CONCEPT NOTE:
UNICEF Executive Board Special Focus Session on Africa
7 September 2023, 9:00-10:00 a.m.
An Africa Fit for Children and Young People:
What investments are needed for Africa’s Human Capital?
Guest Speaker: H.E. Mr. Azali Assoumani,
President of the Union of the Comoros and Chairperson of the African Union

Rationale
In the context of the adoption of the 2030 development agenda, UNICEF had organized in June 2014, a Special Focus Session on Africa during its Annual Executive Board session engaging Member States in a strategic dialogue on efforts needed to accelerate results for children in Africa. Almost a decade later, in the context of the decade of the acceleration of SDG implementation, United Nations Member States responded to the United Nations Secretary General submission of the Common Agenda passing in 2022 a UNGA resolution (A/RES/76/307) calling for a “Summit of the Future: Multilateral Solutions for a Better Tomorrow” to be held in 2024.

Today, we are at a critical juncture with (1) the follow up and review of the state of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the 2023 SDG Summit to be held during the High level week of the UN General Assembly; (2) the United Nations Secretary General’s Climate Ambition Summit also in September 2023 calling for new, tangible and credible action to accelerate the pace of change and (3) the September 2023 preparatory Ministerial meeting for the 2024 Summit of the Future. Against this background, it is today more important than ever for UNICEF to convene Member States around another Special Focus Session on Africa.

For the African Union (AU), 2023 is equally an important juncture for the implementation of its agenda 2063 as the African Union Commission is currently working on the assessment of its first Ten-year implementation and discussing the next 10 years of its development agenda, Agenda 2063 “the Africa We Want”.

The Special Focus Session on Africa during the UNICEF Executive Board will be an opportunity to interact with the AU Chairperson, President Azali Assoumani, and young people from the continent. The Session will contribute to a greater understanding of UNICEF and AU’s work across the continent and will discuss an ‘Africa that is fit for children and young people’ in the 21st century (and beyond). It will explore where progress has been made, and what the future trajectory could look like based on evidence and data, as we celebrate, in 2024, 25 years of the entry into force of the Africa Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

The Special Focus Session on Africa will also provide an opportunity for the AU and UNICEF to share a Children’s Rights centered vision of Africa with all Member States who are present; help strengthen partnerships with regional institutions; reaffirm the special place occupied by Africa’s children and young people and the need to increase investments in children as essential for sustained and inclusive economic growth.

Background
The African continent is going to be immensely important for the future and progress of the world. Although the challenges are great, so is the potential.
Nowhere in the world are children more central to a continent's future than in Africa. By 2055 Africa will be home to 1 billion children, almost 40 per cent of the global total child population. By the end of the century, it is projected that Africa will be home to nearly half of the world's children. Reaping the benefits of this demographic advantage depends on every child, including those living in conflict and humanitarian crisis, getting the support they need – in education, health, skill building, work opportunities - so that they can fulfill their potential.

A radical and groundbreaking transformative education in Africa holds the promise for reaping a demographic dividend in the 21st century that could lift hundreds of millions out of extreme poverty and contribute to enhanced prosperity, stability, and peace on the continent. At the 36th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of States and Governments in February 2023, the African Union adopted education as the AU theme of the year for 2024. The year of education transformation in 2024 will be an opportunity for the AU to mobilize Governments and Development partners to rethink the models and modalities of education and skills development needed for Africa in the 21st century.

We must not overlook the fact that already, 1 billion children - nearly half of the world’s children - live in countries (mostly in Africa) that are at “extremely high-risk” to the current and immediate impacts of climate change. About 4.2 billion children more are expected to be born over the next 30 years. The climate crises exacerbate underlying vulnerabilities, compound existing grievances and disrupt peacebuilding efforts. It is our collective responsibility to bring children and future generations to the center of urgent climate action where leaders are to take decisive action to address the escalating climate crisis and its devastating impact on the most vulnerable populations, especially children so that we can secure a livable future for all.

UNICEF is well anchored across Africa, working closely with African governments, to tap into the wealth of potential and opportunities represented by the continent’s young and vibrant population and its developing private sector. In 2021, almost half of the UNICEF programme expenses went to Africa. The COVID-19 pandemic has come at a steep cost not only to children but to entire countries and economies, and to a continent that has been making incredible progress in recent decades. At such a time, UNICEF partnership with the African Union and with African Member States remain more critical than ever. As countries emerge from the pandemic, UNICEF remains strongly committed to its vision of change and progress for Africa’s children and young people, and to building the human capital that every country in Africa needs.

**Format of the Special Session:**

The Executive Board members and Member States are expected to participate in person. The Guest Speaker, President Azali Assoumani, Chairperson of the African Union and President of the Union of the Comoros, will address the Executive Board in a pre-recorded message. The session will also be attended by young people in person with a segment of voices from the field that will feature example of results achieved for children and youth in the continent, challenges that are still hampering the achievement of the targets set by the SDGs and Agenda 2063 both in humanitarian and development context.

**Expected Outcomes:**

The Session will be an opportunity to present to all Member States data/evidence-based messaging on the investments that are urgently required in the continent. It is hoped that the Session will be catalytic in renewing Member States’ commitment to scale up investments in Africa’s Human
Capital, including sharpening the focus on areas that are impacting the current progress of African children and youth, namely education and adaptation of basic services to climate change.

The Session will provide a platform for Member States to take stock of achievements and future priorities and renew global solidarity for current and future generations of the continent. Board Members and all Member States will engage in a dialogue on the efforts needed to accelerate the implementation of the 2063 agenda “The Africa We Want” and the Sustainable Development Goals for an Africa Fit for Children.

**Draft Run of show**

- President of the Executive Board announces the special focus session.
- UNICEF Executive Director introduces the guest speaker, sets the stage with top line updates on the partnership with the African Union and its importance
- President of the Union of the Comoros/Chairperson of the African Union addresses the Executive Board.
- Video from the regional offices together with the AU office on the partnership between UNICEF and African countries illustrative of the above narrative with data and evidence including a forward-looking vision. The video should showcase results, progress, opportunities and challenges for achieving children’s rights in Africa to scale up results towards the development of the human capital by 2063.
- Interactive panel discussion moderated by H. E. Mr. Claver Gatete, Permanent Representative, Rwanda, including the Permanent Observer of the African Union to the UN, Member States, a UNICEF Regional Director, 1-2 prominent leaders with 3 young people (one from each of the regions).
- Wrap-up by H.E. Mr. Claver Gatete, Permanent Representative, Rwanda.
- Member States to make statements on behalf of their Regional Group.
- Closing words by the Executive Director of UNICEF.
- President of the Executive Board announces the end of the EB Special Focus Session.

**Date and time:** 7 September 2023, 9:00-10:00 a.m. Eastern Standard Time (US)

**Venue:** UNHQ, Conference Room 3, Conference Building (1st basement)