

Seminar tackles youth employment in Africa

The African Development Bank (AfDB) hosted a High Level Policy Dialogue [Seminar on Youth Employment](#) in Lusaka, Zambia, focusing on the challenges and opportunities faced by countries in the Southern Africa Region.

Attended by ministers from Zambia, Angola, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique and Mauritius, as well as representatives of international institutions and chaired by the chief economist and vice president of the AfDB, Prof. Mthuli Ncube, the seminar created an ideal platform for discussion on the policy priorities available for countries to tackle the critical issue of youth employment.

A source of social, economic and political instability

In his opening address, Ncube said, "Youth unemployment has become a potential source of social, economic and political instability of nations. Today's young people face a real and increasing difficulty in finding decent work. This was evident in the last two years, with youth-lead movements from Africa to Europe calling for social justice, freedom and jobs."

Addressing the delegates, Zambian Minister of Finance, Alexander Chikwanda said, "Youth Unemployment is ticking time bomb for all of us."

He added, "We need to create a healthy workforce with the right skills to meet the challenges of a modern economy, this can be achieved by encouraging productivity and entrepreneurship. This will require the joint efforts and solidarity of both the public and private sectors. As government, we need to provide the necessary governance and accountability, as well as building the credibility of the state."

Fackson Shamenda, MP, Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Labour for Zambia, concurred, "There is a lack of co-ordination in our efforts to address the issue of youth unemployment. We need to find appropriate mechanisms to better co-ordinate our programmes if we are to achieve our goals."

With almost 200 million people between the ages of 15 and 24, Africa has the youngest population in the world and by 2030, nearly one in four young people will be African. This presents African with an enormous opportunity, which in turn also presents a significant risk to the social cohesion and political stability, should Africa and its governments fail to create sufficient economic and employment opportunities to support decent living conditions for its youth.

Policies put in place

Some countries in the region are however putting policies in place.

Mauritius has a National Human Resource Plan that provides a policy framework for education, training programmes and career development, to meet the skills demands of employers, and at the same time reduce the mismatch between supply and demand.

In Zambia the government has put in place a National Youth Policy and Youth Enterprise Fund to accelerate poverty reduction.

Over the last decade, Africa has seen unparalleled and sustained improvement in growth, with six of the world's ten fastest growing economies in Africa. This however has not lead to the necessary job creation needed to absorb the 10-12 million young increasingly education people entering the labour market.

Find innovative ways

Government's need to find innovative ways in which to leverage this opportunity. This could include prioritising measures that target young people most at risk by strengthening apprenticeship and vocational training programmes for low skilled youth; the provision of incentives to small, medium and micro-enterprises (SMME's) that employ youth through apprenticeship and internship schemes, as well as encouraging SMME's to hire youth through the reduction of social security contributions or the introduction of wage subsidies.

President of the Zambian Association of Chambers of Commerce, Geoffrey Sakulanda added, "Job creation and employment is dependent on a vibrant private sector. If we are to increase business opportunities, we need to work together with governments, in order to find ways in which SMME's get greater access to capital and long term credit, whilst removing barriers such as over regulation and controls in the market."

During the past years, the AfDB's interventions have already geared towards employment creation on the continent. Some of the interventions address the unlocking of the infrastructure constraint in order to significantly reduce the cost of doing business for the private sector and facilitate regional economic integration; and improvement of government's capacity to implement economic reforms and deliver social services.

In conclusion the AfDB chief economist stated, "It has become clear that there are no quick fixes to ensuring that all Africa's young people get off to a good start. Stronger job creation mechanisms grounded in a deliberate strategy for inclusive growth and social development are needed."

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