collectively on a path of sustainable growth and development, and at the same time to participate actively in the world economy and body politic. The programme is anchored on the determination of Africa to extricate themselves and the continent from the malaise of underdevelopment and exclusion in a globalising world.

One of the motivations for a regional youth policy of this nature is the world programme of action for youth adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1995 – the tenth anniversary of the international youth year. The world programme of action signified the intensification of the United Nations commitment to young people, and an international response calling for more effective strategies aimed at meeting the needs of youth and addressing the challenges they are likely to encounter in the future.

The normative basis of this youth policy is broadly rooted in the overall purposes and principles of the United Nations, and the fundamental basis of such policy is the United Nations Charter. The purposes of the United Nations, as set forth in the charter, are to maintain international peace and security; to develop friendly relations among nations; to cooperate in solving international economic, social, cultural and humanitarian problems and in promoting respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; and to be a centre for harmonising the actions of nations in the attainment of these ends.

### 1.5 Key Principles and Guiding Values

The youth development programme exemplified in this document is based on a series of essential principles and guiding values which have influenced its design and direction. The key principles and guiding values on which this youth policy is formulated are as follows:-

- **Youth participation:** The promotion of youth participation in the democratic process, as well as in community and civic decision-making and development. Emphasis on shifting from the broad concept of youth participation to a more focused participation e.g. political participation;
- **Youth – driven:** All youth development programmes must be youth-driven and youth centered;
- **Mainstreaming youth issues:** The opportunities and challenges facing young women and men should be the concern of the whole

society. Youth development should be recognised as an important mandate for all government agencies, non-governmental organisations and development institutions;

- **Empowering environment:** Creation of an environment which supports the continued life-long development of young men and women and their skills and capacities;
- **Gender-inclusive:** The policy promotes a gender-inclusive approach to the development of young women and men. The policy promotes equal treatment and opportunity for all young people- male and female;
- **Cultural and religious diversity:** The policy recognises cultural and religious diversity as a basis for youth development. It recognises the important role of tradition, religion, and culture in the development of young men and women;
- **Rural emphasis:** ECOWAS youth policy promotes a rural emphasis in many of its strategies. It recognises and attempts to address the needs of rural young people and their communities; and
- **Transparency, accountability, and accessibility:** The youth policy promotes transparency, accountability, and accessibility on issues relating to youth development among institutions and organisations working with youths.

The principles and guiding values outlined above provided the framework upon which the vision, goals, objectives and strategies of the ECOWAS youth policy is built. They provided the basis for youth development and participation among member states of the region.

# Chapter 2

## Rights, Responsibilities and Obligations

The ECOWAS youth policy recognises the rights ascribed to member states within the treaty establishing the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) signed in Lagos, Nigeria on the 28th of May 1975 and revised on the 24th of February, 1993 in Cotonou, Republic of Benin. The treaty enshrines the rights of all people of the member states of the region, affirming the democratic values of human dignity, equality and freedom of all citizens.

### 2.1 Rights of the Youth

The ECOWAS youth policy recognises the importance of youth and their right to enjoy their youthfulness, irrespective of their socio-economic status, ethnicity and gender. Among the most important of these rights which the youth shall enjoy are the following:-

- Participation in policy formulation, decision making, leadership, and development at local and national levels;
- Freedom of opinion and expression;
- Protection from all forms of abuse, coercion, violence, exploitation, discrimination and degradation;
- Access to all benefits such as proper education and training (including opportunities for life-long learning), employment, housing, legal services, health care (including reproductive health), and recreation;
- A secure future through policies and practices ensuring sustainable development;
- Protection against harmful traditional and current practices; and
- In the case of the disabled, the right to be provided with the special treatment which his/her condition requires.

## 2.2 Obligations of the Youth

In order to make the youths in the region tolerant, caring, responsible and productive citizens, the ECOWAS youth policy outlines the following set of obligations to define youth participation in the collective task of promoting cooperation and integration in the region.

- To promote peace, security and development;
- To promote and defend democracy and civility in the governance of the country and in interpersonal relations with fellow citizens across the region;
- Promote human dignity and respect for adults and fellow young people, sound family and community values and community well-being;
- To promote tolerance and respect (cultural, political and religious tolerance);
- To eschew ethnic and religious bigotry;
- To promote reconciliation;
- To protect, conserve, preserve the environment;
- To respect and protect public property and property of others;
- To promote and advance the principles of gender equality;
- To acquire skills which increase their capacity for self-help, self-respectability, cooperation and community development;
- To ensure a society free from violence, coercion, crime, devastation, exploitation and intimidation;
- To promote physical and mental well-being, including the issues of reproductive health;
- To promote work ethic and life-long learning;
- To serve as ambassadors for regional and global development;
- To promote regional, international peace and harmony;

- To promote positive lifestyles and behaviours by young men and women;
- To eschew all acts of violence and crimes, such as cultism, armed robbery, street violence, alcoholism, substance abuse, prostitution etc.;
- To serve their countries through national service, community and voluntary efforts; and
- To be law-abiding, respectable and enlightened citizens, knowledgeable about their rights as well as duties and obligations.

### **2.3 Obligations of Government and Society to the Youth**

Government and society have obligations to ensure that youths are empowered to discharge their obligations and responsibilities to society. Parents need to establish a nurturing and safe environment for their families. Within this context, the rights and opportunities of the broader community include important responsibilities towards young men and women which must be recognised and fulfilled by all in the society. These obligations are:

- Provide conducive atmosphere for the mental, emotional and physical development of the young persons;
- Nurture the youths in warmth and affection in an atmosphere of peace and harmony;
- Act as positive role models to young men and women;
- Constantly provide counselling, support and guidance in accordance with their specific and peculiar needs;
- Encourage participation by young men and women in community life and development;
- Allow young women and men to take responsibility for their actions;
- Teach human rights values, social justice, equity, fairness and gender equality;
- Assist young people in reaching their goals and full potential;
- Recognise their capacities and individualities, according to age, maturity, and allow whenever possible their choice of educational fields and careers;

- Be sensitive to the needs and difficulties of young women and men;
- Respect and accept the contribution of young men and women to society through the use of their talents, resources and ideas;
- Provide adequate funding for equal educational opportunities;
- Create opportunities for youth involvement in decision-making that affects them, the environment and the society; and
- Provide adequate funding for sustainable development of youth-oriented projects.

# Chapter 3

## Target Groups

The ECOWAS Youth Policy provides the basis for the development of all young people in the region. However, certain priority target groups have been identified for specific attention due to specific difficulties faced by them. There are some categories of youth with special circumstances or problems, which require concerted, focused, and well targeted attention.

Accordingly, the identification of target groups reflects the major needs of certain categories of young men and women. These groups shall be highlighted within specific sectoral strategy of the ECOWAS Youth Policy. The following target-groups have been identified for attention in the ECOWAS Youth Policy:

- Students in secondary and tertiary institutions;
- Out of school young men and women;
- Unemployed and under-employed youths ;
- Young men and women with disabilities;
- Youths in crime;
- Young women;
- Gifted Youths;
- Rural young women and men;
- Young people living in the street;
- Young men and women living with HIV/AIDS; and
- Youths affected by armed conflicts.

The ECOWAS Youth Policy recognises the importance of the groups of young people identified above and the need for special programmes and services to be designed to meet their needs. The policy encourages an environment among member states that supports the development of young people, protects and nurtures the vulnerable and disadvantaged among them.

### 3.1 Students in Secondary and Tertiary Institutions

This category of youths falls between the ages of 15 and 35 years. The policy seeks to prepare youth in this category for gainful employment and significant leadership and citizenship roles in their immediate communities.

The absence of conducive teaching and learning environment due to poor funding of tertiary education, is a major concern across the ECOWAS region. Thus the policy focuses on improving the quality of education and the provision of conducive teaching and learning environment. Highly skilled and well educated young people in all areas of human endeavour are important for the development of the region. Hence the policy provides for the following:

- Promotion of the use of ICT (Information, and Communication Technology);
- Development of critical fields of knowledge in basic and applied science and technology;
- Provision of financial assistance to indigent students;
- Promotion of democratic student unionism to serve as launching pad for the training of youth in leadership roles and democratic cultures;
- Introduction of effective measures to curb cultism, gang-related violence and other vices in tertiary institutions; and
- Revising the curricula to include life skills training, good citizenship, leadership training and so on.

### 3.2 Young Women

Young women are exposed to particular difficulties in developing countries of the world. Young women, for instance, experience unemployment more frequently than their young male counterparts and tend to have fewer occupational opportunities. The increasingly high number of teenage pregnancies recorded among member states of the ECOWAS is also an indication that young women require specific support measures in this regard.

The right of the girl-child has long been a major problem of concern and deserves priority attention. Many young women have been victims of sexual

harassment, physical violence and abuse, labour exploitation, gender discrimination, as well as negative attitudes and practices. The policy therefore seeks to protect and promote the interest and aspiration of young women so as to restore their dignity and motivate them to contribute as equal partners in the task of integration and development of the ECOWAS region. Specifically, the policy seeks to achieve the following goals:

- Promotion of specific programmes that address the peculiar social, educational, health and reproductive problems of women in general and those in difficult circumstances;
- Elimination of harmful traditional and current practices that affect women generally and in particular the female adolescent youth;
- Encouragement of female enrolment and education especially in the area of science and technology;
- Elimination of all forms of discriminatory practices against employment of females in all sectors of the economy; and
- Empowering female youths for self and gainful employment as well as for greater participation in the integration of the ECOWAS region.

### **3.3 Young Men and Women with Disability**

All persons with disability have fundamental rights that need to be protected by all the governments of member states. This youth policy adopts a developmental approach to disability, where human rights, participation and inclusiveness are promoted. Young women and men with one form of disability or the other require specific strategies of support and assistance to ensure that they have adequate access and opportunity to participate fully in the society. This youth policy seeks to promote the following among member states of the ECOWAS region:-

- Greater awareness of the issues faced by young women and men with disability;
- Removal of disabling attitudes;
- Creation of accessible environment;
- Empowerment of young people with disabilities and their representative organisation; and
- Programmes that can empower youth with disabilities to positively contribute to national development.

### 3.4 Youths in Crime

The increasing involvement of youths in violent crimes, cultism, and armed robbery is a worrisome development. To reverse this trend, this youth policy provides opportunities and incentives which can discourage and dissuade the youth concerned from such social vices and criminal conduct and motivate them towards law-abiding conduct and greater responsibility. The policy provides for the following:

- Promote community-based preventive measures to youth crime;
- Sensitise the police and the judicial system to the specific concerns of young people involved in crime;
- Create avenues to monitor young people in contact with police, and develop ways to improve the way they are dealt with by the police;
- Ensure speedy trials of youth offenders;
- Find alternative to incarceration where possible;
- Providing counselling services to youths in and out of school;
- Encourage enlightenment programmes on the dangers of drug abuse, cultism, and other forms of crime; and
- Establishment of rehabilitation centres for drug addicts, juvenile offenders, and ex-convicts.

### 3.5 Talented/Gifted Youths

There are many creative, gifted and talented young men and women in the region whose vast potentials have not been adequately harnessed and utilised for the integration and development of the region. This youth policy therefore seeks to identify, support and encourage this category of young persons in the following ways:

- Develop effective ways of identifying and promoting gifted and talented young persons across the region; and
- Provide support and an enabling environment for young and talented/gifted persons to actualise their full potentials.

### 3.6 Rural Young Men and Women

Young men and women in rural areas are generally more disadvantaged than those who live in urban settings. They have less access to services and facilities, and the opportunities for employment are far less than in urban areas.

