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"YOUTH EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA: BOTSWANA'S EXPERIENCE".

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Organisation of Paper

- Introduction
- Brief Overview of Botswana's political economy
- Unemployment trends: Botswana
- Government initiatives to stave off youth unemployment
- Lessons from Botswana
- Conclusion.

Introduction

- Youth unemployment in Africa is a major cause for concern. 60% of the continent's unemployed are youth, figures often double that of adults. Within the SADC region, two thirds of the population is below the age of 35 years, and a substantial segment of this figure is unemployed.

- While unemployment destroys the economic and personal welfare for all those affected by it regardless of age, the destruction is most pronounced when it comes to the youth (Motlaleng & Narayana, 2014).

- youth unemployment has caused some to migrate in search of greener pastures.

Botswana: Political Economy

- At independence in 1966, the country was ranked among the poorest nations on the African continent.
- In the 1970s, the country's fortunes turned for the better following the discovery of diamonds; growth rate and GDP shot up with time.
- Prudent macroeconomic management as well as stable governance resulted in attainment of upper middle income status (Mafela, Maundeni & Mookodi, 2011).
- Yet despite the impressive figures, poverty and indeed unemployment have persisted.

Unemployment Trends

- In the 1990s, and early 2000s, unemployment was estimated at between 20 and 23%, and by 2005 it fell to 17.6%.

- In 2011 the unemployment rate averaged 17.8%, which translated to 126, 349 unemployed persons, in a country with a labour force of 710 600.

- Statistics Botswana (2011:5) lamented that, “The age group distribution indicates the highest unemployment rate of 41,4% is among the 15-19 year age group followed by the 20-24 year age group of 34.0 percent”. (Statistics Botswana, 2011).

Youth Unemployment Figures

- According to figures released at a Youth Employment Summit held in 2016, nationally the unemployment rate stood at 20% in 2013, while poverty levels stood at 19%.
- In that scenario, youth unemployment was said to account for 20% of total unemployed labour force (World Bank, 2015).
- Two thirds of the unemployed youth in Botswana were said to be under the age of 30 years.

Underemployment Issue

- There are high levels of underemployment and poor quality jobs mostly in the informal sector (World Bank 2015).

- Kuhlmann (2018a: 24) observed, "*Then there are hundreds of graduate prudes who are waiting tables, scrubbing floors, tending gardens – doing anything just to earn a living……*".

- *Y*oung people in Botswana face challenges in finding decent work, many end up in poor quality jobs and get paid poorly as they are desperate (Kuhlmann (2018a: 24).

“Poor Youth” Category

- According to Statistics Botswana (2018) there is a category of youth in Botswana that can be termed “poor youth”.

- The MMTHS 2015/16 Survey revealed that out of 643, 542 total youth aged 18 to 35 years, 96 510 (or 15%) fell in the poor category.

- These included ‘employed poor’ youth who worked as petrol attendants, shop assistants, cattle assistants, security guards, caring for the sick at home, in agriculture (Statistics Botswana, 2018).

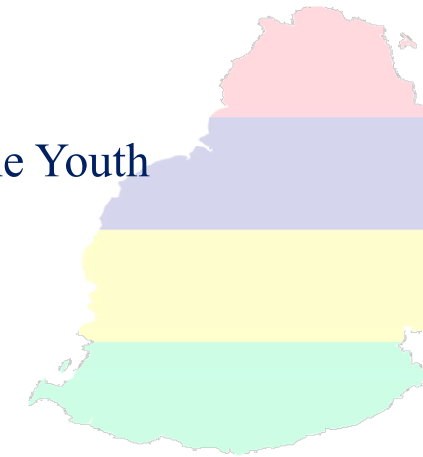
Consequences of Youth Unemployment

- High rates of unemployment (and underemployment for that matter) tend to be associated a plethora of social ills including drug and substance abuse, violence, pre-marital sex, teenage pregnancies and crime (Statistics Botswana 2014; Mafela et al, 2011).

- Youth, especially females, are often forced to supplement meagre wages through commercial sex work, thereby exposing themselves to HIV infection.

Government Youth Empowerment Initiatives

- As way back as 1996 parliament passed the National Youth Policy and this fell under the Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs.
- The National Youth Policy is guided by an Action Plan whose brief, inter alia, includes addressing issues around the thorny subject of youth unemployment (GoB (2010).
- The initiatives in place have included the National Internship Programme (NIP), the Youth Development Fund (YDF) and the Young Farmers Fund (YFF).



National Internship Programme (NIP)

- The *National Internship Programme* (NIP) is an initiative that sought to address the issue of skills development of the youth of the country.
- It involves placement of unemployed graduates in agencies to facilitate acquisition of skills to enhance their chances of getting permanent employment.
- Emphasis is on institutional financing to provide young people with access to finance to facilitate entrepreneurial skills development (GoB 2009).
- Degree and Diploma holders are placed for 24 months to gain on-the-job skills, and during the placement period interns receive a monthly allowance (MLHA, 2011).

