

By Cecilia Okoth

Govt to start trainee certificate project



The Commissioner of Occupational Safety and Health the gender Alex Asimwe, Dr Obuku, Comyn and Bigirimana interacting during a stakeholders capacity building meeting at the Imperial Royale Hotel in Kampala yesterday. Photo by Shamim Saad

The Government and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) are set to introduce an apprenticeship programme that will award certificates of competence to youth to make them suitable for the labour market.

According to the permanent secretary of gender ministry, Pius Bigirimana, the move is part of efforts to curb the rates of unemployment among the youth.

The recent population census estimates youth in Uganda to be over 78% of the total population of which most are unemployed.

Whereas several universities churn out thousands of graduates annually, Daniel Opio, a policy and research officer at the Federation of Uganda Employers, said employers have frequently complained that they are unable to hire the graduates, faulting a mismatch in the skills of the youth with the needs of the labour market.

"We have often urged the ministry to reach out to these employers to help them understand why apprenticeship is important," Opio said.

The new programme, dubbed 'The National Apprenticeship Programme under the National Apprenticeship Framework for Uganda 2017' is expected to be completed before the end of the year and pilot projects will commence in January next year.

The pilot programme, according to the permanent secretary, will target priority sectors like oil and gas, agriculture, the hotel industry and hospitality, manufacturing and construction and subsequently roll out to other sectors.

"This form of training will be provided to employees at their place of work so as to familiarise them with enterprise policies, work culture, and to provide them with the practical skills and knowledge necessary to perform their job," he said.

"The experience gained from workplace-based learning programmes is highly valued by employers and many studies point out that work-based learning is an important strategy to address the skills mismatch and youth unemployment," he added.

Bigirimana who made these remarks at a workshop on capacity building of stakeholders on quality apprenticeship in Uganda said the training will also enable them establish small and medium enterprises.

Apprenticeship, according to the

National Apprenticeship Framework 2017, is defined as a unique form of vocational education/training, combining on-the-job training and school-based learning for specifically defined competencies and work processes.

Apprenticeship is regulated by law and based on a written employment/apprenticeship contract with a compensatory payment and standard social protection coverage. Upon completion of the apprenticeship, a formal assessment and a recognised certification is awarded to the apprentice, clearly defining one's period of training.

The framework will also contribute to the implementation of the Uganda National Employment Policy 2011 whose mandate is to reduce the high number of unemployed and underemployed

BETWEEN THE LINES:

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youth in the country by 2020.

Paul Comyn, a senior skills and employability specialist at ILO, said the organisation is committed to supporting the Government in finalising the national apprenticeship framework, develop systems for apprenticeship training orders, guidelines and manuals, among other tasks.

Distinguishing apprenticeship from internship which he said is often misinterpreted, Comyn said whereas apprentices are considered employees

in law, interns are not.

"Apprentices typically receive a wage whereas interns do not. Apprentices are also enrolled in a formal and structured programme of learning, which does not always occur with interns" he said.

Dr Ekwaro Obuku, the general secretary of Uganda Medical Association, expressed concern saying all skilling programmes are focused on the private sector and ignore the public sector, including medicine.

"The medical profession, for example, has a challenge of the quality of health workers being produced today. There is an outcry from the public about how doctors practice and how nurses and midwives handle them. There are increasing reports on medical negligence and errors and this issue really has to do with the quality of skills," he said.