

Youth inclusion in the WEFE nexus

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Overview of sub-Saharan Youth (SSA)

- Africa has the youngest population in the world, with 70% SSA under the age of 30.
- Lack of decent employment and economic opportunities (3 in 4 youth lack secure work)
- In 2023, 53 million youth in sub-Saharan Africa were NEET (ILO, 2024)
- Youth represent a key demographic that can drive innovation and sustainable development.



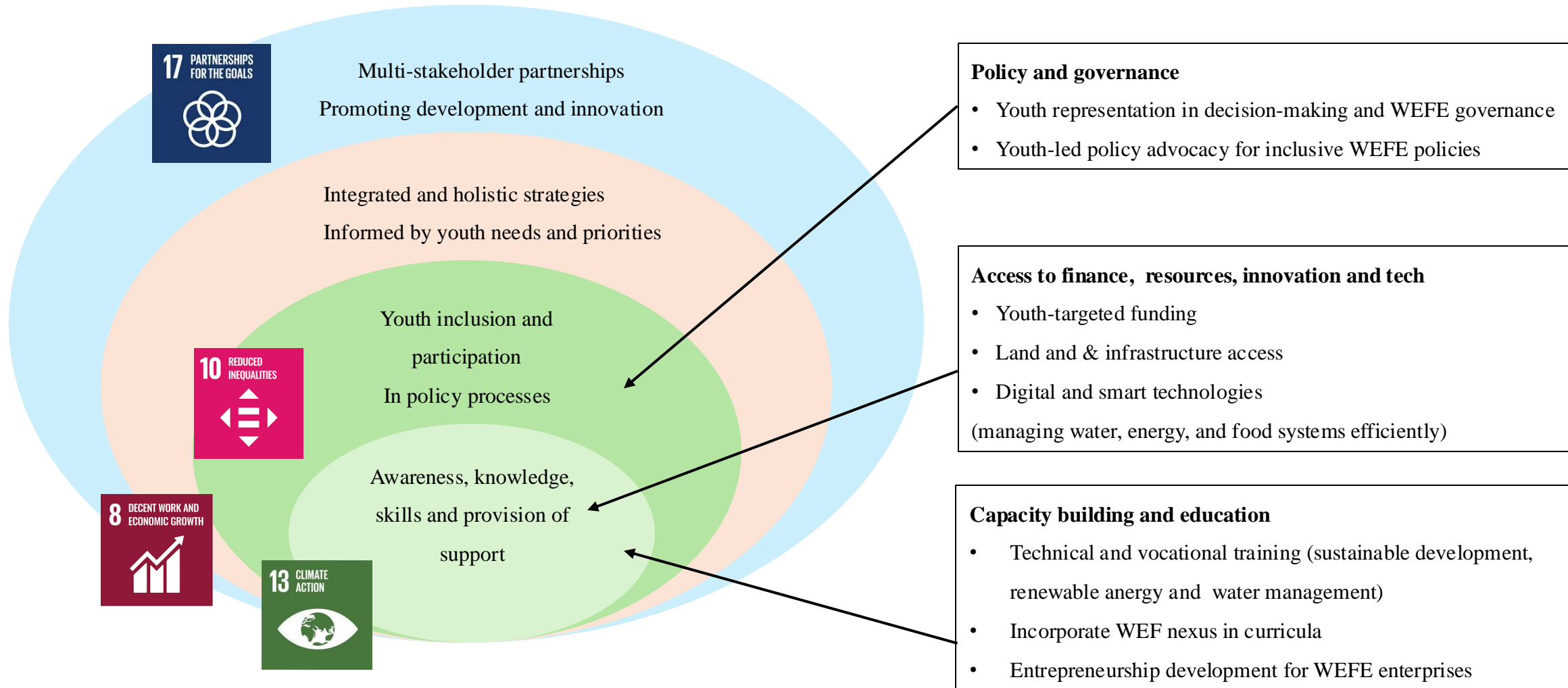
Understanding youth heterogeneity

- Socio-economic status (rural vs peri-urban vs urban)
- Digital and technological access (urban and middle-class youth vs rural youth)
- Education and skills levels
- Cultural and ethnic diversity (group organization, gender roles and indigenous knowledge systems)
- Employment and livelihoods (formal vs informal economy)
- Political and civil engagement (youth activism and disengaged youth)
- Regional and environmental factors (Coastal vs. inland youth groups)



Youth groups in SSA are diverse and influenced by several distinguishing factors that shape their identity, priorities, and engagement in development initiatives like the water-energy-food-ecosystem (WEFE) nexus

Conceptual framework for promoting youth participation and empowerment



Application on various types of youth groups



Agrarian youth key characteristics

- Primarily engaged in small-scale farming.
- Limited access to technology, finance, and markets.
- Vulnerable to climate change and land tenure issues.

Inclusion strategy:

- Improve access to resources
- Promote Climate-Smart Agriculture – Train youth in water conservation techniques, precision farming, and renewable energy-powered irrigation.

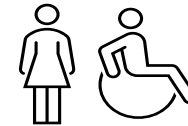


Activist and civic engaged youth key characteristics

- Engage in advocacy, policy making and grassroots mobilization.
- Use digital platforms to campaign for climate change action and sustainable development
- Often work in collaboration with NGOs

Inclusion strategy:

- Amplify Youth Voices in Policy-Making – Ensure youth are represented in government discussions on WEF governance.
- Support Digital Advocacy & Awareness – Provide tools and training for online campaigns promoting sustainable WEF practices.
- Fund Youth-Led Initiatives – Allocate resources to grassroots projects focusing on climate resilience, clean energy, and food security.



Key barriers for females and disabled youth

- Land ownership barriers
- Workload and social norms
- Limited mobility
- Social stigma and discrimination
- Lack of targeted policies

Inclusion strategy:

- Promote gender and disability sensitive WEF approaches
- Develop responsive investments funds that support female and disabled youth led WEF enterprises
- Advocate for disability-Inclusive WEF Policies
- Strengthen youth-led disability rights groups advocating for participation in environmental and economic decision-making.

Examples in Sub-Saharan Africa

Water and Energy Programme by WESSA (Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa)

- Focuses on educating young people about sustainable practices in water and energy sectors.
- Offers hands-on training and capacity-building workshops, enabling youth to actively participate in environmental conservation and resource management

WE4F (Water and Energy for Food) Southern and Central Africa Regional Innovation Hub:

- Supports over 200 off-grid companies working within the WEFEE nexus.
- Provides financial assistance, mentorship, and business development services to young entrepreneurs, fostering innovation in sustainable water and energy solutions

The end

Thank you

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References

- ILO Brief 2, Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024 Sub-Saharan Africa (<https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2024>)
- Wessa programmes: <https://www.wessa.org.za/programmes/>
- Water and energy for food programmes: <https://we4f.org/sca>

