

PROMOTING DECENT WORK FOR COMPETITIVE ENTERPRISES

By John Ricks Kayizzi

There is urgent need to strengthen systems which protect the rights of workers and enhance their productivity, gender minister Betty Amongi has said.

Speaking ahead of Labour Day celebrations, Amongi said this year's theme, *Safeguarding Uganda's Progress: Empowering the Workforce and Promoting Decent Work for Competitive Enterprises*, is significant in the context of Uganda's ongoing socio-economic transformation.

This year's theme calls on all stakeholders to safeguard the progress we have made by investing in our workforce and ensuring that work is not only available, but also decent and productive.

This year's national celebrations honour the contributions of the workforce, especially in the informal sector like boda boda riders and market vendors

towards national development.

The national celebrations are being held at Bishop Nkoyoyo Primary School grounds in Matala in Buikwe district today.

International Labour Day traces its origins to the historic 1886 Chicago workers' strike in the US, where more than 400,000 labourers demanded an eight-hour workday.

The protest, which turned violent after police confronted unarmed demonstrators, became a defining moment in the global labour movement. Since then, May 1 has evolved into a worldwide commemoration of workers' struggles and

LABOUR PRODUCTIVITY

Labour productivity, however, remains below national and global benchmarks. In 2021, Uganda's GDP per person employed stood at approximately \$6,162 in purchasing power parity terms, compared to \$10,278 for Sub-Saharan Africa and over \$41,000 globally. Experts attribute this gap to limited access to technology, low levels of industrialisation, and a shortage of skilled labour. To address these challenges, the government has rolled out several strategic interventions. These include the operationalisation of the Minimum Wages Advisory Board, expansion of the National Apprenticeship Programme, and implementation of the Jua-Kali initiative aimed at formalising informal enterprises. Plans are also underway to establish a National Productivity and Competitiveness Centre to coordinate efforts aimed at improving efficiency.

achievements.

UNEMPLOYMENT

Despite a gradual decline in unemployment rates over the past decade, a significant proportion of Ugandans remain

engaged in informal and vulnerable work.

The informal sector accounts for approximately 85% of total employment and contributes about 54.5% of the country's Gross Domestic Product. This reality presents a major policy challenge, as many workers in the informal economy operate without adequate legal protection or access to social security.

Aggrey David Kibenge, the Permanent Secretary in the gender ministry, highlighted the

risks associated with informality and the need for stronger labour protections.

SOCIAL PROTECTION

Social protection coverage in Uganda remains limited. Although 3.2 million workers are registered under retirement benefit schemes, only about 771,000 accounts are active. Similarly, the number of formal employees contributing Pay-As-You-Earn taxes has remained below 800,000 over the past decade, highlighting the narrow base of formal employment.

Uganda continues to make strides in economic growth and development. The size of the economy has expanded significantly, from sh64.8 trillion in 2010/11 to over sh202 trillion in 2023/24.

The proportion of households engaged in subsistence agriculture has declined, while investments in infrastructure, education, and healthcare have improved living standards.



Gender minister Betty Amongi