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## UNDP and Partners Launch YouthConnekt Sahel to Foster the Socio-Economic Transformation of Sahelian Youth

Dakar, 6 September 2021 – The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in partnership with the YouthConnekt Africa (YCA) Hub, the United Nations Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel (OSCDs) and the Generation Unlimited Initiative in the Sahel (#GenUSahel), have announced the launch of the first edition of the YouthConnekt Sahel Forum (YCSF) 2021, set to take place from the 10-12 November 2021 in Dakar, Senegal, under the theme "Youth Rebranding the Sahel".

The forum will position Sahelian youth as leaders of the region's development narrative in transforming the Sahel through local disruptions, innovations, and positive engagement.

"Youth in the Sahel today are the generation that will change the sub-region's destiny," said Ahunna Eziakonwa, United Nations Assistant Secretary-General and UNDP Regional Director for Africa. "Investing in youth, particularly in their leading role as agents of change in managing resources, fostering climate adaptation, and building resilience – is how we can address the triple threat of poverty, violence, and climate change while building more inclusive and safer communities. The YouthConnekt Sahel Forum offers a platform to start a much-needed conversation on how together we can regenerate the Sahel."

Despite the Sahel being the most youthful region globally, with an estimated 65% of its population under 35, investments in this demographic are seriously lacking. An uptick in instability, untapped natural resources, and the lack of youth participation in political and socio-economic processes continue to challenge the region's full potential.

As a unique response, under the UNDP Sahel Youth Offer and in collaboration with the YouthConnekt Africa Hub, the YouthConnekt Sahel Initiative will inspire, connect, and empower young Sahelians to rebrand the Sahel from fragility, crisis and violence to a land of opportunities and investment. The initiative will also strengthen national YouthConnekt programmes to provide critical support to youth, promote innovative and promising practices, and reinforce local solutions as integrated models to empower youth and contribute to national development.

"The potential of the Sahelian youth has largely flown under the radar, mostly due to the challenges prevalent in the region," said Njoya Tikum, Manager, UNDP Sub-Regional Hub for West and Central Africa. "We have a golden opportunity to reverse this trend and put the region's greatest resource on track to shaping their future and that of the region."

Since its launch in 2017, YouthConnekt Africa has been at the forefront of the youth empowerment ecosystem in the continent, equipping young Africans with economic,



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social and civic leadership opportunities; increasing access to finance and technical assistance for scalable youth-led ventures and innovative youth empowerment initiatives; and improving ownership of the youth socio-economic transformation agenda.

Several African countries have demonstrated a strong interest in learning about YouthConnekt and replicating the model in their respective countries. Among the 10 UNISS Sahel countries, YouthConnekt Africa is present in 9 – Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, The Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Senegal, with Nigeria well on its way to launching its national chapter.

"Sahelian Youth are the engine to drive up their economies and contribute to the region's development. YouthConnekt Africa Hub stands firmly together with partners to empower Young Sahelians to secure their livelihoods and enable them to develop strong leadership, establish and engage in relevant platforms to ensure an improved economy in their respective YouthConnekt Chapters," said Oulie Keita, Executive Director, YouthConnekt Africa Hub.

The forum will mark the official launch of the regional YouthConnekt Sahel Initiative and the YouthConnekt Senegal Chapter, and discussions will focus on various aspects of youth empowerment for young Sahelians - economic, social, digital and political engagement. Over three days, a combination of youth-centred events will hold, including informative sessions, high-level plenaries, panel discussions, keynote speeches, mini-workshops, awards, learning visits, exhibitions, and cultural events.

The YouthConnekt Sahel Forum will convene annually to connect youth from across the region and beyond with policy influencers, political leaders, industry titans and development institutions to engage, discuss, design and accelerate youth empowerment efforts. The forum will create a platform for Sahelian youth to voice their issues, promote local solutions, rebrand the region and shape the futures they want.

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## About YouthConnekt Africa

*YouthConnekt Africa (YCA) is an African home-grown solution positioned to provide relevant solutions for the global South and support relevant South-South initiatives that empower youth. The YCA Hub operates as a pan-African platform with the vision of connecting African youth for socio-economic transformation.*

Learn more at [www.youthconnektafrica.org](http://www.youthconnektafrica.org)