

Employment and Wealth Creation – Caribbean Youth Perspectives

Prepared by the Commonwealth Caribbean Youth Advocacy Group on Youth Employment¹

Within the scope of this work, the term employment will be used to describe young people between the ages of 15 and 30 who are either gainfully employed, under-employed or who are actively seeking legitimate avenues through which they may be employed within society.

The Commonwealth countries which are within the Caribbean region share similar characteristics in relation to the issue of youth unemployment. Most of these characteristics include limitations in areas of interest available, inexperience and lack of the resources (educational qualifications included) for the available job markets. With the integration of Anglo-Saxon Caribbean territories via initiatives such as the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the resources within which youths can tap are expanded, but many of the member countries do not have the necessary facilities in place to guide these un-employed or under-employed youths towards building upon their dreams. Although the possibilities for minimising youth unemployment rates appear to be limitless, the variations and support (whether moral or financial) are the main causes for the limitations being placed onto these possibilities.

With growing trends and cultural diversifications impacting heavily on Caribbean youth lifestyles and job preferences, it is therefore important to note that the necessary mechanisms must be provided to curb unemployment and thereby curb dubious behaviours amongst youths.

The economic success of a country is limited to the availability and proper utilisation of following three significant factors which pre-dominantly determine its wellbeing:

1. Limited resources inclusive of human capital, fiscal services, high employment and market opportunities;
2. A creative and innovative employment culture for wealth creation; and
3. Strategic partnerships for the successful undertaking of necessary diverse ventures.

More than 60% of the Commonwealth's population consists of youths. As with any organisation, the human resources potential of these youths is limited only by the creative imagination of the environments within which they exist and which fosters their growth. The creation of avenues through which employment can be made available to these youths are of course dependent on four (4) key factors; namely education, vocational skillsets, market expectations and entrepreneurial capabilities, within society which govern the types of employment and wealth creation avenues which are made available.

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The first step in promoting employment is to create a culture which fosters youth empowerment within society. This includes the removal of biased limitations; such as age, sex, and academic inclinations, in order to increase the decision-making power and authority which youths can acquire as a result of the work design available to that country. With the advancement of technology, the minds of youths have evolved beyond the sole level of academics and embraced the ideology of vocational skillsets. It is through the proper utilisation of resources such as the internet, vocational training schools, apprenticeships, funding and ease of access to essential information that youths are able to give more of themselves to society by selecting the careers which they desire as opposed to the careers which are deemed suitable for them. This therefore means that although most youths may be at entry positions within the job markets, facilities such as strategic succession planning should be implemented to ensure the smooth transitioning of skills and knowledge between the predecessor and the successor at all times and not solely at that point in time at which a vacancy within an organisation appears. Youths feel more committed to a country when their contributions towards the decision-making processes are not only actively considered, but also when they are acknowledged as well.

Countries which do not invest greater time and resources to fostering a culture of greater youth employment and wealth creation in these modern times will inevitably face either one or more of the following several negative occurrences:

1. Braindrain as the youths who are frustrated due to limited resources within their employment environment of their home countries will venture to other countries in attempts to make a better living for themselves and their families;
2. There will be a significant generation gap between the transition and transmissions of critical details between the seniors and the youths of the country. This will be most evident and reflected by the high turnover within agencies who employ youths, but do not capitalise on the importance of their contributions;
3. Youths who are seeking employment but are denied access due to the traditional biases have and will continue to strive towards alternate methods of livelihoods – namely crime and such other dubious behaviours;
4. The country's economic growth will be erratic in nature and will therefore make it difficult to ascertain what stance should be taken at a specified future period;
5. Essential cultural norms will be lost if youth employees are not educated of their importance to the success of the country or agency of employment; and
6. Significant finances will be spent on rectifying social ills which could have otherwise been mitigated through the consideration of a new approach to employment which is in line with the changing employment opportunities of modern societies.

As the International Labour Office's Director-General noted in his statement to world leaders at the 2010 G20 Summit in Seoul, "Rebalancing the global economy so that growth is both strong and sustainable requires more adjustments to currencies and financial regimes. Investing in social protection and quality jobs will encourage entrepreneurship and investment in real economy and get sustainable growth movement."²

² http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/press-and-media-centre/press-releases/WCMS_146473/lang--en/index.htm.

Through the strategic re-evaluation of the information which is presented within a country's consensus survey, it may be utilised to evaluate the more efficient collection of information relating to human characteristics and behaviour in order to understand the effect of design, methods and environment – the *Ergonomics* of a country, if you will. Youths are of the opinion that the current tools which are being used by countries and employment agencies are under-utilised as they are not truly reflective of the efforts of youths.

In an ongoing survey which is currently being conducted by the Commonwealth Caribbean Region's Youth Employment Advocacy Group, several general trends have been duly noted. They are, but not limited to, the following:

- A. National educational curriculum promotes a greater academic regime and sidelines the importance of vocational trainings and internships which encourage the emergence of new career opportunities such as graphics designing and the evolution of careers from within traditional industries – agriculture evolving to include hydroponics and accounting. With the current curriculum, academic failure implies failure to attain a significant line of employment for youths;
- B. Some countries do not have vocational institutions which complement the current or new job markets. For example, countries with tourism as one of their main industries do not promote local arts, crafts or even local music. Why then do the tourists really visit?
- C. Barriers to the employment success of youths prohibit upward mobility by imposing irrational standards such as fifteen years prior experience required and a minimum of a master's degree is required. Why is there no requirement for a professional certification?
- D. Youths who attempt to be entrepreneurs are severely limited in resources of both financial and subsidized natures. Hence, most of the entrepreneurial businesses crumble within the first five (5) years of their establishment. Business "Start to Finish" seminars or forums should be arranged frequently which will inform prospective and young entrepreneurs of issues which may affect their ventures, funding agencies which are at their disposal, the maintenance of proper business records and the like ;
- E. The media forms which are currently being utilised to inform a country's youth populace of the available resources exclusively target audiences who read newspapers or who have the prior knowledge of the agencies from whom the information or resources may be obtained. Very little, if any information is made available as to the agency and what type of assistance they may be able to render to youths who are desirous of learning a new skill or even how to prepare a basic business plan to secure funding. The stigmatic belief that new emerging careers will fail also prohibit the penetration into new markets; Greater general partnerships between youth and employment agencies need to be established to not only meet and exceed market expectations, but also to ascertain what the employment needs of the youths are. Regional agencies such as CARICOM and the Caribbean Single Market Initiative should also be utilised to capitalise the cross-training and education of youths within member countries which may be unable to offer alternate courses of action within their existing national structures at this moment in time;
- F. Greater emphasis needs to be placed on the importance of internships, apprenticeships and such of other job attachment opportunities to ease some of the frustrations associated with employment and entrepreneurship; and

- G. The relevance and importance of professional certifications should not only be publicized by the relevant agencies, but associated mentorship programmes should be made available in order to provide guidance and understanding.

In order to ensure sustained success, public employment programmes must include components that facilitate young participants' transition to more permanent employment. One option might be to establish a link between public environment programmes and existing youth training programmes in order to provide young people with targeted skills and environmental awareness so that they will be able to identify entrepreneurship opportunities in the field of environmental conservation and rehabilitation.³

In consideration of the above, it is therefore evident that there is a greater need for the better integration of both the academic and vocational institutions. Together, these will encompass a greater cross-section of youths who may be more academically or vocationally inclined and provide for the better facilitation of both products and services to increase the employment and wealth creation possibilities of a country.

³ World Youth Report 2010 www.un.org/youth