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Horizons

Community Engagement & Skills



Youth should be given opportunities for community engagement and skill development, which is vital at a time

when unemployment is rising across the globe.

In a recent rally in Atlanta, the presumptive Presidential nominee of the Democratic Party of the United States, Kamala Harris, stated, “Ours is a fight for the future and for freedom,” giving confidence to the youth and women around the world.

“We begin with new hope,” are the words of the famous Hollywood actress Barbara Stanwyck in the 1952 motion picture *Clash by Night*. In the movie, having moved away from California to the Northeast for 10 years, she returns to her seaside town to begin a new life. Life and travels give her confidence and independence, showcasing the women’s empowerment movement happening in the United States at that time.

As was the case in the 1950s, even today, traits such as self-confidence, determination, and a positive spirit are much needed. Particularly among youngsters, when unemployment is high, empowerment and engagement are crucial. It is not possible to solely depend on the government to create jobs; self-help and community support also have their roles to play. However, the government must be an invisible hand, providing the necessary support through education, skill development, and policy initiatives.

In India, youth unemployment is a major socioeconomic issue. According to some surveys, over 10 million jobs must be created each year to provide employment to the large unemployed youth population and elevate India to economic might. It is pleasing to note that the Indian government, in its 2024-25 budget, is launching the Employment Linked Incentive (ELI) to support national youth entering the workforce. This program should not only look at youth with degrees but also provide support for interns with high school diplomas. India’s economy depends not only on the service sector but also on agriculture and manufacturing. In the manufacturing sector, there are opportunities for youth from rural areas; hence, training and empowerment are critical. Skill development is essential as countries like India strive to boost their entrepreneurial ecosystems.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has emphasized the importance of the space sector for national growth. Sectors such as high-tech manufacturing, space, and defense offer opportunities for SMEs, and the ELI scheme to support internships will be a welcome one for both industry and job seekers. Additionally, such internship schemes should not only focus on strengthening STEM sectors but also address next-generation skill set requirements such as diplomacy, planning, decision-making, and communication.

The Indian government is investing in skill improvement with the creation and support of the National Skill Development Council. In the third term of the present government, the workforce would greatly benefit from attention to enhancing soft skills, entrepreneurial abilities, and

marketing capabilities. Such efforts will lead to economic growth and job creation. Currently, national elections are fought on economic conditions, as evidenced by the recent election in the United Kingdom. After winning the election, the Labor government is facing the challenge of reviving the economy. One of the government's priorities is to fill the skill gap to curb the immigration of cheap labor and provide jobs to its citizens. It was clear in the U.K. election cycle how the issue of joblessness has created rundown situations in once-bustling downtowns, causing frustration and anger among youth. Equipping youth with job-oriented skills is the need of the hour.

Youth Empowerment: Global Program

Like India's national skill development program, the United States has unique programs for developing the skills and personal capabilities of global youth. Since 1946, Fulbright scholarships have provided support to U.S. students and scholars as well as international students and scholars, facilitating exchanges that develop cultural knowledge, professional, and personal skills. Since 2014, the United States has supported the exchange program, "Mandela Washington Fellowship," for young African leaders from Sub-Saharan Africa who are between 25-35 years old, spending about six weeks in U.S. academic institutions. These young leaders compete based on their projects, which have broader impacts in their countries, such as better governance, women and youth empowerment, and job creation. During their stay in U.S. academic institutions, these leaders engage in several educational and community-related activities. These activities give them opportunities to interact with local community leaders and, the local community, and industry in the area.

I have had the opportunity to host a few young leaders in our laboratory for the past two years, which was a learning experience for our lab to understand the challenges faced by Sub-Saharan African nations and their efforts to overcome them. The Mandela Washington Fellowship empowers these youngsters to get motivated to carry out projects that improve their countries. Texas Tech University has been hosting fellows from different countries such as South Africa, Ghana, Botswana, Tanzania, and Kenya, to name a few. This year, Texas Tech University hosted 25 young leaders for about six weeks. The program provides ample opportunities for the fellows to discuss issues facing their countries and learn how such problems are solved by their peers. Also, given the expertise of the fellows in varied disciplines such as medicine, public health, education, governance, and jurisprudence, solutions can be developed collaboratively. The hallmark of the program is that all the fellows give a short presentation on the projects they are carrying out in their countries to enable development.

Community Development and Self-Improvement

This month, two fellows visited our laboratory, showcasing their confidence and enthusiasm to create products that will help their countries. Dr. Idda Mihindi is a medical doctor from Tanzania

who has created a small industry employing rural women. The small-scale industry develops sanitary napkins from natural products and distributes them free of charge to high school children and poor women. Dr. Idda seeks financial support from foundations and the United States Department of State to cover the cost of the sanitary napkins. She has established a foundation that supports the project and pays the women employed in it. Dr. Idda's effort empowers uneducated and rural women to have confidence in doing good with their lives.



Dr. Idda Mihindi

"As many developing countries face the same challenges such as poverty and inadequate access to information due to lack of technological skills, it's very important to motivate, invest, and support passionate young stars from these developing countries as they are going to be future leaders," stated Dr. Mihindi.

Mr. Gregory Rakobe is from Botswana and wants to use native plants to create products with medicinal applications such as skincare. He comes from a ranching heritage and wants to improve the lives of the rural population.

"Motivating youngsters, especially in developing countries, is crucial. It requires passion and dedication because young people often connect with the talents and gifts they encounter early in life," stated Rakobe.

This year's group of 25 people exhibited enthusiasm and confidence in using their skills to improve their community, nation, and the world. Each youth leader has a unique story to tell that showcases their trials and successes in overcoming difficulties. The fact that they have won competitive fellowships and gained international experience for six weeks in the United States highlights their strength and character. Governments should create such fellowships and programs to boost the skills and character of youngsters who are the future.



Gregory Rakobe

The younger generation should do their part by giving back to their communities. Skills and character can be built not merely in classroom settings but also in practical settings and through engagement.

“My motivation for social work stems from a profound love for humanity and the joy of witnessing positive changes in people's lives. Sharing our knowledge, talents, and expertise to alleviate challenges for future generations is deeply fulfilling. It's about ensuring that others do not have to endure the hardships we faced,” opined Rakobe on the importance of giving back to society.

“I attached my commitment and passion to solving community problems. The impacts I made through my projects mainly help rural girls attend school sessions fully during menstruation days through free reusable sanitary pad distributions, as well as helping the rural population access basic health services through free medical camps,” stated Dr. Mihindi, highlighting the importance of empowering rural women.

Learning and engaging with the community and carrying out volunteer projects to uplift society will move us forward. Highlighting the importance of lifelong learning, Dr. Idda Mihindi stated, “Let's keep learning, developing our passions and talents to be innovative, and look for solutions to our community problems.”

Learning from the community is valuable, stated Rakobe. He added, “We need each other to thrive and secure a better future for subsequent generations. Building peace and unity is essential for creating a happy and harmonious world. Understanding, supporting, and living together peacefully is vital for overcoming challenges and ensuring a safe environment.”

The future is promising with empowered youth, and learning is a path forward. As the United States' former President Lyndon B. Johnson stated, “Yesterday is not ours to recover, but tomorrow is ours to win or lose.” Let us win!



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