

Sustained Unemployment Among Malawi's Young is Leading to Poverty and Desperation.

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Abstract

Most of the youths here in Malawi are part of a generation of disadvantaged Malawians blighted by an unemployment crisis that threatens the small, Southern African country's cherished stability.

A lot of them have turn to vending around town to get food for their families. Young, unlicensed street vendors have become one of the most visible signs of the chronic job's shortage on Malawian city streets. The street hawker's community has swelled dramatically as thousands of poverty-stricken young job seekers are increasingly pushed into the formal sector in a desperate bid to survive in a tough economic climate.

The scale of desperate young workers trapped in street vending and other precarious livelihoods is highlighted in a new report from the International Labor Organization (ILO). Its data shows that over 70% of young Malawians aged between 15 and 29 are employed in the informal sector. Malawi has one of the highest rates working poverty, which stands at around 60% on a \$2 per day. Hastily adapting to the rules of

entrepreneurship, young street vendors hawk everything from Coca-Cola, *Madzi Omanga* to used farming tools.

Stable or Descent Employment

It has been revealed that five out of ten young Malawian workers are undereducated or overeducated for the work they do and that six out of ten receive below average wages. From the numerous studies conducted by Makoka and Associates with other local and international stakeholders it has found that cities lack of experience is one of the major obstacles to securing a job.

A weak industrial base has been compounded by an International Monetary Fund. A generation at risk reveals that with just over 66 percent of the demographic completing secondary education, a lot of youths have dropped out of school at fourteen years because of poverty following different problems like death, sicknesses or polygamy scenario are unable to make a successful transition to Structural Adjustment Program, which has devalued the Malawian Kwacha by 49 percent, deepening poverty and inequality in the country.



The devastating consequences of sustained youth unemployment are increasingly coming to the fore in the deeply conservative country. Eliphaz Kuseni and Lucy Makoka of M&A in the Economic Justice Department said rising numbers of dejected youths are visiting the Lilongwe-based organization. *“The easy accessibility of locally grown, high-grade marijuana and cheap alcohol makes many unemployed youths want to escape the reality of their daily lives because they cannot cope with it. We’re seeing girls forced into prostitution due to lack of jobs with serious drug and alcohol problems, which our country do not have the resources to address at the moment”*.

Highly potent alcoholic drinks available to despairing youth include ‘Tyson’; a cane spirit with high alcohol content of 47 percent. *“Malawi is tragically losing a lot of its energetic young people, who are critical for the development of its future, to drugs and alcohol. The majority of our young unemployed are very poor and cannot afford to pay for skills training at different technical college”*, she added.

Countless other down-and-out young jobseekers, particularly rural dwellers, are drifting from town to scouring for work as laborers or ‘ganyu’ as the unemployment crisis knocks them further into a downward spiral of destitution.

It will come a point that the unemployment crisis could lead to politicians using vulnerable young people to their own advantage. It’s a potential recipe for turmoil. Most of our young people are poorly educated and at great risk of getting involved in crime to survive and being exploited to violently gain political power.

Despite all this Malawi has everything: good agricultural soil and plenty of water. We need a bigger program of entrepreneurship, which will create a bigger domestic market so that when our youth produce, they can sell, since government will help us find

stable and fair market.

Implementing policies which match education and training with employer needs are among the Makoka and Associates recommendations to the government of Malawi if young people are to be given a fair chance at a decent job – and Malawi is to meet its Sustainable Goals of fighting poverty and inequality.

There are so many projects that are implementing several initiatives through the **National Youth Service Programme** to address skills development in carpentry, mechanics, IT and other areas. There is also Start and Improve Your Business (SIYB) as part of the scheme. The main issue here it to emphasize youth involvement in our agro-based economy and teach them how to grow cash crops for export like macadamia nuts and soy beans. It will also instill in our youth patriotism and discipline including teaching them about the Malawi constitution.

Adding from the previous initiatives, more controversial, job creation project that is sending more than 250 school leavers to South Korea to work on farms and train in agriculture and livestock development. It brings up issues of labor rights and exploitation. The Koreans have moved up from manual work and are now looking for cheap labor in the form of a programme. It makes more sense to bring Korean experts here to train our youth in agricultural production on their own soil other than opposite way.

Makoka and Associates is a premier consultancy firm that conducts a wide range of research, commissioned studies and consultancies. It has expertise in the field of rural development, agricultural marketing and value chains, rural finance, poverty, livelihoods, and health linkages, programme process and impact evaluations. It was established in 2013 to provide high quality consultancy services in the field of research and development policy to local and international clients.

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