

JA bearing fruits as pupils save over E171 000

BY LUNGELO TSABEDZE

MANZINI - Cooperatives are the new horses to pull the economic cart.

About 4 200 pupils have managed to save over E171 000 under 40 cooperatives under Junior Achievement (JA) Eswatini.

The pupils have a combined total of 4200 pupils as members who saved their own pocket money, on a monthly basis in the last seven months. This was disclosed by Sabelo Msibi, a member of the JA Board.

JA along with its partners hosted the third Africa Cooperative Youth Conference at The George Hotel yesterday in Manzini. Delegates from various ministries and partner organisations attended.

The conference had a wide range of subtopics for panel discussions and presentations focusing on how the cooperatives concept could be better introduced and implemented in schools and communities as an alternate business model; efficiently programmed by relevant government appendages; and efficaciously achieve economic objectives and overcome societal hurdles. The theme for this gathering was "Moving from Ideas to Youth Empowerment" in fostering entrepreneurship and financial literacy education through school cooperatives in Africa.

Delivered

The main sponsor of the conference was the European Union and Her Excellency Esmeralda Hernandez Aragones delivered the keynote address. She highlighted the importance of empowering the youth personally and nationally by listening to and acting on their concerns. She called on the Government of Eswatini to learn from

Europe's programmes with the same objectives. She emphasized that even though the EU was ending its project of paying for Grade One pupils, it would continue to support the country in the Social Protection Project targeting early childcare and education.

Msibi, on behalf of the Board chairperson, said that the importance of this event was the experience-sharing platform and the opportunity to learn and advocate for a safe space for cooperatives in schools. He stated that the theme anticipated the next stage as cooperatives would be used as a catalyst for entrepreneurship among young people and aim to harness its depth and reach to advance economic emancipation.

Voluntarily

Cooperatives are defined as 'an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise' according to the International Labour Organisation, 2006. They have been recognised as key actors that support the implementation and achievement of Sustainable Development Goals. Concurrently, they are enterprises that endeavour to meet the economic progress of members while satisfying their socio-cultural interests and protecting the environment.

The triple effect of cooperatives warrants its ascendancy as an alternate business model, especially for the youngest and fast growing workforce globally. The hindrances and complex problems faced by the continent find a balanced, collective approach in this model; one not divorced from the grassroot dy-

namics and accommodates a myriad of ambitions. Also inculcates skills, soft and hard, to equip the members to be aware and efficacious.

"By integrating the poor and relatively well-off in the same income-generating opportunities, cooperatives also contribute to the reduction of exclusion and inequality", said Musa Ntuli from DGRV, who presented on the role of cooperatives in promoting youth empowerment and inclusion in Africa.

Critical

Brenda Karungi, the Communications Officer from the Uganda Cooperative Alliance, applauded the conference's objectives. "This was an important event because critical issues were discussed with strategic stakeholders", said Karungi. For her first visit to Eswatini, Karungi said she found it beautiful and rich with culture.

Sihlelelwe Ndlangamandla, of Manzini Nazarene High School, appreciated the focus on youth empowerment. "It helps us save more from an early stage and teaches us on how to be responsible leaders", the bubbly student commented.

Throughout the proceedings, partners and funders were abundantly thanked for their resourceful support. These include, but not limited to: CO-DEC, Lubane Savings Cooperatives, Aflatoun International, Republic of China on Taiwan, International Cooperatives Alliance, Centre for Financial Inclusion (CFI), Eswatini National Youth Council (ENYC) and others. Countries represented were Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eswatini, Ghana, Kenya, Mauritius, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zimbabwe.



A poolside group photo of the participants. (Pic: Courtesy)