

Urban Youth Unemployment in Zimbabwe: Nature, Challenges and Consequences

Introduction

The chapter on 'Urban Youth Unemployment in Zimbabwe' by Steven Jerie focuses on the city of Gweru, the third largest in Zimbabwe. It starts with the general problem of the limited number of labour studies in Zimbabwe which is rather paradoxical because, before the formation of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) — the largest opposition party, their main ally the Zimbabwe Trade Union Congress undertook a good number of labour studies. But it seems after the labour movement formed the backbone of the opposition many scholars have shied away from labour studies especially on unemployment that reached 80 per cent in urban areas at one stage. The chapter raises a few issues that challenge conventional thinking. The first one is that while in most of the other chapters the problem of youth unemployment is blamed on the way they are taught without being prepared for the world of work, the author argues that in Gweru many youths do not take education seriously because they do not see it being capable of preparing them to get jobs. This is mainly because there are many high school graduates without jobs. Related to that the author points out that local perceptions shape attitudes of the youth about appropriate skills in that while in other countries vocational training is flagged as the possible route to relevant skills if it is need-based, in Gweru adults and the youth attach low value to vocational training even if they do not have an idea of the content of its curriculum. The third finding out of mainstream thinking is that while elsewhere the feeling is that the supply of young workers is higher than demand for them, in Gweru there is lower demand for them than their supply. Fourth is the finding that the vocational education and training (VET) systems produce more unemployed graduates in Gweru than any other sub-sector of education. This is because of the irrelevance of the skills imparted by the VET institutions in Gweru which do not relate to the production and service occupations in that city. Finally, the author indicates that prolonged unemployment affects the level, availability and quality of services among the youth when they later get employed and this affects their capability to be employed for very long.