

Ensure Kazi Mtaani benefits the youth

Although the Kazi Mtaani programme launched recently to address joblessness among the youth in the wake of Covid 19 pandemic faces its own shortcomings, scrapping it altogether as some parliamentarians seem to suggest is not plausible.

Having successfully been able to give youth livelihoods when it was being piloted, and with roll out in the entire country, instead of halting the programme, the government should seal all the loopholes identified and use the template to create jobs to the millions of the country's unemployed youth.

If implemented properly and transparently, the programme could help put money into the pockets of desperate young Kenyans who lost income because of Covid-19 restrictions.

The ravage of the pandemic has been very harsh, affecting the normal social and economic structure, which justified the urgent measures the government took to rescue the situation by providing young people with an immediate income.

There is now a strong need to put in place appropriate measures to guard the project against mismanagement, corruption and politics, which have been the hallmarks of many such measures by the government in the past to address the youth jobs crisis.

In 2009, The Youth Congress undertook a review of the then Kazi kwa Vijana programme.

The review was based on the notion that youth have a right to gainful employment. The re-



Youth working under Kazi Mtaani programme in Nyeri. --JOSEPH KANYI

port titled 'Mobilisation without Emancipation,' captured feedback that the youth accepted to work under the Kazi kwa Vijana, they wanted certain reforms that would ensure that the programme was effective, responsive and accountable to them and law. The same feedback should be used to strengthen the ongoing Kazi Mtaani.

The State Department of Housing project has been no mean feat. It has been rolled out in 23 informal settlements in phases to provide of youth with immediate job opportunities, a testimony that the government can address the problem of joblessness if it is anchored on a strong policy framework.

In Nairobi, 10,600 youths in Mathare, Kibera, Mukuru and Korogocho slums were enlisted in the first phase of the programme. They earned a daily wage for duties such as access

paths and 'street' cleaning, fumigation and disinfection, garbage collection, bush clearance and unclogging drainage, among others.

At a daily wage of Sh455, and Sh505 for supervisors, this is perhaps the most intensive rescue plan ever undertaken by the government.

The first phase that started in April focused on select informal settlements in Nairobi, Mombasa, Kiambu, Nakuru, Kisumu, Kilifi, Kwale and Mandera.

These counties were hard hit by the first instances of Covid-19 and the subsequent cessation of movement directives to contain the spread of the virus made things even more difficult.

In the first phase, 31,689 Kenyans in eight counties worked on the national initiative designed to cushion the most vulnerable citizens living in the informal settlements from the effects of

the Covid-19 pandemic.

From eight counties, the initiative is expanding to all 47 counties and is expected to employ workers primarily drawn from the informal settlements in urban and rural settings.

An inter-ministerial team has already developed grassroots work plans that will see more than 270,000 Kenyans absorbed in the national programme with a Sh10 billion budget outlay as recently announced by President Uhuru Kenyatta.

To ensure that the programme benefits the youth, the recruitment process should be open and guided by credible criteria. It can't be left to the village chiefs and civic leaders to play patronage and divide the youth further by using cronyism, ethnicity and political patronage as the basis of recruiting individuals into the programme.

Besides, the supervisors' role in the programme should be clearly defined and adhered to.

To stop any opportunities for corruption, information on Kazi Mtaani be made accessible and available. Currently, there is very scanty information on the details of the programme and its financing. This is likely to affect the delivery.

Equally, the government must address the problem of late payments, especially if one considers that the work is precarious, and the youth are in desperate need of money. Payments to youth should be made on time and in the most convenient and reliable manner.

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