The ECOWAS Youth Policy recognises that in view of the fact that most of the youths in the region live in rural areas, youth development programmes and strategies must not be urban biased.

- Effort must be intensified by member states to reverse the under-development of rural areas.
- Deliberate and concerted effort must be made to ensure that programmes and services which address the needs of young men and women in rural areas reach this target group.

### 3.7 Young People Living in the Street

Young men and women who live and work on the street are a particularly vulnerable group in the society. While there is very little accurate information on the numbers of these people, or the factors that are responsible for these kinds of situation, it is clear that these groups of young people are mostly found in urban centres. They are referred to as "area boys" in some West African countries. This youth policy recognises that this group of young people is in need of special kinds of support.

- Efforts should be made by member states to rehabilitate this category of young people emotionally, psychologically, and physically;
- Promotion of enlightenment programmes on the dangers of street fighting, substance abuse, cultism and other forms of crime and delinquency; and
- Efforts should be made by member states to have data base on street youths.

### 3.8 Out of school young men and women

These groups of young persons are persons who are of school age but are not attending schools or have dropped out of school for one reason or the other. Apart from missing proper education, this category of young persons can be at risk in many ways. They become vulnerable to crime either as

perpetrators or victims; may suffer great risk to their health; or may get involved in high risk activities such as abuse of drugs and alcohol; may become susceptible to cult membership and gang-related activities.

- Member states should promote efforts targeted towards rehabilitating this category of young persons by providing appropriate support and encouragement to get them back to school.

### **3.9 Unemployed and under-employed youths**

The ever-rising joblessness and under-employment among youths in the region come with a number of other social ills, including involvement in crime, drug and alcohol abuse, and loss of confidence in the larger society to mention just a few. This policy recognises the predicament of unemployed youths and the fact that they require special attention by all stakeholders to deal with the wide range of concerns and problems they experience.

- Member states must redouble their efforts at job creation in the region; and
- Efforts should be made to promote apprenticeship and vocational training.

### **3.10 Young men and women living with HIV/AIDS**

HIV/AIDS has affected young men and women more directly than any other age cohort. As the number of infected young men and women increase, there is great need to ensure that the particular challenges and problems these category of young people face are addressed.

- Member states should endeavour to provide care, support and treatment for all infected young persons; and
- Member states should promote activities targeted towards HIV/AIDS prevention.

### **3.11 Youths affected by armed conflicts**

In most cases, the relationship between youth and violence was only considered in the context of the problems of juvenile delinquency and the need to prevent violence and crime in the society. However, current trends in the ECOWAS region have shown that young people in countries just coming out of civil wars have difficulty in integrating into the community and gaining access to education and employment. It is quite clear that young

people are disproportionately affected by violent conflict, both as victims and as active participants. The extreme and often prolonged circumstances of armed conflicts interfere with the identity development of the youth. Moreover, the sudden changes in family life circumstances, such as death or disappearance of parents, can leave the youth without guidance, role models or sustenance. This policy recognises the predicament of youths affected by armed conflicts and the fact that they require special attention by all stakeholders to deal with the wide range of concerns and problems they experience.

- Member states should promote effort targeted towards rehabilitating this category of young persons by providing appropriate support and encouragement to get them back to school and the world of work; and
- Member states should encourage and promote the role of youths and youth organisations in promoting peace and non-violence as well as in mobilising youths for post-conflict reconstruction.

# Chapter 4

## Priority and Key Strategy Areas

The development of the ECOWAS Youth Policy is predicated upon the identification of priority areas of concern affecting youths in the region, and the recognition of informed and practical strategies which address these identified priority areas of concern. It is important to note that there have been many economic and social changes in the global environment since 1995 when the World Programme of Action for Youth was adopted by the United Nations. Each of the 10 issues included as priority areas in the World programme of Action in 1995 may still be relevant but additional issues of concern seem to have emerged. Between 1995 and 2005, the global youth population, defined as persons between 15 and 24 years of age, has grown slightly.

The major priorities and critical concerns facing young women and men in the ECOWAS region are identified as follows:

1. Youth and Education
2. Youth and Employment
3. Youth and Health
4. Youth and Environment
5. Youth and Drug abuse
6. Youth and Crime
7. Youth, Science and Technology
8. Young Women and Girls
9. Youth and HIV/AIDS
10. Youth, Sports and Recreation
11. Youth and Participation in Decision-making
12. Youth and Conflict Prevention/Peace building
13. Youth and Agriculture
14. Youth, Arts and Culture
15. Youth, Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)
16. Youth and Family Life
17. Youth Migration
18. Youth and Poverty

## 4.1 Youth and Education

Education is the single most important factor contributing to the chances of young people to live productive and responsible lives. It is a major priority in the development of young men and women because it is through education and training that they can be better prepared for life. The personal development of the individual young man or woman, along with the development of the immediate local communities and the country as a whole is inextricably linked with the quality of education that the young people have.

Unfortunately, not all countries in the West African region have been successful in providing quality education for their young people. For many countries in the region the last decade or more have seen declining per-capita income and rising foreign debt, combined with the effects of high population growth, civil wars and devastating armed conflicts.

Illiteracy continues to be an enormous problem for many young people in the world. In 2000, approximately 82 million young women and 51 million young men were illiterate. Another 130 million children are presently out of school, and they are most probably going to end up as the illiterate youth and adults of tomorrow. Despite all efforts by the member states of the ECOWAS region, illiteracy rate for young people in the region is still quite high. According to the UNDP Human Development Report, 2005 youth literacy rate (ages 15-24) for Mali is 24.2 percent, Niger is 19.8 percent, Burkina Faso is 19.4 in 2003. Poverty is a major barrier to schooling. When poor parents need to make a choice, girls tend to be excluded first from attending school. The gap between male and female literacy rates in Africa appears to be widening. In rural areas, young people have less access to education, the quality of education is poorer and adult literacy is higher.

The ECOWAS Youth Policy views the provision of educational opportunities for youths as a fundamental pre-requisite for building a strong, integrated, viable and vibrant region. Apart from providing education for all, emphasis is on enhancing the quality of education. Abolition of school fees has the potential of stimulating school enrolment but it can also have negative implication for the quality of education if not properly managed. Experience in some African countries has shown that without additional funding for qualified teachers and material resources, schools are not able to accommodate and cope with the larger number of students who have enrolled as a result of abolition of fees. Education and training of young men and women must be firmly positioned as a youth development strategy.

**Goal: To provide equal access to quality education, training institutions and programmes for all young women and men in the ECOWAS region.**

**Strategies:**

- Priority should be given to achieving the goal of ensuring basic education for all (beginning with literacy), mobilising for that purpose all channels, agents and forms of education and training, in line with the concept of lifelong education;
- Special emphasis should be given to the reform of education content and curricula, especially curricula that reinforce traditional female roles which deny women opportunities for full and equal partnership in the society, at all levels, focusing on scientific literacy, moral values and skills learning, adapted to the changing environment and to the full integration of the ECOWAS region;
- Emphasis should be placed on the development of “life competencies” within the educational system. The introduction of such concepts as informal learning, lifelong learning, distance learning, e-learning, peer education and training on the job, show that the concept of education increasingly expands to forms outside the classroom. This way, a good number of youths and young adults who have dropped out of the educational system can be reached;
- Special attention should be given to specific groups of youths in distressed circumstances, including indigenous, migrant and refugee youths, displaced persons, street children and poor youths in urban and rural areas, as well to special problems, including literacy problems, for blind youths and youths with other disabilities;
- Special effort should be made to achieve gender equality within the educational system. There is evidence that educated young women are better able to make decisions that reduce poverty in their own lives and those of their children. Efforts should be made by member states to create enabling environment for promoting female education through legislative and policy reforms; redistributing resources to meet girl’s specific educational needs; reforming curricula; providing incentives to families to make sending children to school a worthwhile proposition; providing school meal programs; increasing the presence of female teachers; improving teacher training; confronting violence; working with parents; providing separate sanitation for girls; providing school-based health education programmes; and raising the minimum age of marriage;

- In addition to the provision of specialised educational programmes and institutions to cater for the needs of those with disabilities, young men and women who are disabled require access to mainstream education along with other young people. The provision of appropriate access and a supportive environment is essential to mainstreaming;
- The importance of teachers and trainers should be recognised in the context of attaining quality education for all. Attention should be given to the education of teachers and their working conditions, career paths and wages that will make the profession more attractive;
- Efforts should be made to promote human rights education in schools and other educational institutions. This is crucial so that young men and women will be aware of their civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights, as well as their societal responsibilities, and to also develop harmonious inter-community relations and mutual tolerance for diversity;
- Introduction and/or Expansion of School Counselling Programmes at all levels of the educational system to provide vocational career guidance, developmental and preventive counselling; and
- Urgent attention is needed to address the major challenges in introducing new information and communication technologies in the educational system of member states of the ECOWAS region. Globalisation is powered in part by tremendous and rapid ICT advances, and young people are often among the first to take advantage of new developments in this area. Youths are at the forefront of the information revolution, but they are faced with the challenges of reconciling the reality of their daily existence with the popular images presented in the media. Many young people are simultaneously experiencing life within the global and local spheres. They develop a global consciousness yet still have to function and survive in their own locality and culture. The challenge here is to create a culturally valid meaning to the use of ICT.

#### **4.2 Youth and Employment**

Unemployment and under-employment among youths is a problem everywhere. Labour force participation rates for young people decreased in the world as a whole by almost four percentage points between 1993 and 2003. This is mainly the result of an increase in the number of young people attending school and staying longer in the educational system, and the generally high unemployment rates all over the world. International Labour

Organisation (ILO) figures show that youth unemployment in the world increased from 11.7 percent in 1993 to an historical high 14.4 percent (88 million) in 2003.

Although no precise figures are available, there can be no doubt that unemployment among young men and women in West Africa has reached alarming levels. The ever-growing number of jobless youths, and the desperation that accompanies this joblessness, undermines any possibility of progress in those countries coming out of crisis. The political and social structures of countries that are at present stable are also seriously being threatened by this same trend. In short, it is no exaggeration to say that the future of the entire region is threatened by the growing number of youths who lack prospects of being able to work for a decent living. Political stability and social development will remain equally unattainable until this situation is altered.

It has been argued that the frustration that accompanies long-term unemployment among groups of young people feeds political and ideological unrest and violence. It has also been argued that unemployed and idle youths who have emerged in society may question government authority and endanger its stability. There is no doubt that youth unemployment is a political-security issue, as well as a socio-economic one. Its causes rest on both spheres, as do its effects. Untrained jobless and alienated youths are ready to take up arms in exchange for small amounts of money. They can be easily recruited as political thugs ready to eliminate opponents at the flimsiest excuse. Unemployment fuels conflict and crime, both of which in turn increase unemployment still further by their effects on economic performance, investor confidence, and political instability. Job creation, therefore, is a key tool for conflict. Many of the cross-border problems involving militias, mercenaries, proliferation of small arms are in most cases the direct result of youth unemployment. This issue of youth unemployment cannot be solved on a country by country basis, but rather requires a regional approach.

To address the problems of youth unemployment in the region, it is crucial not to view youths themselves as the problem, even if it is undeniable that the continued disregard of their aspiration will provoke instability, since they are often at the forefront of denunciations of injustice and demands for reform. The vast energies of the majority of our youths should be treated as a potential asset. They should be seen as an asset rather than a problem, a creative force for the present as well as the future. Care must be taken to avoid referring to young people as "leaders of tomorrow"; the focus instead should be on their role as today's partners. Young people all over the world are now asking that their voices be heard, that issues affecting them be addressed and that their voices be recognised.

