

# ***NETWORKING AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR YOUTH EMPOWERMENT-***

**Presented at the**

**NAMIBIA YOUTH SOCIAL FORUM**

**4 February 2006**



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**Distinguished Youth**

**Distinguished non-Youth**

**Distinguished Youth Sympathizers**

**My task here today is simple and that is to give you a perspective as to why we need to network as youth from an economic and business dimension.**

**When we talk of youth from an economic and business perspective, we do not mean a child below fifteen. Rather we mean the economically productive segment of our population between 14 and 35. Those that are in the middle of their life cycle transition from childhood through adulthood and entering their oldhood.**

**Friends, globally, youth makes up over an estimated 1.8 billion people in the world. They represent a significant if not the significant drivers for the employment industry, economic growth, technological advancement, realized business opportunities, savings, investments, taxation, education, recruitment, training, and demand for services be it tangible or intangible.**

Sadly, they are equally the one's who get easily susceptible to the global evils of today. Youth of today who find themselves alienated from society either through deliberate socio-economic exclusionist policy or by political economic design, tend to be most frustrated by lack of economic and business opportunities and without such means are sometimes are more vulnerable than the other age profile in terms of involvement with illegal/unethical criminal activities, get easily trapped in poverty, and form the bulk of the unemployed with little or no protection benefits for the future. Because of their high level of economic and social activeness, youth remains the most exposed age segment in terms of contracting the dreaded disease HIV/Aids.

They do also sadly become the burden for the society as the relatively old has to subsidies for their health cost due to the dreaded disease and the young does not increasingly have a role models to look up to thus increasing their propensity to follow the same route of burden.

Friends, I am not to here to paint a gloomy picture of what youth represents today in our economic and business world. Youth are the creators of income and drivers of expenses thus creating demand for supplies. They are also managers, entrepreneurs, controllers of the economic and business fabrics including the SMEs,

parastatals, and private entities as well as research institutions. They are mainly the ones that create new ideas and transform them into an innovative product. Take the computer, cellphone and Ipad or recently the washing machine for example.

They are also the ones who possess more marketable and sustainable skills thus enabling them to be the drivers of the economy.

Youth in Namibia is officially defined as people between the ages of 15-24, constituting about 363 000 people or little over 19% of the population. The median age considered for youth is 19 years. But as all of you are aware by now, such a youth definition seems to be narrow from a practical perspective. Hence youth in Namibia can be termed as those between 14 and 35, a definition still broadly used by most youth organizations in Namibia.

Youth in Namibia holds the key to our society. They represent the apex of our ambitions, goals, aspirations, peace, security, governance, human rights and economic development. The old adage “**Youth represents our leaders of tomorrow**” is true and factual within this context and I am sure that the greatest yearning for the youth of Namibia today is to partake into the economic and business opportunities.

One of the key processes of ensuring for the **voice of Youth** to be heard in Namibia is through networking. Networking I would define it as a deliberate conscious and non-conscious effort on the part of us as youth to critically and collectively examine our socio-economic and political situation and to partake on how to improve our situation in Namibia.

Today, networking for youth in Namibia is centred around official structures only. These structures are perhaps the only platforms where youth amplifies their concerns and ensure that they should be heard as youth. These structures range from civil societies, governmental institutions to the private sector. These include Junior Chambers of Namibia, Junior Achievement Namibia, Youth Parliament, National Youth Councils, Regional Youth Associations, and Municipal Youth Forums with Youth Majors etc.

Even though this structures are important for us as youth, purely having such structures are not enough. Youth need to actively engage in an informal dialogue and amplify their concerns in a free and spirited fashion to the Namibian society and ensure that there is a political, socio-economic change on the part of youth development and inclusion within the overall policy making of the country. This should ultimately avoid the danger of defining youth participation in Namibia purely as a **“youth specific issue”**, but as part of

economic and business partners in the society worthy to be listen to and as a force to reckon with.

Hence, I myself as a youth although it may only be effective for one more year only according to the definition wants to congratulate the youth organizers of this event. And I want to say, please organize more as this can only ensure effective informal networking where we can gain not only the economic, social and political freedom, but individual and collective self-confidence, and realize our goal as economic and business/entrepreneurial agents in the economy.

Lastly, I would like to in the same vein call for a more proactive approach as a subset of the overall black economic empowerment programme and law in Namibia, an integrated and coherent socio-economic youth empowerment programme that directly and deliberately integrates youth into the mainstream of the Namibian economy, in a manner that creates sustainable livelihoods for young people through programmes that increase their income, asset and skills opportunities, and increase the numbers of young people that manage, own and control productive enterprises.

I thank you