

FEATURES

UNDP opens window of opportunity for enterprising Basotho



By: Thoboloko Ntšonyane

MASERU- The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) will this week send 12 Basotho youth on an all-expenses paid trip for the annual Youth Connekt Summit in Nairobi, Kenya where they will showcase their innovations and creativity and meet their continental counterparts.

The top 10 are drawn from the recently launched Sebatatso Youth Empowerment Initiative (YEI) – the Prime Minister’s Office initiative that is supported by the United Nations (UN) and its agencies, in particular the UNDP and other institutions.

This youth initiative aims to connect youth-led enterprises and innovators with investors as well as mentors while also addressing youth unemployment.

There are additional two youth which the UNDP will sponsor to participate at the upcoming Youth Connekt Summit slated to take place from 8th to 12th this month and this duo has partnered with the UNDP on waste management and recycling initiative.

The UNDP Lesotho’s Resident Representative Dr Jacqueline Olweya described the Youth Connekt as a resourceful experience that young people across Africa meet with an intention of empowering them through a multifaceted approach.

She added: “This initiative exposes youth to an incomparable platform to link and address their needs with their peers, policymakers, business leaders, development partners, and the civil society. This is where multiple solutions to their challenges are being unearthed and shared for investments, replication and cross continental partnerships.

“UNDP as a partner to the Youth Connekt Africa, felt obliged to support the Sebatatso innovators and entrepreneurs to take advantage of this magnificent and empowering economic development initiative.”

Dr Olweya highlighted that the expected end result is to enhance the beneficiaries’ knowledge, experiences, skills, ideas, and innovations while creating new and untapped business opportunities.

Launched on October 25th, Sebatso YEI attracted youth across all districts in the country and they presented their business ideas before the investors and those successfully walked away with seed funding prizes ranging from M18 000 to M90 000 to plough back into their establishments.

The beneficiaries who will be departing for Nairobi to participate at the Youth Connekt are Bokang Matlosa, Ts'oanelo Thonkha, Morakane Semoko, Lipontseng Violet Makhosane, Limphe Thoahlane, Mamothibe Portia Mothibe, Mokhethi Gilbert Phohlo, Lerato Masupha, Rapiiso Mosebetsi, Thikoi Constance Molapi who emerged winners during the Sebatso YEI launch and Bataung Madane and Rethabile Molumo who have partnered with the UNDP on waste management and recycling initiative.

Youth Connekt convenes an array of potential private sector partnerships and offers investment opportunities coming from many fields across the world to witness and potentially provide capital advancements or enroll youth enterprises into a mentorship programme to help grow innovations or startups.

The UNDP Resident Representative further mentioned that the summit provides a platform where they meet their equally competitive counterparts from across the continent and through these engagements the cross fertilization of skills and ideas, exchange knowledge, and foster new ways of cross border partnerships.

The delegation will be led by the Prime Minister Ntsokoane Matekane, accompanied by Ministers of Gender, Youth and Culture as well as Information, Communications, Science, Technology and Innovation also the UNDP's delegation and other senior government officials.

Dr Olweya said UNDP works in partnership with the Government of Lesotho, development partners and the private sector to combine efforts in the various initiatives that are in place to ensure that they reach the desired goal of empowering Basotho youth in business or those aspiring to be innovators and entrepreneurs.

"Africa's youth have an enormous potential to leverage their communal capabilities, ideas, and innovation to design a better future. The summit creates a new paradigm shift for home-grown solutions and placing our youth at a space of novel development opportunities," she emphasized.

While she noted that there are a wide range of resources and capacity constraints that limit young people to achieve their goals, this coupled with limited policy and regulatory guidance to facilitate greater investment in different sectors, in an endeavor to address this phenomenon, she said UNDP has developed a University Innovation Pod (UNIPOD) which is aimed at addressing and mitigating some of the impediments in the innovations space.

Lesotho is reportedly one of the participating countries in the development and implementation of these hubs.

The UNDP Resident Representative stated that the Sebatso initiative will be anchored on the UniPod to harness local knowledge, foster creativity and innovations, and leverage emerging youth capabilities in technology to catalyse development transformation. This linkage, she said is expected to nurture innovations and creativity to generate development intelligence necessary to leapfrog economic development and transformation.

Asked how the UNDP is going to ensure that there is a return on investment and sustainability on the businesses of these beneficiaries, she noted thus:

"Through support from UNDP, the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Culture has institutionalized a Mentorship Programme, that links up 'mentees' (youth) and 'mentors' (established individuals/institutions from diverse backgrounds/sectors). This is one of the strategies that will be used to ensure sustainability of SEBABATSO by linking the youth innovators and entrepreneurs with relevant mentors.

"A performance based contracting modality would be adopted in providing the capital/prizes to the winning youth (those who received prizes), as a sustainability strategy to ensure their innovations/ideas come to fruition and/or their businesses go through the various stages of formation.

Discussions are ongoing for possible placement of the SEBABATSO youth in selected institutions for internships/work experience etc.," said Dr Olweya.