**Goal: To provide young women and men in the region with a wide range of vocational and life skills which will in turn enable them to find and maintain gainful employment and sustainable livelihood.**

**Strategies:**

- Provision of school-based Career Guidance Service – There is need for young men and women to be able to access information and receive guidance on existing job opportunities. This should be built into educational curriculum so that students are able to make career choices based on a clear understanding of the labour market and emerging job opportunities. Career guidance services should be provided to students in secondary as well as tertiary institutions so that students at all levels will have relevant and meaningful information on which they can base decisions relating to further education, training and employment;
- Provision of Youth Career Guidance Centres – There is need to establish Community-based Youth career Guidance Centres for those young men and women who are not in school and are unemployed. These centres should be community-based organisations supported by governments, the private sector and the local communities. Such centres should provide career information, guidance and information services through collaborative efforts between educational institutions, business and labour organisations. Religious bodies, Non-Governmental Organisations, community based organisations, local governments etc. should be involved in the management and running of these Youth Career Guidance Centres;
- Self-employment creation – Governments and organisations should create or promote schemes that will provide seed money to support enterprise and employment programmes for young people. Advancing a culture of entrepreneurship among youths is central to economic growth and job creation in West Africa. Surveys in some countries in the region show that young people would rather prefer self-employment to salaried jobs. The youths should not be denied access to micro-finance simply because they are seen to be a high risk group for credit. There is need to devise ways to help young men and women access micro-finance. Micro-finance is a tool used world-wide for starting new business, and young people should not be denied this facility. Business enterprises are encouraged to provide counterpart financial and technical support for such schemes. Young people should be involved in cooperative schemes that will involve them in the production and marketing of goods and services. The formation

of youth development banks is also an option that member states can consider. Opportunities for self-employment as a career option for young men and women should be promoted more widely and effectively. Self-employment should be recognised as a legitimate and meaningful career option and not just an option of last resort; and

- Vocational training and apprenticeships – Promotion of vocational training programmes are very essential. Effective vocational training that is based on real labour market demands could greatly improve the economic growth of the region. Each country of the region should identify the demand for skilled labourers, goods and services, and the most appropriate training to meet such demand. Vocational training should be tailored to meet the demands for labour in each country. The focus should be on increasing the overall employability of youth trainees, rather than just training them for narrow occupational categories. Skills training need to be wide enough to avoid pigeon-holing a participant in too narrow an area of employability. In countries just emerging from internal conflicts, the emphasis should be on training for skills demanded locally which provide rapid income-generation. Rehabilitation of damaged housing, public buildings and roads, using labour-intensive methods, is often the highest priority requiring the teaching of appropriate skills backed up by adequate supervision.

### 4.3 Youth and Health

Health may be defined as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. The young, very often, are described as the future of the society, but they are also very much at present. Healthy and happy young people are better equipped to contribute to the development of their communities. The classic picture that youths are a relatively healthy segment of the population is fast changing. This is partly due to bad habits and poor hygiene, persistent behavioural risks, poor basic sanitation and new and emerging diseases.

Many young people in the region suffer from diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, diabetes, high blood pressure, HIV/AIDS to mention just a few. A number of these diseases are due to societal conditions including factors such as cultural attitudes, harmful traditional practices, unhealthy environment, missing support systems in everyday life, lack of information and inadequate health services, lack of safe sanitary environment, malnutrition, risk of infection and lack of portable water. Other factors include the growing consumption of tobacco, alcohol and drugs, unwarranted risk-taking and destructive activities which very often result in unintentional injuries.

Youth is a challenging time of life. However, when conflicts erupt as is the case in a number of countries in the ECOWAS region, risks associated with this period increases, especially for young women. Anxiety, depression, stress, trauma and lack of social support and services may seriously affect young people and cause lasting harm to their physical and mental health. When social structures break down in the face of war and instability in any society, young adults frequently engage in high-risk drug use or high-risk sexual behaviour.

The reproductive health needs of young people have been largely ignored. In many countries in the region, information and services are not available to adolescents to help them understand their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, and to protect them from unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS. Young people worldwide are reaching puberty at earlier ages and marrying later. Premarital sex is becoming widespread. Teenage pregnancy is a major concern especially because of the health risks for both mother and child and the impact on the girl's education and life prospects. Females below age 20 who give birth account for 17 percent of all births in the least-developed countries, which is equal to 14 million births world-wide each year. One out of three females in developing countries gives birth before age 20, and 55 percent of all females in West Africa give birth before age 20.

**Goal: To design and implement health services that will promote and maintain a healthy youth population by addressing the common threats to their health, and by providing young people access to health services.**

**Strategies:**

- Efforts should be made to include programmes focusing on primary health knowledge and practices in the curricula of educational institutions at the primary and secondary school levels. Health education, including life skills, should be introduced into school curricula and programmes designed for out of school youths. Emphasis should be placed on the understanding of basic hygiene requirements and the need to develop and sustain a healthy environment.
- Encouraging the full participation of youths in the development and promotion of health-related programmes and policies would enable them to become agents of change in their communities and positively affect their lives and those of their peers;
- Efforts should be made to promote personal responsibility for a healthy lifestyle and also to provide the knowledge and skills

necessary to adopt a healthy lifestyle, including teaching the legal, social and health consequences of behaviour that poses health risk. Governments in the region should be encouraged to explore the possibility of adopting policies that will discourage drug, tobacco and alcohol abuse, including the possibility of banning the advertisement of tobacco and alcohol. Programmes designed to inform young people about the adverse effects of drug and alcohol abuse and tobacco addiction should be introduced;

- Health workers should be provided with specific training to facilitate communication with young people, to provide youth-friendly services and to build competence in handling the health concerns of young people. Such health care workers should act in the best interest of their clients; they should be non-judgmental and considerate, willing to treat all their client/patients with equal care and respect (regardless of status) and should be willing and able to devote adequate time to each of their clients. Member states should give priority to adolescent-friendly policies that advocate the provision of services to honour the rights and fulfil the needs of adolescents. Such policies should be sensitive to gender-related factors hindering equitable provision of care and do not restrict the provision of health services on any term. Moreover, they should guarantee reasonable privacy and confidentiality and promote autonomy;
- Investing in young people's health, education and skills development, and empowering girls to stay in school, delaying any form of sexual involvement and pregnancy and marrying later, are essential interventions that can substantially improve their chances of becoming well-informed and productive citizens;
- Efforts should be made to promote healthy eating practices in order to combat malnutrition among young people. School lunch programmes, provision of food supplements and similar services should be available, whenever possible, to help ensure a proper diet for young people;
- As recommended by the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action and at several other international fora, member states of the ECOWAS region should work together within the region and internationally to take steps to checkmate abuse and trafficking of young women, all types of exploitation and abuse such as abduction, rape and incest, pornography, trafficking and acts of paedophilia and teenage

prostitution. Female genital mutilation should be prevented through legislation wherever it exists, and rigorous support should be given to the efforts of non-governmental organisations, community and religious organisation to eliminate such practices; and

- Efforts should be made to develop comprehensive sexual and reproductive health care services across the region. Such services should include; providing education and services in family planning consistent with the recommendations of the International Conference on Population and Development, the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women. The reproductive health needs of adolescents as a group have been largely ignored by countries in the region. Specifically, information and services should be available to adolescents to help them understand their sexuality and to teach them the value of delaying sexual involvement until marriage. This will protect them from unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases and subsequent risk of infertility. This should be combined with the education of young men to respect women's self-determination and to share responsibility with women in matters of sexuality and reproduction which is important for the health of young women and their children.

#### 4.4 Youth and Environment

In its broadest sense, the environment contains the conditions or influences under which any individual or thing exists, lives or develops. These include the natural, social, political, cultural, and economic environments under which an individual lives and works. Environmental issues present some of the most profound and complex challenges requiring attention today and in the coming decades. Young people have important environmental concerns and responsibilities owing to the fact that they are likely to bear the consequences of current environmental policies, they are likely to live for much longer time with the consequences of a deteriorating environment left to them by their parents. As demonstrated through their contribution to the World Summit on Sustainable Development, young people all over the world are strong advocates of environmental preservation, they understand perhaps better than most that humankind is not living in a zero-sum, environment-versus-economy world.

Young people, as with people of all ages, have a right to an environment that is not harmful to their health or well-being; and to have the environment protected for the benefit of future generations. The issue of environmental management and improvement is also of a major concern to young people. Young men and women ought to play active roles in programmes and

activities which improve the environment such as recycling, community clean-ups, land reclamations etc. There is urgent need for the natural environment to be maintained and preserved for both present and future generations. The causes of environmental degradation must be addressed; natural resources must be tapped and made use of in an environmentally friendly and sustainable manner.

**Goal: To increase awareness among young men and women in the region on the issues associated with the environment and actions that can be taken to improve the environment.**

**Strategies:-**

- Efforts should be made to promote environmental awareness through the school curriculum. This should include awareness of local environmental issues, sites and heritage. It should also include emphasis on individual and collective actions towards the improvement and protection of the environment;
- Training programmes should be provided to inform teachers of the environmental aspects of their subject matter and to enable them to educate youths concerning environmentally friendly habits;
- The participation of youth groups in gathering environmental data and in understanding ecological systems and actual environmental action should be encouraged as a means of improving both their knowledge of the environment and their personal engagement in caring for the environment;
- Efforts should be made to encourage community initiatives aimed at improving and protecting the environment by relevant Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Community Based Organisations (CBOs), religious organisations, youth clubs and youth development organisations;
- Improving the knowledge base of the society is one important aspect of improving its capacity to address and cope with environmental issues. Much of the information young people receive about environmental issues comes from the media. To the extent that is consistent with the freedom of expression, member states should encourage the media and advertising agencies to develop programmes to ensure widespread dissemination of information on environmental issues in order to continue to raise awareness among youths; and

- In line with the recommendations of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, member states of the region should involve young people in designing and implementing appropriate environmental policies.

#### 4.5 Youth and Drug Abuse

Youth is a period characterised by a search for independence from parents and other adults, seeking close friendships with peers and experimentation with a wide range of ideas, products and lifestyles. This experimentation sometimes involves taking increased risks and making choices and compromises as well as taking advantage of opportunities that may lead to uncertain outcomes. The use of tobacco and alcohol may become a means of escaping from situations that youths often feel powerless to change. Whenever the subject of drug use comes up, it is often in relation to young people. It is during the younger years that most substance use begins. If a person in today's world has not begun to use alcohol, tobacco or an illicit substance during this period, it is unlikely he or she ever will. Young people all over the world tend to use these substances to a greater extent and in more risky ways than do older people, and this behaviour can result in significant problems in the short and long terms

The vulnerability of young people to drug abuse has in recent years become a major concern. The consequences of widespread drug abuse and trafficking, particularly for young men and women, are all too apparent. Violence, particularly street violence is very often the result of drug abuse and illicit drug networks. Tobacco use is probably one of the chief preventable causes of death in the world. There are an estimated 1 billion smokers in the world today. By 2030, another billion young adults will have started to smoke. The highest rates of smoking among youths are in developing countries. There are fewer women smokers than men, but the number of young women taking up cigarettes is on the increase.

There are young people in the ECOWAS region who live in very difficult circumstances and have been identified to be especially vulnerable to drug abuse. Included in this category are working children, out of school youths, refugees, youth soldiers, youth in prison, children from dysfunctional families, young people who have been sexually abused and disabled children. These young people often live on the street and outside the reach of mainstream services.

Abuse of prescription drugs, self-medication with tranquilizers, sleeping-pills and stimulants are on the increase in the region. This is probably due to the fact that many of the countries in the region operate very weak control

over distribution of drugs, habit-forming drugs and prescription drugs purchased over the counter without any form of censorship.

