

EDITORIAL

Do more to support youth after school

This week, Makerere University is conferring academic honours and qualifications upon at least 9,000 graduates at various levels and disciplines. The exercise is replicated yearly at Makerere, across nine public universities and as regularly at the more than 30 private chartered universities in the country. Add to that the other tertiary institutions in the country, and you begin to visualise the sheer numbers of young people leaving school with varying qualifications and eagerly eyeing the world of work.

Of all the graduating youth, a significant portion is leaving vocational institutes, and we expect they have hands-on skills and are well-equipped to be job creators.

It is only when they embark on the journey outside school that they will meet the hurdles that are preventing thousands from actualising their dreams and putting the school-acquired knowledge into practice.

The issue:

Youth unemployment

Our view:

The government should promote investment in sectors that have real potential to provide opportunities for meaningful jobs.

The ability to provide jobs that pay decent wages and provide safe working conditions for the nation's youth should be the gold standard when evaluating investor prospects.

Without rich benefactors or well-to-do family support, youth start requiring access to credit. Besides, they will probably have already sold key family assets to afford tuition in tertiary institutions since the bulk of them are neither free nor cheap.

Leaving their families saddled in debt, they are expected to set forth and establish small businesses using expensive and hard-to-get credit, the acquisition of which might require security in the form of assets they do not have. And the cycle continues.

As the nation strives hard to educate its youth to the highest levels possible, government policy should pay attention to the barriers that lock youth out of employment and make it next to impossible to go the entrepreneurial route, given the high cost of starting and sustaining a business.

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The ability to provide jobs that pay decent wages and provide safe working conditions for the nation's youth should be the gold standard when evaluating investor prospects. Increasing the opportunities to earn a decent living at home will reduce the excessive brain drain and migration of workers to seek better lives abroad.

With more than 70 percent of Ugandans under 30, Uganda has one of the youngest populations in the world. Feeding and educating such a big fraction of the population without planning for its proper deployment is a disaster in the making.

The number of youngsters pouring into the job market is disproportional to the capacity of public and private ventures to absorb them. We need to do better.

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