NIP Challenges

- Critics say the programme only succeeded in providing temporary exploitative employment for very few young people (Sunday Standard, 2018, Diraditsile (2017).
- Some say most young people involved in the programme have not gained sufficient professional training and skills due to weak monitoring and job shadowing arrangements (Nthomang & Diraditsile, 2016).
- Others say the programme is too expensive (at P1400 per month) per individual, and hence not sustainable (Sunday Standard, 2018).
- However critics fail to appreciate the bigger picture; that scores of youth have enormously benefitted from this initiative and on balance the programme's positives far out-weigh the it's negatives.

Youth Development Fund (YDF)

- *The Youth Development Fund* (YDF) is a youth empowerment scheme that supports youth who have dropped out of school with funds to start self-employment income generating projects.
- The Fund promotes such ventures as agriculture, tourism, services, and the manufacturing sector (Min of Youth, Sport and Culture, 2014).
- One strategy involves funding (P50 000 to P 100 000 per project) for Micro and Small Scale Enterprises; another for Medium Scale Enterprises (P101 000 to P450 000) (MYSC, 2014).
- Focus is on youth aged 15 – 35 years which helps in creating an entrepreneurial culture among the country's youth (often at a very young age).

YDF Challenges

- Resource scarcity (despite the country's upper middle income status), meaning not everyone requiring the fund will get access.
- There have also been concerns that there also tends to be too much red tape in some instances, resulting in implementation delays. (Also at times violation of intellectual property rights).
- Some youth feel the orientation (i.e. training) period is rather too short and also that often they (youth) end up being thrown to the deep end with limited skills before they are ready to swim.
- Lack of proper "ownership" of particular projects given that in efforts to access funds some youth use consultants to draw up 'bankable' project proposals on their behalf (not necessarily their preferred ventures).
- However, these concerns are clearly an exception rather than the rule; numerous success stories have been noted or documented. Meaning the programme has by some accounts been a resounding success.

Young Farmers Fund (YFF)

- The *Young Farmers Fund* (YFF) provides graduates of agricultural colleges with funds to start sustainable self-employment projects in the agricultural sector.
- The fund targets Degree, Diploma and Certificate holders and provides agricultural loans to start sustainable agricultural projects (MFDP, 2006).
- The YFF is managed by officers from Citizen Entrepreneurial Development Agency (CEDA) which provides financial and technical support for business development.
- CEDA's mandate is to promote viable and sustainable citizen owned business enterprises; hence it is for this reason that this agency manages the YFF.

Local Enterprise Authority (LEA)

- Youth can also benefit from capacity building in entrepreneurship through access to resources of an organisation called the Local Enterprise Authority (LEA).
- LEA helps individuals start and manage sustainable projects to provide both income and self-employment opportunities.
- LEA's (2004) mandate is to service the general populace (and not specifically the youth) although they (youth) too can access its services.
- The capacity building initiative is meant to enhance beneficiaries' capacity to grow their enterprise in a sustainable manner (LEA, 2004).

Addressing Bottlenecks

- In 2015, the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Culture came up with a document on affirmative action in favour of the youth (GOB 2015). These initiatives included directives to Land Boards across the country, inter alia, to:

- A) grant to youth businesses a 5-year grace period without paying lease fees, for premises being used, and also youth who bid and won tenders for commercial plots be allowed to pay-off the price in instalments instead of a one off lump sum;

- That youth companies should acquire tender documents at a charge of 50% of selling price to accord them the opportunity to bid for a wide spectrum of products and services.

- The list is not exhaustive but these directives have considerably helped promote youth employment projects across the country.

Lessons from Botswana's Experience

1. ***Political will is key***: political will on the part of the government is crucial for meaningful results;

2. ***Catch them young*** – there is need to provide entrepreneurial skills to youth at an early age (15 years).

3. "***Disabuse" family unit about diploma disease mentality*** - Families need to be made to appreciate that if well-groomed, youth can actually become employers rather than simply employees.

4. ***Create conducive environment*** - Botswana has demonstrated that it is possible to make the (national) environment sufficiently attractive to obviate the urge by the youth to migrate to greener pastures.

5. ***Ploughshares and not swords***: An object lesson is that national political stability has the potential to pay handsome dividends. Many African countries lack stability hence employment initiatives get derailed.

Conclusion

- Botswana has indeed made commendable strides in the area of youth employment.

- Clearly the rest of the African continent can take a leaf from the manner in which the Government of Botswana has handled the thorny issue of youth unemployment.

- True, unemployment levels in Botswana remain high, but the bold steps taken by the Government to empower the country's youth ought to be applauded and emulated by many countries in the sub-region.