

LETTER OF THE DAY

Cash handouts: Good for politics but not youth unemployment

In the recent past, President Museveni has more than ever stepped up to the plight of the youth. He has somewhat been intentional in bridging the gap between his government and the youth. Time will tell whether it's duty of care or not that has pushed him to tackle youth issues head-on. He's used, among others, "cash handouts" to lift the youth wallowing in poverty.

Truthfully, life is very challenging for the youth. This is not just a proclamation but a complete anecdote, simply incontestable. Textbook justifications claiming youths are not doing enough to change their situation are purely flimsy. This is because most of the youth have at least done their best to afford a decent life; however, the odds are just not adding up.

Robert Kabushenga once said, "Ugandans are simply poor, the rest are semantics." I wish to carefully borrow his words and remind the President that indeed the youth are poor. In simpler terms - if for once we can forego the wonted statistics and be blatant - the youth can barely do life. They remain (un) comfortably at the brim of the poverty curve with limited survival options.

That's why in a bid to overcome poverty, most of the youth have sold their ancestral grounds to fly out of the country in search of greener pastures - only to be subjected to undignified working conditions. While others who have completed university or tertiary education with promises of finding and starting jobs, the streets haven't been benign to them.

Yet sustainable approaches to address youth unemployment are needed. This includes sup-



porting youths to recalibrate their purpose and become catalysts of the country's socio-economic and political transformation. However, this opportunity faces a huge risk if not well-cultivated.

Government efforts like the Youth Livelihood Programme (YLP) and Youth Venture Capital Fund (YVCF), have, unfortunately, not yielded much.

The National Development Plan IV reveals that implementation of such programmes inexcusably faces hurdles, including illiteracy cycles, poor coordination, financing issues, political patronage, and corruption, which complicate the overall development efforts.

Maybe out of frustration, the President might have switched gears and resorted to cash handouts as the panacea to youth unemployment. However, through optics, should one say these cash handouts by the President are a no-confidence vote in the government youth structures, or they are basically

political gimmicks? Whichever way, cash handouts are not sustainable - something the President needs to boldly be told.

Cash handouts are not the magic bullet to youth unemployment, but structured job creation is.

The existing nuances between the two dictates that handouts breed dependency whilst job creation promotes self-sustenance. We have occasionally seen cash handouts to the youths sanctified as SACCO funds.

No rocket science, form a SACCO, access cash handouts from the President. From election campaigns to post election, cash handouts continue to find their way into the pockets of youths.

But of concern, the President still receives complaints that these cash handouts never trickle down to the actual beneficiaries. They are subject to abuse through personal aggrandizement.

I am yet to establish any empirical evidence showing how

these cash handouts have sustainably impacted the youth. Perhaps an investigation would help to satisfy all the doubting Thomases.

Albeit not a single approach can address youth unemployment, at least cash handouts is not one of them. We would rather maximise the basics, including ensuring access to affordable and inclusive credit for youth startups, promotion of digital infrastructure, prioritization of technical vocational education and training, empowerment of youth innovation hubs, more investment in agricultural, tourism, and industrial sectors, among others.

As the youth bear the brunt of unemployment, several approaches can miraculously overcome the situation, except cash handouts. I fear for the moment when these cash handouts are no more, how shall we face the chronic beneficiaries?

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