



PUBLIC DIALOGUE BRIEF: Human Rights Implications of Youth

Unemployment

Kyambogo University

23 February, 2015 | 1400-1630

This Public Dialogue was conducted in collaboration with the Human Rights class of Kyambogo University albeit with attendance from other disciplines. It featured a main presentation by the Visiting Fellow Fr Dr Pascal Kabura and responses from Hon Muwanga Kivumbi, Hon Brenda Nabukenya and Ms Sarah Bireete. Dr Margaret Lubega and Dr Margaret Kaahwa co-chaired the discussion.

The term “unemployment” has in modern times become an international chorus in every city or village. Although circumstances may differ from one country to another, and the effects of unemployment may vary, international consensus has been built that government should take responsibility to create employment for their citizens and that failure to do so would be a good reason to retire an entire government or some of its sectors. Dr Kabura pointed out the central role that the International Labour Organisation¹ plays in the United Nations Organisation establishment insofar as fighting unemployment is concerned.

The world is faced with a worsening youth unemployment crisis: young people are three times more likely to be unemployed than adults. Millions of youth around the globe are looking for work. The situation continues to get worse and very scaring. Governments are more and more getting scared of unemployed youth. Quite often the success of a government is measured by its ability and capacity to bring down unemployment rate. This is usually done by established, timely and appropriate economic policies that stimulate employment opportunities.

Each year Ugandan Universities “pour” more youth into the crowded labour market. Most of these youth crowd themselves into urban areas where they keep hoping to be one of the lucky ones. Unfortunately 85% of the labour in Uganda is in the rural areas. (Note: Most of this labour is considered unattractive to the youth).

Although youth unemployment is a worldwide problem, the Ugandan situation can be considered more worrying than most countries. In fact we are soon arriving at a very critical moment of the crisis where by all citizens will wake up one day and regret for having had to live in a country whose youth (children) have no hope for tomorrow. The warning is already written on the screen “There is no tomorrow for us, therefore there is no tomorrow for all”. The warning appears to read.

¹ Established in 1919 ILO’s main aims are to promote the rights at work, encourage descent employment opportunities, enhance social protection and strengthen dialogue on work related issues



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Some people are already scared of this warning. Parents are some of the worried. Their hope of leaving behind a happier generation has all been shattered. Their “insurance policy” is threatened and are therefore regretting for having done the wrong investment (Education which used to be the best insurance policy is now lost). Another class of people that are worried are the “property masters”. These are the people who have worked or stolen and invested their catch wisely. A hopeless hungry youth population is not going to sleep on an empty stomach when the few “property masters’ are having a good time. High perimeter walls, electrified fences, security alarms, and cameras will not scare off this growing force. The most scared by the youth unemployment crisis is the state. It is becoming clear that the government of Uganda while acknowledging the crisis, it is getting worried about this worsening situation. It has never happened in the history of modern states that a head of state carries a sack of money (hard cash) to appease an angry group of youth.

Dr Kabura ended his presentation by noting that youth unemployment in Uganda has reached a critical point of crisis. Ugandans are rightly concerned about and scared by this situation. Unfortunately Ugandans are not yet angry enough to take same action to reverse the situation. Uganda’s unemployed youth may be the one’s to take a lead in claiming their right to be provided with employment opportunities and that it is a matter that every citizen ought to be seriously concerned about.

In their responses, Ms Sarah Bireete, Hon Brenda Nabukenya and Hon Muwanga Kivumbi were unanimous in their prognosis of the unemployment question in Uganda as a political question that cannot be divorced from the broader governance malaise that afflicts Uganda. They only differed in their characterization of the human rights implications ranging from the dehumanization of young people; creation of a desperate electorate that is willing and ready to sell their vote in return for money or material benefits.

In the plenary session, there was unanimity for the proposal that this matter should be taken on with the urgency it deserves by all young people in Uganda regardless of their affiliations, professions and socioeconomic standing.