**Goal:** To put in place drug control strategies aimed at reducing drug abuse among young people in the region thereby mitigating the consequences of drug abuse in the region.

**Strategies:**

- Initiatives to address drug use must take place within the overall context of poverty reduction, social inclusion across all sectors of the society, and equal opportunity for all in order to be effective and credible;
- Efforts should be made to put in place well articulated demand-reduction programmes targeted to young people, particularly those at risk. The content of such programmes should respond directly to the interests and concerns of vulnerable youths, and must address the underlying factors that cause young people to initiate drug use;
- Efforts should be made to develop a more comprehensive approach to drug abuse prevention by advocating restrictions on the marketing of tobacco and alcohol and emphasise demand-reduction efforts that appeal to youths instead;
- Efforts should be made to increase opportunities for gainful employment; activities that help young people develop skills, and activities which provide recreation. These are important in helping young people resist drugs;
- Youth organisations and the youth should be encouraged to play key roles in designing and implementing education and prevention programmes. Such programmes should include training in communication skills and peer-counselling;
- Governments, in cooperation with relevant agencies, Non-Governmental Organisations, youth organisations, should work together in carrying out demand-reduction programmes for illicit drugs, tobacco and alcohol;
- Efforts should be made to encourage medical/para-medical associations, faculties and colleges of medicine in the region to develop model courses, if they do not already exist, for the training of medical and para-medical students on the proper handling of drugs and early identification and diagnoses of substance abuse;

- Effort should be made to prevent exposure to drug abuse and dependence among young people suspected or convicted of criminal offences by making use of alternative measures, such as daily reporting to police stations and fulfilment of a specified number of community service;
- Young prisoners who are already drug-dependent should be targeted as priority candidates for treatment and rehabilitation services and should be segregated as appropriate;
- Prison authorities should cooperate with relevant government agencies and law enforcement agencies to keep drugs out of the prison system and
- In cooperation with the institutions of civil society and the private sector, drug abuse prevention should be promoted along with the rehabilitation and education programmes for former drug and alcohol addicts, in order to enable them to obtain productive employment and achieve the independence, dignity and responsibility for a drug-free and crime-free productive life.

#### 4.6 Youth and Crime

The problem of juvenile crime and delinquency is becoming more complicated and universal. There is also a growing involvement of the youth in financial and internet crimes. Their intensity and gravity depend mostly on the social, economic and cultural conditions in each region or country. Juvenile delinquency covers a range of different violations of legal and social norms, ranging from minor offences to severe crimes committed by minors. Statistically, young people constitute the most criminally active segment of the population. Countries with economies in transition have witnessed a dramatic rise in delinquency rates. In Africa, delinquency tends to be attributed primarily to hunger, malnutrition and unemployment.

Young people who are at risk of becoming delinquent often live in very difficult circumstances. These include children whose parents are alcoholics, those living in poor conditions and dysfunctional families. Others include those from overcrowded and abusive homes as well as those affected by the HIV/AIDS scourge. Children who have lost one or both parents in violent circumstances and are abandoned, without means of subsistence, housing and other basic necessities also constitute one of the categories of children at risk of becoming delinquent.

In many cases, youth offenders are “street children” who have been exposed to violence in their immediate social environment, either as observers or victims. Delinquency is also largely a group phenomenon; majority of juvenile offences are committed by members of some form of delinquent or cult groups. Even those juveniles, who commit offences alone, are likely to be associated with delinquent groups. The upsurge of cult activities among young people in some countries in West Africa is a major source of concern for all stakeholders in youth development.

Juvenile crime prevention programmes in many countries of the West African region are either ill-equipped to deal with the present upsurge in juvenile crime and delinquency, or do not exist. Countries in the region have done little or nothing to deal with these problems, and the international programmes are obviously insufficient. This policy seeks to outline a systematic task-oriented action that is aimed at the prevention of juvenile delinquency in the region.

**Goal: To prevent delinquent and criminal behaviour among youths in the region and to promote community based preventive measures to youth crime.**

**Strategies:**

- Youth involvement in delinquent activities can be prevented by providing young people with increased economic opportunities, professional training and education;
- Priority should be given to the establishment of prevention programmes aimed at helping young people to learn how to engage in positive self-appraisal, deal with conflict, and control aggression. Governments and relevant organisations, particularly youth organisations, should consider organising information campaigns, educational and training programmes in order to sensitise youth to the detrimental effects of violence in the society. Such programmes should also teach youths how to communicate without violence, and how to protect themselves and others from violence. Parents of adolescents, the school, local communities, and law enforcement agencies should be involved in the running of such programmes;
- Youths from poor urban settings should have access to specific educational, employment and leisure activities particularly during long school holidays. A wide range of recreational facilities and services of particular interest to young people should be established and made easily accessible to them. Appropriate leisure programmes such as

games, sports, cultural events, entertainment and community service are very important in fighting social ills such as drug abuse, juvenile delinquency and other deviant behaviour;

- Young people who drop out of school or come from broken homes should benefit from specific social programmes that help them build self-esteem and confidence conducive to responsible adulthood;
- Efforts should be made to involve CSOs, religious organisations, volunteers (sportsmen, celebrities, politicians, well-known authority figures) in social work with youth;
- Programmes targeted at the rehabilitation of street children, unaccompanied and homeless children should be established in the region. Special attention should be given to young people who have lost their families during armed conflicts and thus have no appropriate family surveillance; and
- Efforts should be made to develop programmes designed to promote tolerance and better understanding among youths, with a view to eradicating ethnic chauvinism, religious bigotry and all forms of discrimination in the region.

#### **4.7 Youth, Science and Technology**

Science and technology are changing the world at unprecedented rates. How people live, the types of jobs they do, the way they communicate, the way they travel and the way they relax have been affected almost day to day by the introduction of new technology and scientific understanding. Science and technology offer young people all over the world new opportunities as well as new challenges. It is, therefore, important for young women and men to be fully informed of the opportunities in these areas, and also to encourage them to take advantage of such opportunities.

Many rural communities in the region are grossly under-resourced, and lack access to technology. This situation has the potential of impacting young people negatively. The information age has opened up the entire world and converted it into a global village. It is important that all young people in the ECOWAS region should be able to operate in their environment and to make the best use of these changes.

**Goal: To raise awareness among young people in the ECOWAS region of the opportunities in science and technology, and to enable young men and women use new and appropriate technologies.**

**Strategies:**

- Efforts should be made to promote science in schools, especially among female students,
- Efforts should be made to highlight the involvement of young men and women in the sciences by instituting youth science awards at all levels of education,
- Efforts should be made to promote science and technology role models,
- Efforts should be made to promote information technology. Information technology has the potential to enable rural and remote communities have access to new and appropriate knowledge and skills; and
- Science and technology clubs and societies should be encouraged within the schools with a view to supporting peer networks and interest groups around science and technology. Institutional support should be provided for the establishment and sustenance of these clubs and societies.

**4.8 Young Women**

One of the most important tasks of this youth policy is to improve the situation of young women, and to recognise that young women are unique individuals with rights and responsibilities similar to those of young men.

Girls are often treated as inferior and are socialised to put themselves last, thus undermining their self-esteem. Discrimination and neglect in childhood, negative cultural practices and attitudes, gender-biased curricula can initiate a lifelong downward spiral of deprivation and exclusion from the social mainstream, thus reinforcing gender inequalities. Close to 65 million girls still remain out of school worldwide; 5 million women aged 15-19 have abortions every year, 40 percent of which are performed under unsafe conditions. Studies have shown that the level of unawareness of HIV/AIDS-related issues is particularly high for young women aged 18-30 years. In almost all regions of the world, young women fare worse than young men in the labour market.

Violence continues to be perpetrated against girls and young women worldwide. Physical and sexual abuses affect millions of girls and women, yet these incidents are grossly under-reported. In the West African region, the prevalence of female genital mutilation is not known to have declined; the greater number of refugees in the region are women and as refugees, they are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence and abuse.

**Goal: To improve the situation of young women in the region and also recognise that young women are unique individuals with rights and responsibilities similar to those of young men.**

**Strategies:**

- Member states are encouraged to enact and enforce legislation protecting girls and young women from all forms of violence, including genital mutilation, incest, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, child prostitution and child pornography;
- Member states are encouraged to pay attention to gender parity in such key areas as education, health and employment;
- Universal and equal access to and completion of primary education for girls and young women as well as equal access to secondary and higher education should be ensured across the West African Region;
- A framework should be provided in the region that ensures that the development of educational materials and practices are not gender biased;
- Policies should be put in place to promote educational settings among member states that eliminate all barriers impeding the schooling of girls and young women, including married and/or pregnant girls and young women at all levels of education;
- Member states are encouraged to take steps to eliminate stereotyping and discrimination against girls and young women, and to ensure full participation of girls and young women in society; and
- Girls and young women should be protected from economic and related forms of exploitation and from engaging in any work that is likely to be hazardous, to interfere with their education or to be harmful to their health or their physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.

#### 4.9 Youth and HIV/AIDS

The impact of AIDS has been most serious in sub-Saharan Africa. The region contains almost three-quarters of all young people living with HIV/AIDS, even though only 10 percent of the world's youths live there. The majority of new infections in the region are among those between 15 and 24 years of age. It is estimated that in almost all the countries in the region, at least 5 percent of young women aged 15-24 years are infected with HIV.

Until recently, HIV prevalence remained low in most countries in West Africa. However, rapid increases in infection rates are now being reported in a number of the countries in the region. General population statistics often conceal dramatic variation within countries. Where heterosexual transmission of HIV is dominant, generally more young women are infected than young men. Cities generally have higher HIV prevalence than rural areas, and disadvantaged people have been shown to be at greater risk than others.

Young people, like adults, contract HIV in several ways such as injecting drugs, unprotected sexual activity, blood transfusions and sharing of sharp non-sterile equipments. Injecting of drugs using needles contaminated with HIV is playing a major role in the spread of HIV/AIDS among young people, especially young men. Youths who share drug-injecting supplies are at high risk of HIV infection, as the virus is introduced directly into the blood stream. Sexually active adolescents who do not consistently use condom are at high risk of contracting HIV/AIDS.

**Goal: To reduce HIV/AIDS infection among youths in the region and to mitigate the impact of the epidemic, and to prepare young people to survive in a world with AIDS.**

##### **Strategies:**

- All countries in the region should ensure that youths have access to a full range of services such as schooling, youth-friendly health services and counselling, opportunities for decent livelihood, fundamental to their healthy development and to reduce their risk of contracting HIV;
- Efforts should be made to provide young people in AIDS-affected families with education, general health and food security, social welfare, protection and ensure emotional health to lessen the impact of HIV/AIDS;

- Action is required among member states to strengthen legislation focusing on protection issues in order to prohibit discrimination related to HIV sero-status, protect property rights, ensure access to information and services and reduce the abuse, exploitation and trafficking of young people;
- Treating youths with sexually transmitted diseases must be a priority;
- Efforts should be made to implement Voluntary Counselling and Testing (VCT) services for young people. Referring young people who test positive to treatment programmes can decrease their infectivity, as treatment can help lower their viral load. For those young people who test negative, VCT provides an opportunity to educate them on how to reduce their future risk of contracting the HIV virus;
- Efforts should be made to promote programmes that encourage abstinence and mutual fidelity;
- Efforts should be made to ensure blood safety among member states;
- Efforts should be made to strengthen life skills education in both school and out of school programmes;
- Efforts should be made to promote Information, Education and Communication (IEC) among member states. Young people cannot protect themselves if they do not know the facts about HIV/AIDS programmes that promote abstinence and mutual fidelity. Communication programmes must inform youths about the risk;
- Efforts should be made to mobilise youths, families and communities in the fight against HIV/AIDS;
- Efforts should be made to strengthen the HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI) surveillance capacity of member states; and
- Efforts should be made to rehabilitate Commercial Sex Workers (CSW).

