



Republic of Malawi

**“THE NEXT COMESA AND THE NEXT GENERATION”**

**BY**

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**AT COMESA SUMMIT OF HEADS OF STATE AND  
GOVERNMENT**

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I want to make a special case for the Youth. We can only prepare for the future by investing in the Youth in a manner that prepares us for the next world.

From the wisdom of our people, one of our African proverbs puts the case in its perspective. This proverb says: *We have not inherited our land from our ancestors, rather, we have borrowed it from our children.*

The way we plan and manage our resources today shapes the reality that our next generation must grapple with. Our resources include the human capital. Let us consider the Youth as a human resource capital as well. Therefore, we must define the Youth as an opportunity and not as a problem.

At the same time, our planning for production, distribution and consumption of our natural and financial resources must always put the Youth at the center stage.

It is commendable that, as an organization, we have begun to take measures for empowering the Youth and creating job opportunities for them.

It is also commendable that various member states are taking active measures to address the Youth question. What we now need is to unite and consolidate our efforts.

By the nature of the mission and aspirations of COMESA, the Youth Agenda should inevitably be at the core of our focus.

We are an economic community that aspires to achieve *sustainable* economic and social progress in all the member states.

We have agreed to attain this sustained development through economic integration.

However, the idea of sustainability necessitates that we must inaugurate far-sighted plans and develop a human capital that will continue the vision. Thus, we must invest in the future by investing in the Youth.

The future into which we take the next generation is going to be different from the world in which COMESA exists today. Our economic reality will be different. The space of markets will be different as we think and operate more in virtual spaces.

In a few years to come, the nature and patterns of trade will change. The economies of the region are likely to be better, bigger and in need of a different kind of a labour market.

In a few years, our economic community will be trading services more than trading goods. There will be more demand for ICT services, banking services, financial services and tourism services among others.

Soon, we will be more industrialized countries. Agriculture will be more mechanized. We will be producing more.

We are looking at a region in which countries will have no choice but to join regional value chains. A product made in one country will depend on services provided from other countries.

Let me give one example to illustrate this point. Energy being generated in Malawi may depend on coal imported from Mozambique or gas from Tanzania while transportation and logistics come from Zambia.

The energy generated may in turn be fed into the regional pool of power to run factories and power houses in other countries. That is the integrated world we look forward to. The question remains: *how are we preparing our next generation for such a world?*

This is the Youth generation who are increasingly migrating into the digital world. In a way, our Youth live in virtual space.

They have multiple sources of knowledge. This can be a danger aggravated by the fact that there is no common way of understanding what various countries are growing, producing or offering.

A Youth generation that does not share a common understanding of our African reality can easily be a source of disintegration in a region that desires integration.

In our quest for progress here in COMESA, we have agreed to move as one economic front. But how shall we march to progress as one front if we don't get our next generation to walk a common path?

We can integrate in trade, customs and monetary affairs. We can integrate in transport and communication. We can integrate in information and technology infrastructure.

But our integration will remain incomplete unless we integrate our thinking, including the mindset of our Youth. Regional integration must succeed as a psychological progression if it is to succeed as an institutional process.

In this context, I submit that this organization must consider pursuing the following measures.

First, we need to find or create an institution that regulates common and authoritative curricula in economic and trade interests of the region.

Let us teach our Youths to think as a region, to think as a block, and to act as a front. We cannot talk of integration if we don't understand what different member states do.

Second, we must create a forum at which our ministers responsible for Youths and education convene to share best practices for addressing the Youth question.

Let us take advantage of the fact that member states are taking various initiatives in dealing with the Youth question. Let us learn from one another.

Let me offer that Malawi is willing to host the first ministerial meeting on this cause.

Thirdly, we need to create a mechanism for encouraging us all to increase our national budgets on the Youth bracket. Let us refocus our economic planning on the Youth.

My list of proposals is not cast in iron or stone. The more heads we put together, the more productive we become. And as we say, many hands make work light.

**Thank You for Your Attention!**

**May God Bless Africa!**