

## **Stimulating Entrepreneurship among the Youth:**

**GATOBU MUGWIKA**

With over 200 million people aged 15 and 24, Africa has the largest population of young people in the world. This is a resource we must tap into for our development, but it calls for a multi-faceted approach: Addressing the youth's skills gap, creating market linkages, undertaking mentorship, and offering seed capital.

Across Africa, youth unemployment remains the big challenge. For many countries, finding solutions is a top priority, largely because the outcome will have spill-over effects across society – improving social and political stability, and benefiting generations.

The covid-19 pandemic only exacerbated the situation by slowing down efforts by countries to fast-track their youth development, and thus aggravating the unemployment crisis.

The scope of youth unemployment in the continent is well demonstrated in World Bank statistics that youths account for 60 % of all Africa's jobless.

However, the continent's youthful population is also its greatest asset from a human resource perspective. The United Nations projects that by 2030, an estimated 100 million young people will have entered the labour market in Africa, representing more than 10 million young job-seekers each year.

The demographic surge can be an opportunity if we can solve the employability challenge. To meet economic demand and build a future for young people, it is now urgent to strengthen the effectiveness of vocational training systems through partnerships.

Thus, there is urgent need by both public and private sector players to recognise youth employment as a priority, so that they may create effective interventions to offer young people more and better earning opportunities.

The World Youth Skills Day, marked every July 15<sup>th</sup>, provides an opportunity to reflect on the catalytic interventions for job creation, to enable nations to generate opportunities for the youth, beyond formal employment. The youth form an integral part of any society, and are an essential part of the development process.

Fresh graduates are a worried lot because of the shrinking opportunities in the labour market. There's much uncertainty, as it has been proven that simply having the right qualifications is not enough anymore. Even before covid-19 pandemic struck, we had witnessed a surge in the number of job losses, with businesses folding. The grim reality is that we have very limited formal employment opportunities now, but this has also created a huge chance for self-employment.

While the reality is less than ideal, global technological advancements have placed the youth in a better position to disrupt every sector of the economy. In the agricultural sector, for

instance, some young men are already leveraging opportunities offered by digital technologies to increase productivity and access to services and markets.

To catalyse such efforts, it is our collective responsibility to promote youth skills development and youth-owned enterprises. Promoting enterprises that are owned by young people provides a powerful mechanism for job creation, innovation and empowerment, and unlocks the full participation of young people in the economy.

The 2023 World Skills Youth Day theme, ***“Skilling teachers, trainers and youth for a transformative future”***, emphasised the need for education systems to be oriented towards producing youths who have both strong foundational skills as well as specific competencies for jobs.

Hands-on skills are a catalyst for job creation, as they enable individuals to either pursue employment, or go for self-employment by setting up enterprises and providing the specific goods and services.

Non-governmental organisations such as the KCB foundation in Kenya and others, are playing their roles in tackling youth unemployment through skills and enterprise development, by focusing on the socio-economic empowerment of young people through their programmes such as the Jijiri programme by KCB foundation.

There are skills development and job creation initiatives that seek to catalyse employment and wealth creation among the youth. They empower and equip unemployed and out-of-school youths to establish micro-enterprises by providing them with technical skills and training opportunities, as well as up-skilling and certifying existing micro-entrepreneurs seeking to move their businesses from informal to the formal sector.

Some non-governmental organisations such as the KCB foundation have rolled out programmes which are closely aligned with Kenya’s policy frameworks affecting economic, small business, youth, and skills development. For KCB foundation for example, since 2016, their Jijiri programme has created about 102,679 jobs, trained 22,959 youths, incubated 5,594 businesses, disbursed Kshs 26 million in loans as business capital, and issued 918 business start-up toolkits.

KCB foundation for example has deliberately offered practical skills and entrepreneurship training, mentorship through partnerships with various industry titans, as well as extending start-up capital. Today, the stories emerging from the programme are phenomenal. Some of the beneficiaries are already managing competitive businesses and creating employment for other youths who would have otherwise remained unemployed. To ensure the quality of skills, the KCB foundation programme has engaged over 43 technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions countrywide, to train the youth. The TVET institutions are contractually obligated to ensure the youth are adequately skilled and retained to complete the programme and attain certification. The institutions provide linkages and referrals for internship and job placements.

As the size of the younger population in Africa steadily swells, our youth is a great gift of dynamism for us to leverage on to drive economic growth and development of our nations. We must invest in deliberate efforts to nurture and empower them to own and manage profitable and competitive enterprises.