#### **4.10 Youth, Sports and Recreation**

The importance of leisure-time activities in the psychological, cognitive and physical development of young people cannot be over emphasised. There is growing recognition in Africa of the vital role that discretionary time can

play in promoting social inclusion, access to opportunities and overall development among young people. Leisure-time activities include games, sports, cultural events, entertainment and community service. Appropriate leisure programmes for youths can be targeted towards fighting social ills such as drug abuse, juvenile delinquency and other deviant behaviour.

In every culture, there are hours in the day when young people are not formally required to be in school or engaged in household or paid work. These hours and the activities that young people choose to engage in during this period are considered discretionary. They are viewed as optional, nice but not necessary, or even particularly important. It is these hours that policy makers, programme planners, and sometimes the public have no problems reducing or cancelling outrightly. When public funds are low, sports, recreation and cultural programmes are usually the first to go.

As indicated in the World Youth Report 2003, terms such as “leisure”, “informal learning” and “play” imply a casualness of purpose and practice that does not do justice to the way in which a majority of young people use their free time. Young people’s leisure time and volunteer activities relate directly to many of the issues affecting them, such as education and employment. Threats to the well-being of a young person, such as HIV/AIDS, delinquency, conflict and drug abuse, are very much linked to the way discretionary time is utilised. Given such interconnections, it is critical that leisure time activities continue to be the pre-occupation of member states of the region.

Apart from the fact that sports improve physical health, contribute to the development of positive self-concept and values such as team work; sports can be a veritable tool in the integration of the young people of the West African region. Sports are a universal language that can bring people together, no matter their origin, background, religious beliefs or economic status.

**Goal: To broaden the participation of young men and women in a wide range of leisure and sporting activities, and to recognise that leisure time and opportunities constitute a right to be protected rather than a privilege to be earned or lost.**

**Strategies:**

- Efforts should be made to promote well designed sports-based initiatives which can serve as tools to cut across barriers that divide societies across the ECOWAS region thereby promoting the integration of the region;

- Efforts should be made to promote greater support for games, sports and recreation through the school system. This will involve the creation of sports and recreation facilities in local schools. Skills training programmes which promote and encourage sports and recreation activities among young men and women should be put in place at all levels of education;
- Efforts should be made to create and promote a sports and recreation culture throughout local communities in the region. This will require parents, community leaders, politicians, youth clubs and sporting organisations to promote and encourage participation in a wide variety of sports, games and recreational activities including reading for pleasure;
- Efforts should be made to create community sports and recreational facilities. The development, for example, of parks can be very important in the promotion of sports and recreation within the local community;
- The leisure needs of young people ought to be considered in the process of urban planning and rural development in order to ensure the availability of a range of constructive, voluntary activities and opportunities for youths; and
- Efforts should be made to create a balance between the traditional based leisure activities and the “individualised leisure time” created by modern technology through the use of mobile phones, computer games, and home videos etc.

#### **4.11 Youth and Participation in Decision-making**

The demand for the recognition of the right of young people to be heard, to have their views given serious consideration, and to play an active role in promoting their own best interest has increased all over the world wide in the past decade. This demand represents a profound challenge to traditional attitudes towards young people in most societies of the world. It means a radical change in youth-adult relationships in all areas of life including the family, school, local communities, social services, and at local, national, and regional levels.

The age-old propensity of adults taking decisions concerning young people in their absence is at variance with the commitment respecting the participatory rights of young people. Many politicians, governments, community leaders and others in the ECOWAS region, it would appear, are

not completely convinced that harnessing the active involvement of youths, represents an effective strategy for achieving better outcomes. This position points to the need for a change in approach.

Many of the profound difficulties faced by young people around the world – illiteracy, poverty, HIV/AIDS, substance abuse, unemployment, discrimination and forced engagement in armed conflict are situations of widespread concern in the region. Effective strategies are needed to resolve these concerns. Young people have experiences that are unique to their situation, and they have views and ideas that derive from such experiences. They are social actors with skills and capacities to bring about constructive resolutions to their own problems. It is therefore legitimate for young people to contribute to programmes, policies, and decision making.

The more opportunities a young person has for meaningful participation, the more experienced and competent he or she becomes. Participation for young people strengthens the commitment to and understanding of human rights and democracy. Much of government policy has direct or indirect impact on the life of young people, and the only way to protect them is to enable them participate in the policy making process. Youth participation is an essential strategy for ensuring young people's optimal development, and for achieving wider development for the society as a whole. Young people must be recognised and respected as social actors, agents in their own lives, and as citizens of their own societies.

**Goal: To promote the right of young people to be heard and to express their views constructively on all matters that affect them and to have their views taken seriously.**

### Strategies

- Efforts should be made by member states to ensure that active participation of young people and youth organisations is embedded in the political process at local, national, regional and global levels;
- Efforts should be made to widely disseminate relevant information to the youths and also facilitate access to the same in order to enable them play greater and more effective roles in the political process;
- Efforts should be made to foster intergenerational relationships and support the capacity of young people to participate meaningfully in programmes and activities that affect them;
- Governments should always lend support to and be willing to engage in dialogue with youth-led organisations. Governments should seek to work with a broad range of the youth population.

- Efforts should be made by member states to institutionalise democratic systems for the youth. This might take the form of legal reforms that give young people the right to develop democratic structures in their schools and colleges or by introducing formal mechanism for political dialogue between youths and those in government. Student associations should be encouraged, and supported in all tertiary institutions;
- Efforts should be made to pursue a broader inclusion of disabled young people. Many of them remain marginalised and excluded from participatory activities. Greater investment and efforts are needed both to incorporate them into the mainstream programmes and to establish avenues that allow them to share their particular experiences, priorities and expectations;
- Youth-led organisations should be encouraged to observe the principles of transparency, accountability, non-discrimination and mutual respect; and
- Efforts should be made to create youth fora designed to encourage dialogue among the youth themselves and other groups of people in the society.

#### **4.12 Youth, Conflict Prevention and Peace building**

Peace and security are prerequisites for development. When there is a break down of law and order in conflict situations, masses of people are displaced after their homes and communities are destroyed, rapidly fuelling the ranks of refugees and internally displaced persons. Youths are often a targeted group during conflicts either as victims or perpetrators.

The past decade has witnessed an unprecedented increase in armed conflicts in the West African region. The involvement of child-soldiers in the Liberian and Sierra-Leonean wars is very well documented. It is said that the highest number of child-soldiers is found in Africa with an estimated number of 300,000 young soldiers, most of who are between the ages of 10 and 24. Many of these young people are compelled to join through conscription, abduction and coercion. Their survival becomes a challenge as they put themselves in danger. Drug abuse becomes an integral part of their lives, shielding them from physical and emotional pain and forcing them to stay awake. During warfare, girls and women encounter threats of rape, sexual mutilation and exploitation, trafficking and humiliation.

Young people's involvement in armed conflicts is facilitated through the trade of small arms and light weapons. Insufficient opportunities to earn a living in their communities often leads them to gravitate towards participating in violent conflicts, and also heightens their chances of facing poverty and thus becoming vulnerable to illicit activities. Today, young people in Africa encounter greater and more unique challenges than ever before. Not only are they faced with the biological and psychological growth processes that characterise youth and adolescence, but they must also grapple with formidable external pressures such as poverty, disease and violence. A war situation definitely compounds the adversities they face.

**Goal: To prevent outbreak of violence and the escalation of conflict, and to promote active youth involvement in peace building and prevention of violence in the region.**

**Strategies:**

- Efforts should be made by youths and civil society organisations to detect early warning signs - systematically collect and analyse information on crises areas for the purpose of preventing youth involvement in violence;
- Efforts should be made to strengthen conflict prevention measures by promoting dialogue, tolerance, cooperation, peace education among young people in the region;
- Efforts should be made to strengthen conflict resolution measures. Non violent modes of conflict resolution can be applied to achieve peace and prevent future conflicts;
- Efforts should be made to promote educational materials and curriculum that focus on developing crises prevention and peace building skills in schools in the region;
- Efforts should be made to develop interim care centres with a view to removing, rehabilitating, and re-integrating street children in the region;
- Efforts should be made to respond appropriately to the special needs of youth in armed conflict situations in the region;
- Efforts should be made to engage the youth by providing them with gainful employment opportunities;

- Efforts should be made to provide well coordinated disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programmes for youth soldiers;
- Efforts should be made to increase youth participation at all levels including the political sphere; and
- Efforts should be made to prevent youth involvement in thuggery, and those who sponsor youth thuggery directly or indirectly should be penalised.

#### **4.13 Youth and Agriculture**

Traditionally, most communities in the ECOWAS region are basically agrarian societies. In accordance with article 25 of the ECOWAS treaty, cooperation among member states in agricultural development and food security remains crucial to the development and integration to the region. Many young people who are working in this sector unfortunately lack the necessary support to improve their productive capacity. Very often, they do not have access to land, credit as well as extension services.

Young people are generally very energetic and are keen to take up challenges. Their involvement and full participation in the agriculture sector especially in the fields of research, training, and production, preservation, processing and marketing of the produce of agriculture, forestry, livestock and fisheries will certainly make a great difference. The region will pursue the following strategies to enhance youth participation in agriculture.

**Goal: To promote the involvement and full participation of young men and women in the agricultural sub-sector in the ECOWAS region.**

##### **Strategies:**

- Efforts should be made to promote among member states youth involvement in the agricultural sector (fisheries, livestock, forestry, processing and marketing of agricultural produce etc.);
- Efforts should be made by member states and other stake holders to provide necessary agricultural inputs such as extension services, land, credit etc in order to facilitate youth involvement in agriculture;
- Efforts should be made to encourage the teaching of agricultural science at all levels of the educational system in the region;

- Efforts should be made to disseminate knowledge on agricultural techniques and processes;
- Efforts should be made by the governments of member states to finance and procure modern agricultural implements for the use of young farmers; and
- Efforts should be made to encourage research in the agricultural sector.

#### 4.14 Youth and Culture

Arts and culture are important vehicles for appreciating and respecting the heritage of a people. They represent the sense of identity, self-respect and paths through which generations seek to learn and transfer the skills and techniques of social relations and survival. Through arts and culture, young people are able to express their personal and collective views about the society and the world in which they live. Through arts and culture, norms and values of society can be questioned and creativity can be enhanced. They also contribute to the promotion of social networks, reconciliation, and the breaking down of barriers to social and cultural diversity.

The objective of this youth policy is to promote the participation of young people in all forms of art and culture, and ensure that they have a sound understanding of their culture and heritage. The following strategies will be employed:

**Goal: To promote the participation of young people in various forms of arts and culture, and to ensure that they have a sound understanding of their culture and heritage.**

##### **Strategies:**

- Efforts should be made to include arts and cultural education in the school curriculum in the region;
- Efforts should be made to encourage local communities of member states to undertake arts and cultural activities such as preservation of cultural sites, the writing of local stories and folklores;
- Efforts should be made to encourage artistic and cultural activities among youths in and out of school, and also promote the understanding of, and respect for the diverse cultural differences in the region;

- Efforts should be made to promote the learning and dissemination of local and official languages among member states in the region;
- Efforts should be made to promote, by every means possible, all forms of cultural exchange among member states of the ECOWAS region; and
- Efforts should be made to develop structures and mechanism for the production, propagation and utilisation of local arts and crafts industries among member states in the region.

