

## **Tackling the problem of Youth Unemployment**

Across the globe the evidence points to the fact that there is a high level of youth unemployment. This is confirmed by the International Labour Organization (ILO) which estimated that the global youth unemployment rate was expected to reach 13.1 per cent in 2016, and would remain at that level through to 2017. The upward trend is apparent, based on the fact that in 2015, global youth employment stood at 12.9 per cent.

In August 2014, Geoff Tily, a Senior Economist in the Trade Union Congress in the United Kingdom, made the observation that the global youth unemployment rate was more than double the global unemployment rate, which stood at 5.8% in 2015 and was (as of January) expected to be unchanged into 2016. With this being the case it means that governments are challenged to find creative ways to grow their economies. It would be expected that governments will critically examine measures of stimulating the private sector to invest and to create new forms of business that will absorb many young workers.

In the English speaking Caribbean where for the most part, negative growth has been recorded, this has given rise to unprecedented levels of youth unemployment. As a solution to this crisis, there seem to be a deliberate strategy to promote entrepreneurship and the creation of an informal sector. While there is merit in this, it does not solve the problem of finding employment for the vast majority of well educated young men and women coming out of schools, colleges and universities. The solution itself may be cosmetic in that entrepreneurs and members in the informal sector find themselves challenged as it relates to sustainability.

A study commissioned by the Caribbean Development Bank in 2015, revealed that Youth unemployment rates in the Caribbean are among the highest in the world. One of the main findings was that nearly 25 per cent of youth in countries for which statistics were available, were unemployed. The data showed that the regional countries with the highest persistent youth unemployment were Guyana and Suriname which, since 2000, have consistently been above 30 per cent, with the rate in Guyana hovering around 40 per cent since this time. What makes for interesting reading is the fact that most countries had a relatively consistent youth unemployment rate over the period, but the Bahamas, Barbados and to some degree, Belize, demonstrated a spike in youth unemployment since 2007. This has been attributed in part to the recent global economic crisis.

The youth employment problem which is being experienced has been around for some time. The findings of a Study which was commissioned by the Caribbean Office of the International Labour Organization and undertaken by Dennis Pantin, Economist and

Researcher at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus (1996), revealed that the youth cohort looms larger in terms of unemployment. It was estimated that 404,000 persons or 15% of the region's labour force was unemployed at the time.

A 1993 Commission on Youth in Barbados found that among the reasons advanced to explain youth unemployment in the island were inadequate education, lack of appropriate training in terms of multi-skilling, relevance to modern technology, exceedingly high occupational and wage aspirations, lack of work experience and inappropriate attitudes. It can be said that there are ongoing efforts to address some of these deficiencies. The introduction to training and use of new technologies, along with a focus on technical and vocational education, the development of skills and competencies, employability skills and job apprenticeship scheme, are the means being adopted to enhance the preparation of young people for the world of work.

It is now up to governments and the private sector across the Caribbean region to drive investments so as to create new business ventures and job opportunities. Where there remains a limitation on available jobs at the domestic level, the export of labour ought to become a serious consideration. The move in this direction may be guided by information shared by the ILO that “Globally, the share of young people between 15 and 29 years old who are willing to move permanently to another country stood at 20 per cent in 2015. The highest inclination to move abroad, at 38 per cent, is found in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean, followed closely by Eastern Europe at 37 per cent.”