

Ensure skills transfer, employability in Africa's telecoms sector

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TANZANIA's Labour Commissioner Ms. Rose Teemba has said that the telecoms enterprises are adapting rapidly to changes in their market and as such workers should develop new competencies to ensure their continued employability. Officially opening the UNI/ILO regional workshop on Skills and Employability in the Telecoms Services in Africa, held 4 - 6 December in Bagamoyo, Tanzania, the Labour Commissioner said the boom in mobile phone use and new technologies were having a significant impact on employment, labour relations and work organisation.

She called for joint efforts between governments and partners in the telecoms sector to undertake relevant training to match with the current innovations.

"Appropriate and relevant training will increase productivity, employment and re-deployment of workers, acquiring new skills and enhancing employability of workers," she said.

She observed that despite growth in investment and market expansion, changes in the telecoms sector had been accompanied by job losses, a shift from regular and full-time employment and the disappearance of civil-servant status.

MTN Nigeria Senior Manager for Learning and Development Ms. Olufunke Amobi told delegates that employability was key in the telecoms sector which is grappling with recruitment difficulties and industry-wide gaps due to high level of skills requirements. Presenting her company's training programme which covers the 1,850 employees in MTN Nigeria, Ms. Amobi said training in telecoms requires a combination of technical expertise and business acumen as well as continuous learning to develop new skills-set for workers.

Chief Executive of ISETT-SETA, a South African national skills development institute, Mr. Oupa Mopaki said that an ICT Employment and Skills Survey they conducted in 2005 revealed that the country would face a skills shortage of over 34,000 ICT workers and 300,000 IT workers by 2007.

To reverse this, South Africa has come up with a national skills development strategy which involves partnerships between public and private organizations. Other initiatives are the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), Partnerships with Institutions of Further Education and Training (FETs) and the Joint Initiative on Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA).

UNI's John Musonda told delegates that despite the economic potential associated with the growth of mobile telephony, the number of formal jobs being created in Africa was just too few compared to those being destroyed in fixed line companies.

He said due to the fact that mobile telephony was technology intensive, thousands of jobs were being pushed into the informal economy where casualisation of employment was now becoming a common trend.

Equipment vendors are also off shoring employment through service contracts instead of promoting vendor-specific training programmes and certification in African countries.

The seminar also heard that the international bench-making of 400 phone lines per employee which state-owned phone companies were being pushed to achieve by retrenching more workers was an unrealistic measure of productivity in Africa where the infrastructure is largely under-developed.

The delegates also pointed out that across Africa most telecom training institutes were being closed down after privatisation. The seminar recommended that governments, employers and unions should promote public-private partnerships (PPPs) initiatives on telecommunications training, and examine possibilities to share facilities and experience of the remaining telecommunications training centres in Africa.



Neil Anderson, head of UNI Telecom sector



Some of the delegates at the ILO Telecoms Skills Training workshop



Tanzanian Labour Commissioner Ms Rose Teemba officially opened the Telecoms Seminar, with John Myers and Alexio Musindo (ILO)



Zambia's Deputy Labour Minister Austin Liato said they have revised laws to address casualisation of employment