

Telecoms companies urged not to casualise customer care jobs

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THE Zambian government has described customer care as a critical component of telecoms companies that should not be casualised through outsourcing.

Zambian Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Security Hon. Austin Liato told customer care staff from telecoms companies in the SADC who were attending a skills training course at the Zambia Telecommunications Company (ZAMTEL) Training College in Ndola, Zambia that quality service delivery has become important in the telecoms industry which is now open to private competition.

"Customers now have a choice. At the forefront of this quality service delivery are customer care staff that need to be well-trained to understand, promote and market telecoms products to customers. It is wrong to casualise customer care functions. These are not periodical or seasonal jobs."

"It is important that through public-private-partnerships (PPPs), we ensure that there is technology transfer so that our people can become employable," the minister said in his official opening remarks.

The two-week training course was organised by the ILO in conjunction with Union Network International. Thirteen delegates, nine of them women, from public and private telecoms companies in Malawi, Lesotho, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe participated in the course from 20 - 31 August 2007.

UNI-Africa Regional Secretary Fackson Shamenda observed that the telecoms industry was shedding jobs because of technology. "It's important that we retain skills through training. Through this partnership with the ILO, we are keen to see how African governments can revamp existing telecoms training centres."

Meanwhile, ZAMTEL General Manager Watson Tembo who graced the graduation ceremony said that the survival of any telecoms company in any economy today is largely dependent on the effective application of staff knowledge and skills.

In a vote of thanks, Ms. Sitembeni Munyanyi from TelOne, Zimbabwe urged the ILO, UNI and the Zambian government to help restore social dialogue in her country where, she said, "It has become a taboo for employers, government and unions to sit down together. Talking about trade unions in Zimbabwe is like talking about the opposition. There is need to take this message to Zimbabwean employers that working with unions is a partnership," she said.

ILO representative John Myers said the training programme was as a result of an earlier research that the ILO conducted on employability in the telecoms industry. He said the ILO and UNI are implementing similar training programmes in Cameroon and in Uganda, where a research on child labour through the sale of pre-paid phone recharge cards was being conducted.

In December 2006, the ILO and UNI held a tripartite regional meeting in Bagamoyo, Tanzania that focused on skills and employability in the telecoms sector. The meeting recommended follow up training programmes in Cameroon, Uganda and Zambia.



John Myers from the ILO shows delegates a study on employability in the Telecoms sector



Deputy Labour Minister, Austin Liato addresses delegates



Delegates at the late UNI Secretary General, Dag Hammerskjold memorial plane crash site, outside Ndola



TelOne employee Sitembeni Munyanyi tries out headsets during a study tour at Zamtel call centre offices in Kitwe



MTN Tambia employee Dorothy Sikazwe get certificate from Watson Tembo, Zamtel General Manager
Also in pic, NUCW Presiden, Patrick Kaonga & College Principal, Lloyd Simfukwe



Group photo after official opening of the ILO, UNI customer care training course at Zamtel