#### **4.15 Youth, Information and Communication Technology (ICT)**

In examining young people and ICT, it is important to note that young people are among the first to take advantage of new developments in this area. They are at the forefront of the information revolution. Youths are capable of using ICT in diverse and novel ways; they stand to benefit most from the ICT revolution. The computer for instance releases the natural creativity and desire to learn of young people, which have been either blocked or frustrated by the traditional methods. Among young people in the ECOWAS region, as well as elsewhere in the world, ICT constitutes a socialisation force that is increasingly becoming more powerful than the home and the school.

It is impossible to overlook the fact that youths of today are faced with a global media culture that represents a unifying force that shapes the way they think and behave. Young people in the ECOWAS region are often seen as innocent victims of the pervasive and powerful media. Many young people around the world are dreaming about living the glamorous life-styles of celebrities such as pop stars or top footballers. Teenage pregnancy, child prostitution, child pornography, paedophilia and child trafficking are spreading through the internet. With the increasing penetration of cable television and home videos in the ECOWAS region, drug use, juvenile crimes, the degeneration of manners and moral values, suicide and religious excesses as well as the breakdown of the nuclear family are problems that have become exacerbated in the region.

While it is true that the global media culture constitute a wave of pressure on the average young person, the effects vary from society to society. This is probably due to what is referred to as the digital divide. The notion of the digital divide relates to the disparities in ICT use between people living in different parts of the world. Many young people, particularly in developing countries, are excluded from the information revolution, leaving them on the wrong side of the digital divide.

**Goal: To raise the level of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) awareness, and to bridge the digital divide among youths in the ECOWAS region.**

**Strategies:**

- Efforts should be made by member states to equip institutions of learning in the region with ICT resources and latest applications;
- Efforts should be made by member states through appropriate agencies to reconcile global and local practices thus giving valid meaning to new technologies among people in the region;
- Efforts should be made to bridge the knowledge and information gaps existing in the ECOWAS region;
- Efforts should be made to establish community-based youth facilities equipped with ICT resources including internet facilities;
- Efforts should be made to create ICT centres that will support distance education and training; and
- Efforts should be made by member states to monitor television and radio programmes, internet sites with a view to restricting access to programmes that do not promote positive values among young men and women.

#### **4.16 Youth and Family Life**

Major economic, social, cultural, political and demographic changes have disrupted and redefined the role of the traditional African family. The extended family network which represents a coping mechanism of infinite versatility, a quasi-communal approach to the supervision and the correction of the younger generation in many African communities are under increasing strain as family ties evolve owing to economic requirements or incentives occasioned by rapid modernisation of the region. This has partly resulted in the growing number of women who are traditional caregivers in most African societies moving into the workforce.

The poignant answer of young people to questions about why they join gangs is that these groups become the families that they never had. This is a compelling testimony of young people's fundamental need for close, reliable relationships with a supportive, protective group that confers respect and identity and recognises competence. Young people will flourish and contribute positively to society when they have a family life that is characterised by warmth and mutual respect and when parents show serious and sustained

interest in their lives. Such a family is very likely to be able to provide a consistent basis of discipline and close supervision and provide powerful protection against the risks of a young person's involvement in unhealthy or antisocial practices.

**Goal: To re-engage families in providing appropriate atmosphere that protect young people against the risk of engaging in unhealthy or antisocial behaviour in the region.**

**Strategies:**

- Member states should encourage and support parents and other adults in their vital role in the lives of their young people by encouraging parent-support groups in neighbourhoods;
- Efforts should be made by member states to encourage parents to remain involved in the education of their wards even at the tertiary levels of education;
- Efforts should be made by all those who work with youths such as relevant government agencies, civil society organisations, religious organisations etc. to be prepared to work not only with young men and women but also with their families; and
- Educational institutions should offer parents opportunities to support the learning of their wards at home and at school.

#### **4.17 Youth and Migration**

West Africa has experienced a variety of migrations caused by population pressure, poverty, poor economic performances and endemic conflicts. Historically, migrants regarded the region as an economic unit within which trade in goods and services flowed, and people moved freely. To fully comprehend contemporary migration trend in the region, it is pertinent to state that they are rooted in socio-economic, political, historical and cultural factors which have shaped the direction of development and types of economic activities and laid bold imprints on international migration in particular.

Like HIV/AIDS pandemic, "Euro mania" which has afflicted many young people in the region, appears to be incurable. Almost on a daily basis, we are faced with the news in the prints and electronic media of young people from West African countries who are stranded at various points along the Mediterranean coast, who risk their lives and limbs to emigrate to Europe and other Asian countries through dangerous routes.

Thousands of young migrants have been leaving West Africa's shore in rickety open fishing boats hoping to reach Europe and find work and send money home. Many run out of food, fuel and water and die on the journey of more than 500 miles (800 kilometres) to the Canary Island in Spain. Some succeed on this perilous journey only to encourage their peers to follow. They usually would phone home to say that they have found some unskilled work on the black market and will soon earn enough money to start sending home. Some 15,000 illegal migrants have landed on the Canary Islands in 2006. This number doubled the number recorded in the previous year. Another 10,000 arrived at the Spanish ports, according to official figures.

Reuters reported on the 11th of August, 2006 that at least 17 more young African migrants had died trying to reach Spain after a gas bottle exploded on their boat. The boat was said to have left from Senegal bound for Spain's Canary Islands. Reuters reported further that the boat was detained at high sea and that those on board said they had thrown 11 bodies into the sea. More bodies were recovered from the boat and several people who were injured in the blast, later died in the hospital, bringing the number of dead to at least 17. The Spanish media put the total death toll as high as 19. This is just one example of the daily occurrence of the illegal migration of youths in the region.

Experts have advanced varied reasons for this trend; not least among these is the backwardness of Africa. Young people, who risk their lives and limbs to enter Europe, do so to escape this backwardness and get a better life. It follows that if our youths see bright prospects for themselves at home, they would be less tempted to illegally migrate to Europe. The huge human toll arising from illegal migration is a needless loss for the region; very drastic actions must be embarked upon by members of the ECOWAS region to reverse this ugly trend.

**Goal: To put in place necessary mechanisms that will reverse the migration crisis involving young people who risk their lives to emigrate to Europe and other countries through dangerous routes in the ECOWAS region.**

**Strategies:**

- Member states should ensure the full implementation of the second phase of the Protocol on The Free Movement of Persons and the Right of Residence which came into force in July 1986 by implementing The Right of Establishment;
- ECOWAS should urgently put in place an all-embracing mechanism that will be involved in migration management that goes beyond punitive and control measures in the region;

- Effective mechanism should be put in place among member states to enlighten young people on migration issues so they can avoid being caught in traps that may ruin their lives;
- Member states should immediately review all national laws, employment and investment codes that are at variance with ECOWAS protocol on free movement, establishment and settlement;
- Member states should exert themselves to ensure improved economic and social status for everyone in the region;
- Member states should ensure that youths have decent living, health and physical well-being, and equal opportunities;
- Youths in the region should be encouraged to play central roles in politics, democracy and to uphold the principles which guarantee human survival;
- It is obvious that the migration crises cannot be effectively managed by unilateral actions; hence bilateral relations should be forged between countries sending and receiving migrants outside the region. In this context, multilateral arrangements between ECOWAS and the EU should be rigorously pursued;
- Efforts should be made to undertake collaborative research and information sharing between countries of origin and destination;
- Member states should adopt responsive policies that will address high levels of unemployment, poverty, internal disorder, mismanaged economy and rural degradation; and
- Member states should endeavour to strengthen all the institutions or agencies required to manage migratory flows such as the customs, immigration and the police through capacity building, retraining and proper funding.

#### 4.18 Youth and Poverty

Poverty is a complex phenomenon and it is usually indicated by household income and poverty line statistics as well as the lack of access to basic services and resources. Some of the key issues in the poverty debate include the profile of the poor, the possible links with macro-economic reform and the association between gender-based inequalities and poverty. Studies on the *impact of macro-economic and Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP)*

At the regional and state levels resource mobilisation plans will be developed periodically as deemed fit.

An ECOWAS Youth Fund should be established for youth development in the region for the implementation of the Policy.

## 5.2 Institutional Framework

Implementation of the ECOWAS Youth Policy will be multi-sectoral.

- **Relevant government agencies and ministries** – They will provide the technical lead in developing interventions on the different aspects of youth development.
- **ECOWAS Youth and Sports Development Centre** –The Centre will put in place structures, mechanisms and processes that will guide and assist her to plan, implement, monitor and evaluate the process of the implementation of this youth policy.
- **Private sector** – The responsibilities of the private sector will include contributing resources, collaborating with governments and other actors to implement the ECOWAS Youth Policy.
- **Development partners** – They will also assist in providing financial and technical support, materials and equipments in implementing the strategic action plan on youth development for the region, advocate and lobby their principals for support and other actions that will aid youth development.
- **Civil Society Organisations** – They will be responsible for building partnerships and networks with governments, other agencies, and communities in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the strategic action plan on youth development in the region.
- **Youth Organisations** - They will be involved in designing, planning and implementation of all youth development programmes.

## 5.3 Monitoring, Evaluation, and Research

The objective of monitoring is to ensure compliance with the guidelines of the ECOWAS Youth Policy. Evaluation is concerned with assessing the extent of achievement of the set goals and targets. The importance of monitoring and evaluation is to ensure successful implementation of the policy.

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) shall be carried out at regional, national, state and community levels. Baseline research will be carried out on the onset of the implementation and will be followed by subsequent researches which will collect disaggregated data on age, gender, location, socio-economic status as well as special circumstances of youth to assess progress in specific areas of the Policy.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Research should include the following:

- Establishing data bank on youth activities and youth development, and regularly updating the situational analysis of youth development programmes.
- Undertaking research on youth development issues.
- Supporting and strengthening M&E systems among member states within the ECOWAS region.
- Developing appropriate M&E tools and mechanism and assisting with follow-up as well as assessing youth intervention programmes.
- Conducting periodic M&E reviews on youth development programmes among member states.

#### **5.4 Periodic Review of Policy**

Since the society is dynamic and changes are the norms rather than the exception in the contemporary world, it is therefore necessary that this ECOWAS Youth Policy and Strategic Plan of Action be reviewed periodically.

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**STRATEGIC  
PLAN OF ACTION FOR THE  
ECOWAS YOUTH POLICY  
(2009-2013)**

## **Strategic Action Plan on Youth Development for the ECOWAS Region**

This document outlines the range of activities necessary to translate the ECOWAS Youth Policy into feasible programmes and projects for the overall achievement of the policy's mission and vision statements. Specifically, it is intended to translate the policy into action through a focus on strategic issues, goals, objectives and programme strategies.

The key strategy and priority areas include education, employment, health, environment, drug abuse, science and technology, young women, HIV/AIDS, sports and recreation, participation and decision-making, conflict prevention and peace building, poverty, migration, crime, family life, agriculture, arts and culture.

