

THE YOUTH AND UNEMPLOYMENT IN ZIMBABWE

*Remarks presented by **Cephas Zinhumwe** at the National Youth Conference, with the theme, "Building a future with Decent Work for Young People held at Rainbow Towers in Harare on 29 March 2012*

Introduction

Youth unemployment is a global phenomenon. Worldwide, youth are 43.7% of the total unemployed people (ILO, 2010). In sub-Saharan Africa, about 60% of the unemployed are youth (ILO, 2010). The situation is no different for Zimbabwe with the Zimbabwe Poverty Assessment study (1995) revealing that the youth have the highest unemployment rate among all the age groups in the labour force in Zimbabwe. More recent figures indicate that out of the country's 12 million people, only 480,000 were formally employed in 2008, down from 3.6 million in 2003 (The United Nations Office of the Coordination Humanitarian Affairs [UNOCHA], 2008). Formal sector unemployment stood at 94 percent of which 67.7 percent constituted the youth (www.mydec.gov.zw). The rate of youth unemployment with regard to both formal and informal sectors of the Zimbabwe economy stood at 19 percent for females, 11 percent for males (Chakanya, 2008).

It was during the decade of long political and economic crisis that plagued Zimbabwe since 2000 that youth unemployment peaked. The unstable economic environment during this period led to the proliferation of the informal sector and parallel (black) market which absorbed most young people as agents and dealers. With the signing of the Global Political Agreement, the economy stabilized and these activities came to a sudden halt, worsening the situation of the youth. Against this backdrop, the Government of National Unity took reduction of unemployment to be one of the key areas of action. Article 3.1a of the GPA states that the parties shall be committed to working together on a full and comprehensive economic programme to resuscitate the economy which will urgently address the issues of unemployment (GPA 2008).

Causes and effects of youth unemployment

The causes of unemployment are manifold including the incompatibility between the curriculum and the needs of the industry in changing times. As a result of this disjuncture, graduates' skills are not relevant to the needs of the communities and nation at large. Furthermore, the shrinking economy cannot absorb all the youth. The effects of high youth unemployment include youth engaging into drug abuse, violence and crime, promiscuity leading to prostitution where they end up contracting HIV and AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections that can be detrimental to their health.

Recommendations of youth employment and entrepreneurship

The National Association of NGOs in Zimbabwe and its members strongly recommends that:

- Development of a comprehensive national employment policy in consultation with relevant stakeholders. There is need for strong involvement of the National Manpower Advisory Council (NAMACO) in employment policy issues and employment creation.
- The need for adopting a multi-sectoral approach involving all relevant ministries and civil society organisations working on the youth labour and employment issues to create synergies in attacking unemployment.
- Revision of the curriculum (education and training) to make it compatible with the needs of the industry – the world of work. Carrying out a skills requirements audit in the economy so that education and training respond to the needs of industry.
- Wide dissemination of the skills requirements of the economy through career guidance and counselling sessions so that students make informed decisions.
- Establishment of a co-ordinated Labour Market Information System to monitor labour market trends and facilitate the designing, planning and monitoring of policies and programmes geared at employment generation.
- Introduction of a comprehensive incomes policy to address discrepancies in salaries in the private and public sectors. Investments are to be made into the informal sector to allow for easy access of credit and general reform of regulations to allow the development of the sector.
- Putting an efficient apprenticeship system in place so that firms have more input into the system.
- Establishment and strengthening of entrepreneurship education in schools and tertiary institutions to foster the development of an

entrepreneurial culture among the youth to facilitate self-employment.

- Putting a loan and grant scheme in place to assist the needy to finance their education in vocational training colleges, technical colleges and universities.
- Provision of resources to the youth to support their development by all players; the government, international NGOs and civil society organisations in Zimbabwe.

Conclusion

In view of the afore-stated recommendations, it is prudent for the Republic of Zimbabwe to review the current national youth employment policy to address the causes and challenges of youth employment in the country. This conference needs to interrogate major youth challenges such as job availability and quality, rights to work, social protection, entrepreneurship and self-employment, education and training as well as issues of minimum wage. Addressing youth unemployment in Zimbabwe will curb the adverse effects of youth engaging into drug abuse, violence and crime and promiscuity leading to the spread of HIV/AIDS.

This is the right opportune to deliberate on these critical issues which will lead to a comprehensive national youth employment policy that promotes decent work for young people through their participation in socio-economic and political development of the country.

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