



**REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT**

REIMAGINING & REBUILDING

The role of young Namibians post-COVID-19

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12/08/2020

We are living through a defining moment for the 21st Century, as we experience profound socio-economic disruptions. COVID-19 is not only a global health security challenge that has caused immense loss of life and human suffering, the true extent of its impacts will be most pronounced in the aftermath of the public health emergency. Anticipated economic vulnerabilities, recessions and mass unemployment threaten to further complicate the socio-political landscape.

African governments had a brief window to prepare for the unavoidable. The arrival of COVID-19 on the continent in February 14, 2020 found many States relatively underprepared for a risk of this magnitude. Political and business leaders have been balancing the risk of spread of the disease against the socio-economic consequences of prolonged restrictions. The impact on the Informal Sector (which is larger than the formal economy), Small to Medium Enterprises and livelihoods, is devastating. Businesses have ground to a halt and households have become financially insecure, overnight. Difficult decisions have been taken and trade-offs are being made in the medium-to-long-term, as COVID-19 is projected to remain in our midst for a prolonged period.

Even in the best of times, young people face inordinate challenges, as reflected by the number of job seekers and informality. Dubbed the “Lockdown Generation”, we are experiencing disruptions in job security, education and training, and mental wellbeing. Many young people are searching for a way out, or some might say, a way in - A way into co-leadership, policy and lawmaking and decision-making processes, and a way out of insecurity, informality, hardship and vulnerability. A young demographic majority has an important role to play in the attainment of our

democratic ideals. Young Namibians are engaging democratic processes. Efforts are being made to enhance youth engagement through formal representation at both levels of decision-making and implementation.

International Youth Day hosted on 12 August 2020 under the theme “Youth Engagement for Global Action”, shone the spotlight on the role of young people in the attainment of our sustainable development agenda.

Young Namibians are responding to the crisis and many seek opportunity to unleash the power of entrepreneurship, innovation and technology to meet needs. To mark the occasion of President Geingob’s Birthday Anniversary on 03 August 2020, young innovators were invited to the State House, to exhibit groundbreaking innovations. Elsewhere in the country, developers are hosting virtual weekend hackathons to problem solve. Notably, most solutions are intended for public and private institutions, necessitating procurement policy that is receptive to innovation. This approach to preferentially procure local content and innovations can stimulate change quickly and must be intensified.

Furthermore, the imminent approval by Cabinet of the ‘Trade in Services Policy’ will go a long way in regulating, protecting and professionalizing our service industries. This Policy prioritizes and will propagate sectors where Namibia has both comparative and competitive advantage for export, including ICT, the Cultural and Creative Industries where many young people operate, in informality

With the onset of this pandemic, global has become local, and the problems of the world have become African and Namibian problems. The fight against COVID-19 in Africa demands a contextualized response, applicable to our lived realities. African Governments must leverage “internal” expertise by inviting African medical professionals and scientists in the Diaspora who are working on the frontlines in affected countries, to return to the continent for service. Such a strategic response would significantly increase the authenticity and efficacy of the solution and demonstrate Africa’s capacity to respond and defeat Corona Virus.

Above all, Namibia, as other African States, must urgently review the structural imbalances perpetuating inequalities and redesign a strategy based on the fundamentals of a healthy and educated society. The premium that is placed by President Hage G. Geingob on inclusion, youth empowerment and development, is a matter of smart governance. Young people must actively participate in and be meaningfully engaged in our vision for development. Ultimately, it is a sustainable development imperative.

Fellow Young Namibians, we have a job to do to reimagine, reform and rebuild towards a shared future. We require all hands on deck and we can do so provided we adopt an unrelenting commitment to excellence, exceptional focus on transformation and the courage to do things differently. Collaboration across sectors will greatly enhance the collective response of our integrated society. There is opportunity to limit the spread of the disease through public information. We should also take action to meet immediate needs of the more vulnerable members of our communities. This is the time to uphold the enduring value of Solidarity. This is the hour to extend empathy and spread hope. We have to stoke our creativity for homegrown solutions and confront the monumental challenge of COVID-19.

When historians write this chapter on Namibia in the 21st Century, let them say that it was our generation that united in purpose and contributed towards a more inclusive, equal and prosperous society.

[Word Count: 809]

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