### Priority 1: Youth and Education

*Goal: To provide equal access to quality education, training institutions and programmes for all young women and men in the ECOWAS region.*

Objectives	Strategy	Activities	Anticipated outcome	Verifiable indicators	Means of verification
To provide basic education for all youths in the region.	Expansion and upgrading of existing schools, and the building of new schools.  Financing education.	Provision of well-trained teachers.  Provision of specialised education.  Provision of school/vocational counseling	Improved equal access to quality education for all young women and men in the ECOWAS region.	More schools built.  More teachers trained.  Increased school enrolment/more schools.	Survey of the number of schools, educational infrastructures, equipment and personnel among member states.
To train youths in vocational skills	Provision of vocational and professional training. Exchange Programmes involving lecturers, students, youth organisations and youth workers. Promotion of human rights education. Introduction of distance learning, e-learning, and life-long learning.	Sensitisation on the need for the education of the girl child Exchange programmes among member states at various levels	Enhancement of educational development among member states	More opportunities created for educational advancement for all young people in the region. Number of lecturers, students, youth leaders and youth workers involved in exchange programmes	Survey of school enrollment at the secondary and tertiary levels, school reports Surveys, National and educational reports.

**Priority 2: Youth and Employment**

*Goal: To provide young women and men in the region with a wide range of vocational and life skills which will in turn enable them to find and maintain gainful employment and sustainable livelihood.*

Objectives	Strategy	Activities	Anticipated outcome	Verifiable indicators	Means of verification
To train youths to be self-reliant and employable	Promote employment creation programmes such as life skills and vocational skills training.  Develop comprehensive youth employment strategy	Establish vocational training and apprenticeship programmes.  Promotion of community services involving youths	Increased number of employment opportunities and employable youths.	Increased number and percentage of youths actively engaged in economic activity.	National and regional statistical publications, programme reports
Ensure equal employment opportunities for all youths	Promote and strengthen youth enterprises.  Equal employment opportunities for specific and marginalised groups of young people	Provide resources to create employment for special groups of young people.  Provide legal backing for equal employment opportunities in the region.	Reduction in labour market segmentation  Equal employment opportunities.	Number and percentage of special groups of young people actively engaged in economic activity.	Surveys, programme reports and published documents

Objectives	Strategy	Activities	Anticipated outcome	Verifiable indicators	Means of verification
To create more jobs	<p>Access to micro-finance</p> <p>Promote training and culture of entrepreneurship among young people in the region.</p> <p>Promote self-employment as a legitimate career option.</p>	<p>Establish youth development funds.</p> <p>Encourage youth cooperative schemes</p>	<p>Increased access by youths to credit facilities</p> <p>Increased number of employment opportunities.</p>	<p>Number and percentage of young people having access to micro-finance</p> <p>Number and percentage of young people actively engaged in economic activities.</p>	<p>Surveys and published documents by member states.</p> <p>Beneficiary assessments of credit</p>
To provide students and job seekers with relevant information regarding labour market, potential job opportunities, and pathways to employment.	<p>Promotion of school-based career guidance</p> <p>Provide youths career guidance centres.</p> <p>Provide employment support strategies</p>	Ensuring that labour market information is incorporated in school curriculum	Improved access to labour market information	Number and percentages of young people employed	Surveys and publications, school reports

**Priority 3: Youth and Health**

**Goal: To design health programmes that will promote and maintain a healthy youth population by addressing the common threats to their health, and by providing young people access to health services.**

Objectives	Strategy	Activities	Anticipated outcome	Verifiable indicators	Means of verification
To provide adequate comprehensive health care for young men and women in the region.	Improving orthodox health care delivery systems and utilising alternative health care delivery.	Provide stronger support to fight against major diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, cholera, typhoid fever and HIV/AIDS	Improved health care facilities	Number of and improvements in health care facilities.	Surveys, programme reports, official documents.
To provide access to health and rehabilitation services to young men and women, and to provide "youth-friendly" health services and programmes.	Provision of basic health services	Provide health workers with specific training to facilitate communication with young people and to provide youth-friendly services.	Improved health care services.  Improvement in the quality and number of health services	Number of health personnel trained in appropriate communication techniques.  Number of reproductive health services available.  Number of dialogues/sensitisation programmes and revised curricula containing reproductive health education.	Surveys of facilities and health personnel.  Programme analysis

Objectives	Strategy	Activities	Anticipated outcome	Verifiable indicators	Means of verification
To promote appropriate behavioural change and communication programmes.	<p>Forging partnerships.</p> <p>Develop comprehensive sexual reproductive health services and provide youth access to such services</p>	<p>Cooperation with international agencies to adopt a multi-sector approach to the issue of reproductive health.</p> <p>Appropriate Information and services should be made available to in-school and out of school adolescents on sexuality, unwanted pregnancies, STDs and HIV/AIDS.</p>	Improvement in the quality and number of reproductive health services.	Number of and improvements in health care facilities.	Evaluation Surveys /programme reports.
Promotion of health education among young people in the region	<p>Include health education in the curricula of educational institutions at all levels.</p> <p>Education through school-based and community based mechanisms</p>	<p>Promote among young people healthy lifestyle habits and behaviour and the concept of total wellness.</p> <p>Step up sensitisation and educational programmes. Focus on primary health knowledge and practices in schools</p>	Enhanced understanding of health related issues	<p>Number of health personnel trained in appropriate communication techniques.</p> <p>Number of reproductive health services available.</p> <p>Number of dialogues /sensitisation programmes and revised curricula containing reproductive health education.</p>	Programme records, curriculum materials implementation plans and media.

**Priority 4: Youth and Environment**

**Goal:** *To increase awareness among young men and women in the region on the issues associated with the environment and actions that can be taken to improve local environments.*

Objectives	Strategy	Activities	Anticipated outcome	Verifiable indicators	Means of verification
To create awareness on environmental problems and management.	Integration of environmental education and training into the education and training programmes.	Revise school curricula to include environmental education Train teachers on environmental aspects of their subject matter.	Improved environmental awareness and care for the environment.	Number of sensitisation programmes/	Programme/ school records, curriculum materials, evaluation surveys.
To promote and strengthen the participation of youths in the protection, preservation and improvement of the environment	Youth participation in programmes designed to protect, preserve and improve the environment	Initiate programmes to promote tree planting, waste reduction, combating desert encroachment, recycling and other good environmental practices.  Create appropriate solid waste management	Increased youth participation in environmental decision making and development.	Number of youths involved in environmental decision making and development	Evaluation surveys, programme reports

**Priority 5: Youth and Drug Abuse**

*Goal: To put in place drug control strategies aimed at reducing drug abuse among young people in the region thereby mitigating the consequences of drug abuse in the region.*

<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Anticipated outcome</b>	<b>Verifiable indicators</b>	<b>Means of verification</b>
Demand reduction programmes for illicit drugs, alcohol and tobacco	<p>Ensure youth participation in demand reduction programmes.</p> <p>Target demand reduction to all young people particularly those at risk.</p> <p>To cooperate with other stake holders particularly youth organisations in demand reduction programmes.</p>	Promote preventive education programmes showing the dangers of drug abuse.	Increased demand reduction for illicit drugs, alcohol and tobacco among young people in the region.	Number of sensitisation programmes on demand reduction for illicit drugs, alcohol and tobacco	Evaluation surveys, programme reports.
Treat and rehabilitate young people who are drug abusers or drug dependent	Promote social and medical research in the prevention and treatment of substance abuse.	<p>Establish and fund drug rehabilitation centres</p> <p>Promote social and medical research in treatment and rehabilitation of drug users</p>	Improved treatment and rehabilitation facilities for young drug abusers.	Number of rehabilitated drug-dependent young persons.	Evaluation surveys, programme reports.

Objectives	Strategy	Activities	Anticipated outcome	Verifiable indicators	Means of verification
To care for young drug abusers in the criminal justice and prison system.	Consider alternative measures of punishing young persons convicted of criminal offences.	Young persons convicted and are drug-dependent should be targeted as priority candidates for treatment and rehabilitation.	Reduce the cycle of dependence, release, repeated incarceration.	Number of convicted drug abusers rehabilitated	Evaluation surveys, prison reports.

**Priority 6: Youth and Crime**

*Goal: To prevent delinquent and criminal behaviour among youths in the region and to promote community based preventive measures to youth crime.*

Objectives	Strategy	Activities	Anticipated outcome	Verifiable indicators	Means of verification
To reduce delinquent and criminal behaviour among youths in the region.	<p>Create economic activity, professional training and education for youths in the region</p> <p>Provision of recreational facilities for youths.</p> <p>Provision of community-based, task-oriented preventative measures to youth crime</p>	<p>Establishment of vocational, training and apprenticeship centres and programmes.</p> <p>Engage youths in games, sports, cultural events, entertainment and community service</p>	Reduction in the number of youths involved in delinquent and criminal behaviour.	<p>Number of youths involved in definite economic activities in the region.</p> <p>Number of professional and vocational training opportunities available to the youths</p>	Evaluation surveys, programme reports, and meetings
	<p>Establishment of prevention programmes</p> <p>Strengthen the family as a social institution</p>	<p>Promote kinship and neighborhood networks</p> <p>Create forum to encourage and strengthen strong family ties.</p>	Reduced delinquent and criminal behaviour among youth in the region	<p>Number of youth involved in delinquent and criminal behaviour.</p> <p>Number of sensitisation programmes organised for the family</p>	Evaluation surveys, meetings, programme documents.

Objectives	Strategy	Activities	Anticipated outcome	Verifiable indicators	Means of verification
	<p>Sensitisation and awareness campaigns on the detrimental effects of youth violence and crime.</p> <p>Control of inappropriate films, home videos, and sexually offensive internet sites.</p>	<p>Organise sensitisation programmes in collaboration with schools, NGOs, religious bodies.</p>		<p>Number of sensitisation programmes organised for the youths on the detrimental effects of violent crime</p>	

**Priority 7: Youth, Science and Technology**

**Goal: To raise awareness among young people in the ECOWAS region of the opportunities in science and education.**

Objectives	Strategy	Activities	Anticipated outcome	Verifiable indicators	Means of verification
<p>To promote awareness of science and technology among young people in the region.</p> <p>Identify, encourage and empower gifted youths.</p>	<p>To promote and strengthen science and technology curricula in schools</p> <p>To encourage the formation of science and technology clubs in schools</p>	<p>Institute youth science awards in schools.</p> <p>The formation of science and technology clubs</p>	<p>Increased involvement of young men and women in the sciences.</p>	<p>Number of youth science awards instituted by both government and the private sector.</p> <p>Number of science youth clubs.</p>	<p>Surveys, published reports</p>
<p>To promote information technology and distance learning</p>	<p>Development of community-based multi-purpose centres</p>	<p>Set up Information and Communication Technology (ICT) centres in rural communities</p>	<p>Increased awareness of the possibilities of Information Communication Technology/ internet. (ICT)</p>	<p>Number of information technology centres available.</p> <p>Number of young people involved in distance learning.</p>	<p>Survey of structures, equipment and personnel Published reports.</p>

**Priority 8: Young Women**

**Goal:** *To improve the situation of young women in the region and also recognise that girls and young women are unique individuals with rights and responsibilities similar to those of young men.*

Objectives	Strategy	Activities	Anticipated outcome	Verifiable indicators	Means of verification
To reduce disparities between men and women in all areas.	Gender mainstreaming socio-economic policies and budgeting  Design poverty-reduction strategies to include gender perspectives.  Highlight the contribution of women to the economy	Training in economic participation and Gender budgeting  Advocacy, research on identified problems, appraisal and evaluation of policies.	More equitable economic participation rates between young women and men.  Equal opportunity employment	Number and percentages of young women actively engaged in economic activity. Number of companies and organisations enforcing equal opportunity rules.	National, regional and international statistical publications. Surveys of establishment
To address socio-cultural factors that support gender bias.	Harmonise national laws and international conventions such as CEDAW	Review and harmonisation of legal and constitutional framework.  Educate young women in the use of the legal system.	Transparent legal framework targeted at gender discrimination.	Number of young women and women groups making use of the legal system	Legal instruments
To reduce gender gaps in school enrolment and eliminate gender stereotyping in education curricula.	Monitoring school enrolment at all levels to reduce gender bias.  Curriculum development to ensure the inclusion of gender sexuality topics	Work with relevant authorities to monitor access to education and literacy issues.	Improvement in enrolments at all levels of education  Revised curricula with gender perspectives	Number of boys and girls enrolled at all levels of education  Number and type of gender-sensitive materials included	School records. Curriculum materials.

