

Youth Blog by Isaac Selasi Ahadz

Isaac Selasi Ahadz is a graduate in Political Science & Information Studies from the University of Ghana, Legon. He is also a delegate of the Young Diplomats Ghana and participated in the stakeholder engagement session of the APD on youth employment interventions in Ghana on 9 September 2020.

Being passionate about youth empowerment and development, and especially because I find myself now faced with the dilemma of not knowing exactly what to do after tertiary education, I jumped at the opportunity to participate in this year's African Policy Dialogue, since it promised to shed some light on the actual state of youth unemployment interventions in the country and generate a pragmatic road-map for alleviating this phenomenon. This opportunity was made possible by my current membership of the fourth cohort of the Young Diplomats of Ghana (YDG) programme under the auspices of the International Perspective for Policy & Governance (IPPG).

My experience was a wonderful one, right from the orderly and aesthetic setup to the punctuality and efficiency with which the whole programme was executed. Included in the itinerary were presentations from representatives of the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations and The Netherlands Embassy, as well as portraits of everyday youth interviewed during the data collection process.

Most remarkable for me, however, was the truly comprehensive presentation by the Keynote speaker Prof. William Baah-Boateng, which not only provided a well-researched background to the history of the Ghanaian government's job provision policies since the start of the 4th Republic (such as the 2001 STEPP-Skills Training and Employment Placement Programme) but also gave proper stakeholder characterisation and described key terms like youth, employment and unemployment, joblessness, visible and invisible underemployment, discouraged workers and disguised employment, to mention a few. It was interesting to note that despite the significant yield in educational attainment of the youth, the rate of unemployment was ironically higher among the educated youth than the uneducated. An explanation for this could be attributed to the erroneous social and cultural orientation programmed into the minds of children and young adults that white-collar jobs like banking, insurance and accountancy are the only benefitting kind for educated people, while blue-collar ones like farming, masonry and trading are the domain of the less/uneducated. With the formal employment sector already choked and unable to accommodate the large number of graduates each year, these educated youth are thus left at home since they refuse to delve into informal employment, unlike their uneducated counterparts.

Beyond the presentations, however, there are some interesting questions that piqued a lot of interest, particularly regarding the causes of youth unemployment. Paramount among them was the question of why universities and colleges do not reduce their intake of Humanities applicants, linked to the claim that skills-mismatch and over-production of Humanities graduates against STEM graduates was responsible for such high youth unemployment. The answer was that the excessively high cost involved in training a single STEM student is about seven times more than that of a Humanities student, making it more economical for most schools to keep accepting more Humanities applicants than STEM applicants. That leaves me wondering if targeted government aid, especially in the TVET sector, amidst the

vigorous re-orientation of education campaigns towards the opportunities available in the informal sector, could help pre-align the focus of today's youth and alleviate the situation.

The break out session was truly interactive and educative, since it saw participants segregated into three round-table groups along political parties, private-sector support and knowledge-sharing and governance (where I happened to be placed). The moderator, Ms. Beatrice Anowah Brew, did a wonderful job of coordinating the discussions, which involved identifying flaws in current interventions and generating realistic, sustainable solutions. Some of the said solutions include dis-aggregation of youth to ensure targeted, tailor-made interventions; major educational reforms, especially regarding diversification in subject choices; National Service Scheme reforms; development of a National Youth Agenda to guide successive governments; and the introduction of Career Advisory services from an early age. This was possible because of the earnest contributions of the group members, who brought their varied and diverse perspectives to bear on the issues.

My key takeaway was the clearly touted importance of the role of the youth in developing more employable skills such as research, technical and digital skills, soft skills, job search skills, and volunteer experience. I therefore pledge to devote myself fully to the pursuit to self-development to become a viable agent of positive change!