

***YOUTH EMPOWERMENT-
ECONOMIC IMPERATIVE/RATIONALE***

Presented at the

**KARAS YOUTH ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT
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Mr. Moderator

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentleman

I am unable to make it for this important gathering but thought to give you an insightful view on youth empowerment process and its relevance within the economic sphere of Namibia. Youth empowerment is a process whereby the youth of Namibia becomes empowered by firstly earning future good incomes, secondly, manage, control or drive entrepreneurially the income generating processes such as the Small and Medium Business (SME's), and thirdly owning an existing or upcoming economic ventures and lastly, possessing marketable and sustainable skills.

In order to do this, we need to be clear as to who are the youth in Namibia. By addressing such a question, we need to further define the youth empowerment process within the context of an overall black economic empowerment process that is currently being spearheaded by the government. Lastly, there is also a need to be aware of what strategies, tactics and policies one needs to consider to ensure integration of youth within the economic mainstream of the country.

Mr. Moderator, Allow me to make one issue clear and that is the definition of youth. From an international specific, the definition of youth can be country-specific and it can also be era-specific. It is therefore not universal, nor is it permanent. Countries also define youth according to various reasons. It usually varies between 14 and 28, 30, 35, 40 and 45. There are some countries, though, where it is just unbounded.

In terms of the World Population Prospects (United Nations, New York, 2002), Youth in Namibia is 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, since youth in Namibia can be

termed as those between 14 and 35, a definition still broadly used by most youth organizations in Namibia. This means that for the purposes of youth economic empowerment, youth would be those between the ages 15 to 24 to 35 years, which can also be classified as the group that is mainly economically-active.

Hence, my focus of youth empowerment will rests on the youth age profile of 15-35 years, given that there are continued economic challenges still faced by this broad group of young people in Namibia.

Mr. Moderator, when the word “youth” is mentioned, it is always the case that from a mindset perspective, we think of youth in terms of schools, tertiary education, sports, arts and culture. But we do not think of them in economic terms. Accordingly, we all know that there is a concern among us that unemployment is one of the major economic problems facing Namibia, as also indicated in the NDP II plan. But according to the *Labour Force Survey 2000*, we do not take cognizance of the fact that of the current unemployment rate of 33.8%, about 41% constitutes youth unemployment which are aged between 15-24 years. Adopting the broad youth definition of up to 35 years, could indicate that the unemployed youth can constitute a larger percentage of all unemployed people in Namibia and that this figure could be as high as 70%.

Youth unemployment also varies regionally, where the Karas region records the third highest youth unemployment (with 47%) preceded by Omaheke (50.5%) and rivaling closely the Omusati region (47.6%). Surprisingly, the lowest youth unemployment was recorded in Oshikoto (33.1%), Kunene (35%) and Otjozondjupa (36%) regions. The Erongo records 39.8% and khomas 40.9%, which is also surprising in the light where formal job opportunities are abundant but could be confounded by the high urbanization rate in those regions.

Mr. Moderator, suffice to say that these figures make a very strong case for ensuring that there needs to be a broad-based youth economic empowerment in terms of jobs, skills development and self-employment opportunities. This can enable the youth of Namibia to equip resourceful assets that can allow them to contribute meaningfully to the sustainable growth and development of the Namibian economy. 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 for economic participation, for economic opportunities.

Historically, we all know that it is increasingly difficult for young people to find work – partly because there are not enough jobs and partly because the young do not have the skills that are in demand in the labour market. Currently, too few young people are given opportunities to improve their skills in areas that will enhance their employability.

Furthermore, the aspirations of the youth of Namibia cannot be separated from those of the people of Namibia as a whole. Care should be taken that the aspirations of the youth as a sub-element of the broader category of the aspirations of all the people should not be neglected as it could lead to socio-economic marginalization of the youth, Hence, such a situation of having many young people economically un-engaged and unproductive would certainly rob the country of the energy and genius of the youth, and would pose a serious social threat to the future economic prosperity of the Namibian economy.

As a result, there is a need to propose a number of strategic interventions with regard to youth empowerment. *First* of all, there is a need to ensure as a subset of the overall black economic empowerment programme and law in Namibia, an integrated and coherent socio-economic youth economic 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, including the cooperate enterprises.

Secondly, and complementary to the first strategy, is attending to the critical issue that confronts the youth which is job creation. This should be done through special projects such as expanded public works programmes, the national youth service programme and others; skills development such as learnership and internship programmes, small business development support etc. Please note

that I am not saying that these programmes are non-existing in Namibia. I am aware that there are some programmes in place but is not as yet effective and some have not as yet been started. In order to reduce youth unemployment, there would be a need to ensure the effectiveness of existing programmes and commencement of those not as yet started.

