

Job-hunters' junction

Uganda has a helpful tool that gives visitors a list of NGOs working in the country and a profile of each organisation. The Uganda National NGO directory includes well-known organisations, big and small, that have offices and staff around the Pearl of Africa, but also big and smaller regional ones that may not be as well-known outside those regions.

It also profiles smaller NGOs and civil society organisations that survive on the efforts of volunteers. Even smaller NGOs based in rural areas are included.

Instead of starting with bigger, well-known NGOs, the directory began at the bottom by reaching out to the small NGOs in rural areas. Workshops were conducted in various regions - and the smaller NGOs in rural areas were assisted with writing their profiles.

The database - which lists 311 NGOs, which operate legally, under 22 categories, from agriculture to water and sanitation - is updated regularly.

Less than three years old, the database is proving to be an invaluable source of information for various visitors interested in the work the organisations do, from donors to international NGOs looking for a local partner, to the public and private sectors and volunteers wanting to offer their time and skills.

The database exposes small and little-known organisations to funding and publicity opportunities that usually go to the big national organisations.

Anyone who wants to help can go to the database and contribute to the NGO of their choice. The profile has all the information needed and interested parties can make their inquiries from there.

Here at home, in 1999, the Commission on Gender Equality developed a booklet for the media that contained the details of gender professionals and experts working in various fields and organisations ranging from employment equity and land policies to sport and reproductive health. The aim is to help offer different points of view for a more gender-sensitive representation of women in the media.

The booklet is a good place to begin a search for gender experts.

The youth need a tool like this. For starters, what about a database of unemployed youth similar to the Uganda NGOs database?

All school-leavers, matriculants, graduates and postgraduates who are under 35, and are South African citizens or legal non-citizens, would be eligible to register to be included on the database.

The Department of Labour's announcement last month that it planned to procure buses to "roam the country to register job-seekers, as part of a campaign to ramp up and keep an up-to-date national register of job-seekers" is not a bad idea.

The department announced that the government was working "to create a public employment services network that will log and try to place job-seekers".

Just as the Uganda NGOs database did, let the buses reach the youth in rural areas who cannot access information because they are far from social services. The buses could roam those areas and register job seekers.

For other youth, registration boxes could be put up at social services offices all over the country

If the database were accessible to more than just the government, the responsibility to place job-seekers would not be the responsibility solely of the government. Organisations, companies and NGOs would be encouraged to train, employ and even fund further studies for the youth on the list. It would be a first step in dealing with youth unemployment.

It would also be a valuable tool for gathering statistics on the youth, such as: how many found employment how long it took them to find jobs, what kinds of jobs they found, which companies and organisations hired them, and how long they stayed in those jobs.

A youth booklet similar to the one the gender commission compiled for the media would help the youth deal with the challenges they face in their daily lives.

A directory of toll-free help-line numbers and addresses for people and organisations that help with matters affecting the youth, from drug and alcohol addiction to recreation centres, is a must.

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