

‘Youth should co-develop educational programmes’

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‘Youth in Nigeria must not be seen as a problem to be solved, but as a resource that must be tapped into,’ said Paul Michael from the University of Benin during this panel. He pleaded for the use of indigenous knowledge in tackling unemployment issues. By focusing on traditionally inherited talents, employment can be more efficiently realised in a more valuable way. He pointed out how in pre-colonial Nigeria, education was already centred on an individual’s talent and that we need to re-incorporate that into education today. According to Michael: ‘Societal expectations or pressure must give way to the freedom to develop one’s talent into a career pathway.’

When implementing programmes aimed at individuals’ talents, it is not easy at all to remove these social expectations, however. Aniek Santema, life skills expert at Edukans, explained how life skills training in Ethiopia was influenced by the political context. Life

skills lessons aimed at helping young people to make responsible decisions, Edukans observed, ‘were influenced by the ideas that donor organisations held about what responsible decision-making is.’ Donor organisations regarded migrating as an irresponsible choice, for example. Migrants were invited to talk about their negative experiences during the life skill lessons. To ensure that such life skill lessons are addressing the youths’ needs rather than donors’ expectations, Santema argued that young people must be put at the heart of the life skills lessons.

When it comes to technical and vocational education and training (TVET), both in Kenya and Guinea-Bissau, the skills acquired by students do not meet the labour market’s demands. Maria Antonia Barreto and Clara Carvalho from the University of Lisbon argued for the national certification of TVET teachers and graduates, and better quality of TVET education. John Mugo, executive director of the Zizi Afrique Foundation and Lucy Heady, chief executive officer at Education Sub-Saharan Africa, stressed the need for data collection to improve TVET education.

One of the conclusions drawn from the discussions is the necessity of not only establishing relationships between employers and training institutions, but also putting young people at the centre of developing educational programmes. Besides, there is a need to return to talent-based education, as traditionally was done in pre-colonial Nigeria.

Take-aways

- The labour market needs to establish relationships with TVET institutions to make sure students acquire skills that are in demand with employers
- Indigenous forms of knowledge about creating employability are valuable in addressing unemployment
- Youth must be put at the centre of educational programmes to ensure that education addresses their needs