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NEWS RELEASE

41st Annual Meeting of East, Central & Southern Africa Employers' Organisations deliberates on Skills Development for Youth Employment in Walvis Bay, Namibia



The leadership of 13 employers' organisations from East, Central & Southern Africa came together in Walvis Bay, Namibia on 14 – 15 February to take stock of the state of play in developing skills for youth employment and entrepreneurship, to learn from successful experiences and to set out a declaration of commitment to urgently address the issue of youth unemployment in the region. The employers' organisation leaders were joined by representatives of the ILO, national and local skills training providers and private sector actors.

Graciously hosted by the Namibian Employers' Federation (NEF) and jointly organised with the IOE, the event, which has been taking place annually since 1977 in various locations in the region, was supported by Business Africa and the Jobs for Africa Foundation. Traditionally self-funded, it was on this occasion supported financially by the European Union to build employer organisation capacity.

NEF's Secretary-General Mr Tim Parkhouse opened the Conference, capturing the urgency of the situation at the outset: "We cannot simply shrug our shoulders, sit back and do nothing...this is a call to action."

The Honorable Cleophas Mutjavikua, Governor of the Erongo Region, and His Worship, Mr Immanuel Wilfred, Mayor of Walvis Bay, also extended the warmest of welcomes with words of encouragement and anticipation regarding outcomes. The Governor emphasised the need to elevate the status of apprenticeships and trades, calling for a "change of attitude" in this regard and commended the organisers for including successful young Namibian entrepreneurs in the programme. Pledging the support of his office, he also made a plea for the Blueprint for Jobs in Africa not to "gather dust on the shelf".

Namibia's Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment Creation was represented by Permanent



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Secretary Mr Bro-Matthew Shinguadja, who linked training with productivity gains and underlined the role jobs played in conferring dignity.

Business Africa's Secretary-General Jacqueline Mugo, ILO Zimbabwe's Director, Hopolang Phororo and the IOE's Frederick Muia also contributed to the opening panel. Ms Phororo drew attention to the asset represented by young people, and the decisive role they could play in the agenda, specifically the Sustainable Development Goals and Africa 2063. Ms Mugo called for the development of much needed soft skills.

The ILO's Hezron Njuguna proudly recalled the history of the ESCA annual meeting and expressed his anticipation with regard to outcomes and impact.

The first session explored training for development with a presentation by entrepreneur Ms Ally Angula of the journey of her young company, Leap. Highlighting the value of entrepreneurship as a means to employment provision, Ms Angula nevertheless drew attention to the critical need for entrepreneurs to have support, given the high cost of failure and the difficulty in recovering lost years. She called for more effective collaboration: "Business has to share information more, get involved in the career guidance process. Institutions are not close enough to industry." Regulation, she noted, was not always supportive of business development.

Mr Mandela Kapere of the National Youth Council of Namibia talked too of the need for broad-based collaboration and for a "national consensus on what makes societies work... the polemic that we are constantly having harms us more than helps us."

The discussion on creating more and better jobs was stimulated by entrepreneurs Twapewa Khadhikwa, Mariane Akwenye and Sam Sivute who provided inspirational stories of their own personal and professional development. Whilst every entrepreneur is different, clear characteristics emerged including alertness to opportunities and the ability to seize them, motivation, hard work, patience, single-mindedness and ambition. Employers' organisations had a key role to play by advocating for a conducive eco-system for entrepreneurs, as well as by offering support services such as coaching, and providing platforms for experience-sharing.

Mr Jeremy Muller of COSDEF and Ms Yvette Bellens of the Young Africa (Namibia) Trust set out the case for community-based skills training, and innovative approaches such as market-related vocational training in partnership with local businesses, providing young people with skills of direct relevance to the local community, as well as a route to personal and professional development and the opportunity to engage in active citizenship.

The IOE's Frederick Muia told of the African employers' organisations' recent journey that had led to the Casablanca Declaration, the Blueprint for Jobs in Africa and most recently the Jobs for Africa Foundation. Whilst the Blueprint offered 10 recommendations for advocacy, there were two overarching goals: creating jobs and equipping young people with the skills they needed to do those jobs.

Echoing previous speakers, Mr Muia underlined the need to work together: "to address job creation – you need a shared vision" – such as had been realised in the launch of the Jobs for Africa Foundation, with employers' organisations, governments and workers' organisation pledging their firm commitment. A clear manifestation of the shared vision was the inclusion of the Blueprint on the agenda of the African Union labour ministers upcoming meeting in Algiers. Momentum was gathering for the Jobs for Africa initiative with additional critical partners, such as the ILO and the African Development Bank, taking a keen interest in achieving policy coherence in addressing the youth unemployment crisis. Mr Muia also explained the value of the IOE-initiated Global Apprenticeships Network (GAN) and the importance of national networks such as the employers' organisations in Malawi, Tanzania and Namibia were in the process of launching.

Day two began with IOE Vice-President for Africa, Mr Mthunzi Mdwaba, giving an overview of the work of the ILO and the key discussions at the upcoming International Labour Conference in June. He noted the high relevance of ILO Programme Outcomes, particularly more and better jobs; sustainable enterprises and the transition to formality, as well as cross-cutting Outcomes that related to the SDGs. He drew particular attention to the upcoming discussion on migration – labour mobility being of prime importance to business. Frederick Muia underlined the need for policy coherence between ILO and IOM in this area, and highlighted the role of the IOE in bringing the voice of the private sector to the migration debate by hosting the business mechanism of the Global Forum for Migration and Development. (GFMD)

The Conference was a unique platform for sharing experiences, and country presentations were delivered by the employers' organisations. They began by setting the scene in their countries; explaining their efforts in



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advocating for reforms to skills development programmes, VET training, education curricula, tax incentives for work-integrated learning, as well as challenges related to the implementation, monitoring and measurement of programmes. Lessons were shared on what had worked, and just as importantly, what had not, in ongoing efforts to equip young people with the necessary skills to make effective school-to-work transitions.

The programme concluded with a discussion of the [draft Walvis Bay Declaration](#) which was signed by the employers' organisations endorsing the commitments.

Mr Elias Shikongo, President of the Namibian Employers' Federation, brought the Conference to a close, thanking the participants for their strong engagement and the NEF and IOE for their organisation of the event. He expressed appreciation for the importance accorded to the event by the Namibian government, the Governor of Eronga and the Mayor of Walvis Bay, and singled out the European Commission for their generous support.

All available presentations, including country profiles, speeches and the Walvis Bay Declaration, may be downloaded on the [Africa page](#) of the IOE website. A detailed report, as well as the fully finalised Declaration will be published in the very near future. If you have any questions or comments, kindly contact the IOE's Mr Frederick Muia at muia@ioe-emp.com or Ms Anetha Awuku at awuku@ioe-emp.com



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