

African experts confront youth unemployment

Nairobi, Kenya (PANA), April 3, 2012 - Determined to see youth unemployment adequately dealt with in the continent, African scientists have urged African ministers, in Nairobi to discuss how to boost science and technology with a view to creating jobs for the youth, to prioritise health, food, infrastructure, water and energy research.

Professor Raphael Munavu, the Chairman of the Kenya National Academy of Science (KNAS), said focus on boosting investments in science and technology should concentrate more on achieving the “best quality of life”.

“What is more important is that we train, impart the skills that enable the young innovators to create jobs. We have a lot of resources, both natural wealth and our greatest wealth in the rich biodiversity,” Prof. Munavu told PANA on Monday.

He was speaking on the sidelines of the African Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation (STI), the first of its kind dedicated to sparking interest in boosting Africa’s scientific trade.

Saying that major gains had been made, Prof. Munavu said: “We must focus on the young people and their pattern of distribution. All the young people of the world will be in Africa because Africa is the continent of the future with 25% of its population being the youth.”

Professor James Kahindi, of the United States International University (USIU), said while private universities were gradually growing in numbers across Africa, including Kenya, to fill in the training gaps for the youth, there was demand for specialization. “They should move towards specialization and avoid duplication.”

He said while the university campus based in Mombasa, Kenya’s coast, could specialize in oceanography studies, those based in agriculturally-productive areas are made to focus on research relevant to their neighbourhood community’s needs.

Ginette Nzau-Muteta, the African Development Bank (AfDB) Resident Representative in Burkina Faso, said efforts to reduce unemployment was being carried out by the Bank and its partners on country-specific policies.

“In 2050, Africa will be more populous than India and Asia. It will have more youthful labour force, it needs us to prepare an environment for production,” she said, adding that the AfDB was currently working with students to educate them on the realities of the job-market and the types of investments that could be of benefit to those working in the private sector, agriculture.

“We know we are contributing a lot to science and technology,” Nzau-Muteta said. She said the Information Communication Technologies (ICT) was one way to boost youth employment and innovation.

Nzau-Muteta said for the youth to achieve its full potential, investments were required to enable young Africans connect to all forms of telecoms, including the internet.

Dr. George Afeti, a Consultant for the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), an educational thinktank amongst the international organizers of the ministerial conference, said failure to create jobs was a management failure.

“If a country is unable to put up measures to create jobs, the opportunities would be limited,” Dr Afeti told PANA on the sidelines of the STI Forum.

Dr. Afeti said while the ministerial meeting and an experts forum underway here were still missing the point, it was the failure to discuss the national measures that should be put in place to guarantee the creation of decent jobs for the youth.

“Leadership is not just political. It must come from the corporates. It is the national economy that regulates every economic activity,” he added.

Alice Sena Lamptey, the Higher Education Programme Specialist at the African Union, said the lack of a proper vision that links science and technology with human capital development was a key weakness to the challenge of boosting productivity in Africa.

She said African countries could develop better if they followed the example set by Korea, which despite having no natural resources, decided to focus on education which was built into the country’s political vision of becoming a developed economy.

PANA reports that Researchers and scientists have been in Nairobi since Saturday for the first Africa Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) which seeks the implementation of the African Union’s declaration seeking to boost funding for scientific innovation.

The experts' meeting preceded that of ministers in charge of Science and Technology which took place in the Kenyan capital Tuesday.

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