**Priority 9: Youth and HIV/AIDS**

**Goal: To reduce HIV/AIDS infection among youths in the region and to mitigate the impact of the epidemic, and prepare young people to survive in a world with AIDS.**

Objectives	Strategy	Activities	Anticipated outcome	Verifiable indicators	Means of verification
To develop and make accessible, affordable, high quality primary health care including sexual and reproductive health care services.	<p>Promote youth-friendly health services in and beyond the health system.</p> <p>Treat sexually transmitted infection.</p> <p>Promote and establish voluntary counselling and testing services.</p> <p>Ensure blood safety.</p>	<p>Strengthening the capacity of public and private health and social support facilities</p> <p>Develop partnerships for multi-sectoral approach Set up sensitisation materials.</p>	Reduced HIV infection among young persons in the region.	<p>Number and quality of primary health care facilities available.</p> <p>Number of young persons accessing sexual and reproductive health care.</p>	Surveys of structure and facilities, programme reports, meetings
To develop education programmes relating to STDs and HIV/AIDS for youths	<p>Promote Information, Education and Communication campaigns among young people</p> <p>Promote life skills education and counselling in schools and out of school programmes.</p> <p>Mobilise youths, families and communities in the campaign to fight HIV/AIDS.</p>	<p>Employ behaviour change communication models</p> <p>Programmes to include the ABC (Abstinence, Be Faithful, Condomise) of prevention with emphasis on the 'A' for unmarried youths</p>	Enhanced understanding modes of transmission, prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS	Number of dialogues, sensitisation and campaign programmes	Surveys, mass media, school records, curriculum materials

Objectives	Strategy	Activities	Anticipated outcome	Verifiable indicators	Means of verification
		<p>Incorporate AIDS prevention in to school curriculum</p> <p>Awareness and sensitisation programmes for families and communities</p>			
<p>To provide care, support, protection and treatment for young people who are HIV positive.</p>	<p>Ensure food security and nutrition.</p> <p>Provision of ARV for PLWAs</p> <p>Eliminate HIV/AIDS-related stigma and discrimination.</p> <p>Forge partnership</p>	<p>Promote school-based meal programmes.</p> <p>Cooperation with international agencies and partners.</p>	<p>Enhanced treatment, care and support for HIV-positive persons</p>	<p>Number of young persons living with HIV/AIDS treated. Quantity of food and nutritional supplements available to PLWAs</p>	<p>Hospital records, programme records, surveys</p>

**Priority 10: Youth, Sports and Recreation**

*Goal: To broaden the participation of young men and women in a wide range of leisure activities and to recognise that leisure time and opportunities constitute a right to be protected rather than a privilege to be earned or lost.*

<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Anticipated outcome</b>	<b>Verifiable indicators</b>	<b>Means of verification</b>
To broaden the participation of young men and women in sporting and recreational pursuits in the region.	To promote leisure time activities as an integral part of youth policies and programmes	Advocacy to attract government and private sector funding for leisure time activities  Establish public libraries, cultural centres, sporting and leisure facilities in rural and urban areas	Increased youth participation in leisure time activities.	Number of young people participating in leisure time activities.  Number of programmes geared towards leisure time activities.  Number of recreational facilities available	Survey of structures and facilities, programme analysis, policy documents

**Priority 11: Youth and Participation in Decision Making**

**Goal: To promote the right of young people to be heard and to express their views constructively on all matters that affect them.**

Objectives	Strategy	Activities	Anticipated outcome	Verifiable indicators	Means of verification
To promote the economic, social and political participation of young people in the region.	<p>Improve youth access to information. Develop and Promote youth associations</p> <p>Involve youth in designing, implementing, and evaluating policies and plans affecting them.</p>	<p>Establish structures that facilitate access to information.</p> <p>Encourage national, regional and international Cooperation and exchange between youth organisations.</p> <p>Develop democratic structures in schools. Promote participation as well as leadership skills.</p> <p>Adopt legal reforms that promote youth participation.</p>	Improved youth economic, social and political participation in the sub region.	The number of youths participating in economic, social and political aspects of society. Number of structures and programmes put in place to ensure youth participation.	Surveys, publications of government and other agencies, legal instruments, programme reports and evaluations
Promote a broader inclusion of young people	Promote the inclusion of special groups of young people usually marginalised.	Create more programmes involving special groups of young people	The number of marginalised youths incorporated and involved in mainstream programmes.	The number of marginalised youths participating in economic, social, and political aspects of society	Surveys, programme reports/ evaluations, official documents.

**Priority 12: Youth, Conflict Prevention and Peace-building**

**Goal: To prevent outbreak of violence and the escalation of conflict, and to promote active youth-involvement in peace building and prevention of violence in the region.**

Objectives	Strategy	Activities	Anticipated outcome	Verifiable indicators	Means of verification
To promote youth involvement in conflict prevention and peace building in the ECOWAS region	To promote early warning and prevention systems.  Address economic, social and political inequalities	Collection and analysis of information from crises prone areas.  Create opportunities for young people to earn a living	Increased prevention of violence outbreak.  Reduced tension and illicit activities.	Number of conflicts and violence averted.  Number of young people engaged in gainful economic activities.	Programme reports, official documents, surveys, government reports.
To promote conflict resolution among young people.	Promote non-violent modes of conflict resolution	Create forum for dialogue, building of trust and reconstructions  To mobilise youths (in areas not in conflict) as volunteers in infrastructural reconstruction in areas just coming out of conflict.	Increase in the number of conflict transformation and resolution.	Number of conflict situations transformed.	Official documents, programme reports, surveys.

**Priority 13: Youth, Arts and Culture**

*Goal: To promote the participation of young people in various forms of arts and culture, and to ensure that young people have a sound understanding of their culture and heritage.*

<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Anticipated outcome</b>	<b>Verifiable indicators</b>	<b>Means of verification</b>
To ensure youth participation in all forms of arts and culture.	Community mobilisation. Youth involvement in cultural decision-making bodies.	Promote cultural activities, cultural sites among member-states.  Cultural exchanges among youth organisation in the region	Increased youth participation in arts and culture	Number of cultural activities involving young men and women	Evaluation surveys, programme reports, and meetings
To encourage arts and cultural education.	Restructure school curriculum to include arts and cultural education.	Create forum for young people to explore and experience their culture	Increased understanding of culture and cultural heritage.	Number of sensitisation programmes on arts and culture curriculum	Programme reports, surveys, and curriculum materials.

**Priority 14: Youth and Agriculture**

**Goal:** *To promote the involvement and full participation of young men and women in the agriculture sub-sector across the ECOWAS region.*

Objectives	Strategy	Activities	Anticipated outcome	Verifiable indicators	Means of verification
<p>To promote youth involvement in the agriculture sector in the region.</p>	<p>Promote the teaching of the science of agriculture at all levels.</p> <p>To facilitate accessibility to land</p> <p>To provide funding and technical assistance to youth on agriculture</p> <p>Disseminate information on new techniques in agriculture.</p> <p>To provide funding for agricultural projects</p>	<p>Restructure school curriculum to include the teaching of Agricultural science at all levels.</p> <p>Organise sensitisation programmes.</p> <p>Organise cooperative societies</p>	<p>Increased youth participation of young men and women in agriculture.</p> <p>Increased awareness.</p> <p>Increased funding</p>	<p>Number of young people involved in agriculture. Number of sensitisation programmes organised.</p>	<p>Curriculum materials, programme reports, surveys, publications of governments and other agencies.</p>

**Priority 15: Youth, Information and Communication Technology (ICT)**

**Goal: To raise the level of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) awareness, and to bridge the digital divide among youths in the ECOWAS region.**

Objectives	Strategy	Activities	Anticipated outcome	Verifiable indicators	Means of verification
To promote the use of ICT and to bridge the digital divide among youths in the ECOWAS region	Restructure school curriculum to accommodate the use of ICT Creation of ECOWAS youth web-site	Provide funding for ICT materials Monitor programmes in the mass media especially the TV. Equip institutions of learning in the region with ICT resources and latest applications. Create information technology centres that will support distance learning and training. Establish community-based youth facilities equipped with ICT resources	Increased youth participation in the use of ICT. Reduction in the negative impact of media on the youth	Number of young people involved in the use of ICT Number of controls instituted in the media. No of ICT centres established by governments	Programme reports and surveys.

**Priority 16 Youth and Family Life**

**Goal:** *To re-engage families in providing appropriate atmosphere that protects youths against the risk of young people engaging in unhealthy or anti-social behaviour in the region.*

<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Anticipated outcome</b>	<b>Verifiable indicators</b>	<b>Means of verification</b>
To re-engage families in providing appropriate support for young men and women in the region.	Establish parent support groups in neighborhoods.  Encourage parents to remain involved in the education of their children and wards.	Enact laws that promote family values.  Involve civil society organisations in working with youths and their parents.  Promotion of Family Life Education	Family life characterised by warmth and mutual respect.Reduction in unhealthy and anti-social behaviour among youths in the region	Number of young people with appropriate family	Programme reports and surveys.

**Priority 17 Youth and Migration**

**Goal: To put in place necessary mechanisms that will reverse the migration crisis involving young people who risk their lives to emigrate to Europe and other countries through dangerous routes in the ECOWAS region.**

Objectives	Strategy	Activities	Anticipated outcome	Verifiable indicators	Means of verification
<p>To reduce the temptation among youths to embark on illegal migration outside the region.</p>	<p>Develop a migration management mechanism in the region.</p> <p>Improve economic and social status of the youth.</p> <p>Forge co-operative relations between the countries of origin and destination.</p> <p>Capacity building for immigration officials and others.</p>	<p>Create a framework to monitor and implement decisions at national and international levels.</p> <p>Develop policy framework to assess impact of migration.</p> <p>Dialogue and consultations among all stake holders.</p> <p>Involve civil society organisations in working with youth and their parents.</p> <p>Public enlightenment, concerted advocacy and public education.</p>	<p>Responsive policy making that will address youth unemployment, poverty etc.</p> <p>Continuous policy dialogue among all stake holders leading to better understanding of all the issues involved in migration.</p> <p>Sustained sensitisation activity on illegal migration.</p>	<p>Reduction in the number of young people involved in illegal migration in the region.</p> <p>Multilateral arrangements between ECOWAS and the EU</p> <p>Number of training and retraining organised for immigration officials and others</p> <p>Number of public enlightenment and education embarked upon by member states</p>	<p>Programme reports, Surveys. Government publications and that of relevant agencies.</p>

**Priority 18: Youth and Poverty**

**Goal: To put in place necessary mechanisms that will eliminate absolute poverty in the region, thereby creating an enabling environment for the youth to develop their full potentials.**

Objectives	Strategy	Activities	Anticipated Outcome	Verifiable indicators	Means of verification
To reduce and eliminate absolute poverty in the region	Promote a multi-sectoral approach in the provision of quality education, employment opportunities and provision of social amenities. Provision of funding for agriculture. Elimination of all forms of gender discrimination	Establishment of vocational training and apprenticeship centres. Providing equal opportunities for all young people in the region to attain their full potential	Increased number of youths with gainful employment	Reduction in the level of poverty in the region. Increased life-expectancy in the region.	Surveys, National reports and trends on employment and standards of living

