Papua New Guinea (PNG) faces a challenging future because of its youth bulge. Even though the country is rich in natural resources, about 40 per cent of the population lives in extreme poverty, below US $1 per day. With an annual population growth rate of 2.3 per cent with 50 per cent of the population under 20 years old, the youth population is expected to increase dramatically in the next twenty years. (UNDADF) As education and employment demands for youth intensify, the Government of PNG needs to respond to these issues, as they will affect the stability of its society.

Youth Unemployment and Underemployment
PNG’s population is highly youthful with 39 per cent of the population under 15 years old. Young people are 2.5 times more likely to be unemployed compared to adults, and 49 per cent of people registered as unemployed are aged under 25. (ILO, 2011) Many young people seek employment to secure the vital survival of themselves and their families. Economic uncertainties and limited private sector development make it harder for them to find formal employment. Less than 10,000 youths enter the formal labour market every year. (ILO, 2008) Of the rest, some remain unemployed or under-employed in the informal economy which is linked with lower wages, poor working conditions and career prospects.

Rural Youth
About 87 per cent of the total population lives in rural areas, which are mostly inaccessible by road and, rely on farming and cash crop production as the main sources of income. For the youths in PNG, the rural areas are increasingly considered unattractive because of lack of basic healthcare services, education opportunities and limited income generating opportunities (European Commission, 2007). Many young people leave the rural areas to find better life opportunities in cities, but most of them remained unemployed in the urban environment because of the lack of education, skills and experience.

Labour Migration
While international migration is low, internal migration from rural to urban areas is substantial. (UNESCO, 2009) The concentration of young people is even greater in urban areas as they migrate to towns in search of better education and employment opportunities. A large urban youth bulge, together with few job opportunities, contributes to growing inequality and instability of society and social conflict. Many youths who do not have access to sustainable income foray into crime and drugs, which has become a major social issue in PNG.

Young Women
Labour force participation and employment rates for women are very high in rural areas since most of them are engaged in agriculture and fishing for household consumption. However, in 2010, only 37.9 per cent of total employed women had waged jobs. (National Statistical Office, 2012) As girls are less likely to attend schools than boys, adult literacy rate of females is considerably lower than that of males. Also, only 26 per cent of the total enrolled students to vocational education were girls. (UNESCO, 2008) Lack of education opportunities significantly contribute to the inequalities in job opportunities of girls in the formal labour market.
Education and Skills Development
Approximately, 80,000 young people leave school every year, but only 10,000 people found jobs in the formal labour market. A mere 7.8 per cent of students would eventually finish Grade 12, and only 0.7 per cent of the population would obtain university-level education. (UNESCO, 2009) Graduates are likely to find employment in private sector, but few children and youths have the chance to complete their education, which becomes a major obstacle for them to find decent jobs in the labour market.

Child Labour
About 19 per cent of children work to supplement income for their family. (ILO, 2012) Child labour can be found in subsistence agriculture and plantation farms in rural areas, and a considerable number of children work as domestic servants, as well as in shops and hotels in urban areas. Some girls are even involved in commercial sexual exploitation in bars and night clubs.

Government Priorities
The Government of PNG recognizes the challenges it face regarding youth bulge, and is trying to adopt meaningful strategies to empower youths through education, technical and vocational trainings and entrepreneurial skills development programs to tackle youth unemployment crisis.

The UN and Youth in Papua New Guinea
14 United Nations (UN) agencies and international organizations work on the economic, social and cultural development of PNG under the United Nations Development Assistance Framework and UNESCO, World Bank and ILO actively run projects on youth employment.

The ILO in Papua New Guinea
The ILO seeks to promote decent work among youths by providing improved education and training and enhanced involvement of youth in Papua New Guinean society. ILO run a few Youth Employment projects in PNG such as Education, Employability and Decent Work for Youth in Pacific Island Countries and supported the development of a national employment policy.

Policy and Programme Recommendations
As part of the United Nations System-Wide Action Plan on Youth and Papua New Guinea Vision 2050, the following activities can be conducted to support youth employment in Papua New Guinea.

- Developing a reliable labour market data and information system on youth employment.
- Building employment services and centers for youth.
- Developing a demand driven, coordinated and inclusive TVET system.
- Providing entrepreneurship skills development programmes to promote youth entrepreneurship.
- Strengthening the capacity of the social partners and promoting tripartite solutions for youth employment at the local level.
- Advocating for a national policy on youth employment.

References
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More information is available at www.ilo.org

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