

WORLD DAY OF DECENT WORK, 2014

Africa is described as the fastest growing continent in the World with the youth constituting over 50% of its population. 70% of these youth work in poverty and live on less than the internationally defined poverty threshold of US\$2 a day. The nature of most work done by the youth falls squarely within the informal economy and are characterised by precarious conditions.

In response to addressing youth unemployment, African leaders met in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and declared 2009-2018 as the African Youth Decade to address both youth unemployment and underemployment through creation of safe, decent and competitive employment opportunities.

Half the decade is already gone; various attempts by Governments have largely failed to recognise the link between decent employment and job creation. Employment is treated as if it's a residual outcome of economic growth and macroeconomics stability. The assumption that once macroeconomic fundamentals are set right (particular inflation), the economy grows and job creation automatically follows, has consistently failed to provide decent jobs for the youth.

WanagariMaathi, the first African woman to receive the most prestigious Nobel Peace Prize for 2004, said " if young people are a gift to both communities and the world, then Africa is a continent rich in gifts".

That goes to say that the major resource for the development of any country is its people and when it comes to the question of growth of any economy, it largely depends on the competence of the youth in pursuing their career and interest. Africa is no different.

It is worrying to hear majority of the young Africans describe themselves as an unwanted gift. (as they see how they are largely isolated from the economic progress occurring elsewhere in the world).

Clearly, African Governments has a choice to make..... to capitalize on this **Gift** to help lift the economies of Africa or watch it become a **Lost Opportunity**.

What will the choice be?

On the occasion of World Day for Decent Work, I call on African governments and policy makers to adopt an active approach to the employment challenge by moving from inflation targeting framework to active labour market policy initiatives not only to create viable and decent jobs for the youth; but as a pre-condition for Africa's poverty eradication, sustainable development and peace building.

I equally urge donor governments to include this in their development cooperation policies to bring all stakeholders to speed in ameliorating the situation of youth employment in Africa, whiles ensuring that the tenets of Decent Work are respected.