

Chapter 81

Critical Examination of the Implications of Youth Unemployment in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

The chapter examines youth unemployment and its dimensions and characteristics in relation to overall unemployment. Youth unemployment has become increasingly recognized as one of the more serious social problems confronting Africa. There are many reasons why the government of Zimbabwe and society feel increasingly concerned about this problem. At the human level, failure to secure satisfactory employment upon completion of schooling and training can cause intense frustration, despair and alienation. It may also be associated with such social ills as drunkenness, drug-taking, violence, robbery and prostitution. From a material point of view, youth unemployment represents a tragic waste of skills and talents, resulting in lower production, increase in dependency burden on the rest of the society, and in the longer run, a gradual deterioration in the quality of national human resources. The potential consequences of high levels of youth unemployment at personal, social and national levels are thus serious and warrant sustained efforts to find solutions to these problems.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, the period of youth has been associated with problems. As early as fifth century B.C., Socrates observed:

Our youth now love luxury. They have bad manners, contempt for authority, they show disrespect for their elders and love chatter in place of exercise. They no longer rise when others enter the room. They contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble up their food and tyrannise their teachers (Dacey, 1984:4).

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The contention is that not only do youths create problems for society but society also creates problems for youths and their socio-economic development. The majority of the people in Zimbabwe of which the youth are a disproportionate number getting through each day is a major victory. Thousands of young women and men are wasted as they idle away for lack of anything meaningful to occupy them. In fact, the failures in development have made many people believe that their situation is not likely to change. The question thus becomes how can the government of Zimbabwe meet people's basic needs in such a way that the youths can have a meaningful life? What is needed is money, in combination with political support, appropriate advice, valid solutions and efficient management.

Youth development is a task that no country can afford to ignore or attempt without the necessary resources, coordinated efforts and the seriousness that it deserves. Yet the Government of Zimbabwe's efforts at youth socio-economic development are often hampered by misdirection, lack of resources, political expediency and lack of concrete or realistic policies among others, as opposed to socio-economic realism. What should Zimbabwe do, considering its bulging youth population, which needs the appropriate skills to graduate into good jobs? This was one of the many questions addressed at the 2018 African Transformation Forum (ATF2018), which was held in Accra, Ghana, and organised by the African Center for Economic Transformation (ACET).

Youth unemployment is a serious national problem that Zimbabwe needs to resolve urgently. It has been a subject of increasing debate, analysis and definition. Unfortunately, the solution is still not in sight and the problem is becoming more serious. While unemployment increases with urbanisation, underemployment too is wide-spread and deep seated in Zimbabwe.

The youth problem cannot be solved by the government alone. It requires the concerted efforts of the government, communities, individuals, academicians, international, local organisations and youths themselves. In line with Section 20 of the Zimbabwe Constitution and the Zimbabwe Youth Policy; young people should participate in political, social, economic and cultural development of the country. Additionally, in line with the Agenda 2063 of the Africa Union, youth inclusion and empowerment is at the center of African Union (AU) taking youth not only as beneficiaries but also as leaders and key stakeholders in national development processes. What motivated this chapter is the recognition of the vital importance of young people both in their ability to contribute to the socio-economic progress of humankind and their potential to approach afresh the problems of humankind. Time and again it is said that the youth represent the future. They do not only represent the future but they are also the embodiment of hope for the future. This chapter therefore seeks to discuss and analyse the youth situation in terms of opinions and ideas that might help the government of Zimbabwe to take a realistic look at the youth problem and its solution. This chapter also deals with the youth problem and its administrative and political implications, the law as it affects youth and their participation in society, unemployment, youth activities in the informal sector, community programmes and training of youth for development and self-reliance. The chapter further studies sociological aspects of the youth problem such as delinquency, crime and prostitution among others.

CONCEPTUALISING YOUTH AND YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

The crucial question of who the youth is needs to be tackled. The debate on who is a youth has not resolved the confusion surrounding the concept. Generally, the period between childhood and adulthood is called youth. Defining the concept youth is always a problem. The Commonwealth Secretariat (1973)

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