As a *third* strategy, there is a need to ensure creation of platforms where youth can be heard. Youth needs to be involved in structures of civil societies, governmental institutions and private and public sector. It is worthwhile to note that there are Junior Chambers of Namibia, Youth Parliament, National Youth Councils, Regional Youth Associations, and Municipal Youth Forums with Youth Majors etc. But purely having such structures are not enough. Youth need to actively engage in dialogue and amplify their concerns to the Namibian society and ensure that there is a political, socio-economic change on the part of youth development and inclusion within overall policy making of the country. This should ultimately avoid the danger of defining youth participation purely as human resources and skills development, but as economic agents worthy to be listen to and as a force to reckon with.

The *fourth* strategy should revolve around ensuring adequate financing for youth economic empowerment. This means that institutions, structures, methods and procedures should be created to ensure that youth has access to capital. The Namibia Development Bank can establish a “window facility” called a **Youth Empowerment Fund** where financing and utilization guidelines can be established targeted at the Youth age profile. Other institutions such as the banking industry and Microfinance institutions can also play a role in terms of re-orienting its financing profile towards youth empowerment.

Fifthly, Youth empowerment should be geared also towards ensured access to business development. Issues such as Mentorship and coaching, Access to skills training and entrepreneurship education, Development of small business support infrastructure, identification of innovative ideas for youth involvement should be pursued as a matter of priority.

The *sixth* strategy should revolve around access to procurement opportunities. Government and private corporate procurement policies should set targets for youth procurement, employment and skills development through learnership and internship programmes.

Lastly, building capacity of the youth at the regional and local levels should not also be under-emphasized. In order to fully implement youth empowerment process within Namibia, government, in partnership with the private and public sector, must build the capacity of the youth at regional and local levels through various interventions such as life, youth education initiatives, and other basic skills development to equip them with the capacity to access information, access support for their projects and participate in or implement those projects. Today, this stands as one of the greatest obstacles towards youth economic empowerment, and addressing it would unlock the real and full potential of the youth of Namibia.

To ensure effective strategic interventions, Youth need to formulate the following policy objectives that should realize effective youth economic empowerment. These are as follows;

- ✚ *A substantial increase in the number of young people that **earn** an income through a variety of programmes, including jobs, special programmes, self-employment and empowerment;*
- ✚ *A significant increase in the numbers of young people that possess **skills** that are relevant to the demands of the labour market, the fast-changing economy and that are sustainable and can lead to either employment or self-employment;*
- ✚ *A significant increase in the numbers of young people that involved in the ownership and **management** of economic activities vested in community, broad-based enterprises and cooperatives;*
- ✚ *A substantial increase in youth ownership and **control** of existing and new enterprises;*
- ✚ *A substantial increase in the number of **youth-owned**, youth-empowered and youth-engendered enterprises;*
- ✚ *A substantial increase in the **numbers** of young people in executive and senior management of enterprises;*

- ✚ *A substantial increase in the numbers of young people being **mentored** to own, control and manage either youth-owned or other enterprises.*

In order to realize such policy objectives underpinned by the above strategic issues that I outlined earlier on, the following key considerations should not be overlooked.

Youth empowerment process can only be effective as the effective implementation of the strategies. This means implementation should be well targeted towards the youth and strategic interventions proposed should ensure that it enforces youth economic empowerment so that it is not left either to chance or the benevolence of those that can facilitate it. There should also be an effective and visible youth representation in the Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) structures which are yet to be set up. There should be youth targets included in the BEE programme and sector charters – to enforce youth economic empowerment.

In conclusion, Mr. Moderator, I hope that I have given you the yeast of how to ensure effective youth empowerment within the economic sphere of Namibia. Allow me to reiterate that the key strategies and policy objectives of youth economic empowerment cannot be separated from those of the envisaged broad-based BEE. This means that youth economic empowerment should be consistent with overall BEE policy objectives, in tune with sectoral charters and be part of the overall economic growth and development strategy, as contained in the National Development Plan.

Allow me to end on a cautionary note that experience in South Africa has shown that youth economic empowerment tend to take a tendency of an able, urban and intellectual form. It becomes biased towards young women, rural youth, working class youth and youth with disabilities as groups that are most marginalised, disadvantaged, and vulnerable to and stricken with poverty and underdevelopment. It is important that youth empowerment should not be biased but allow that all youth, whether able or differently abled, rural and uneducated do partake into the process of youth economic empowerment because only then can we surely say that youth economic

empowerment is a success and a instrument worthy to ensure that our youth of today becomes effective leaders of tomorrow.

I thank you

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