

LETTER OF THE DAY

Unemployment crisis: A generation in despair

Uganda, a nation blessed with a youthful population faces a daunting crisis, one that continues to widen the gap between dreams and reality for millions of young people: unemployment.

With thousands of graduates emerging from Makerere University each year, alongside many other institutions across the country, the question remains, 'where are the jobs?' The statistics are staggering, yet the reality is even more sobering.

As of recent reports, Uganda's unemployment rate among youth stands at an alarming rate of more than 13 percent, and the underemployment figures are even higher.

The number of graduates entering the job market each year is growing exponentially, but the opportunities available are few and far between.

The youth who represent over 75 percent of the population, are caught in a vicious cycle, education without opportunity, aspiration without realisation. This is not just a statistical issue, it's a matter of the future generation, and it's high time Uganda confronts this challenge head on.

In Uganda, education is often seen as the key to a brighter future. Universities churn out thousands of graduates annually, each armed with degrees and dreams of success.

However, the job market has proven to be a cruel reality for many. The lack of alignment between what students are taught and what the job market demands is a major factor in the rising unemployment rates.

Many graduates find themselves with degrees that do not correspond to available positions.

For instance, degrees in fields like humanities, social scienc-



es and some technical courses have few direct opportunities in the labour market.

Additionally, the skills taught in universities often do not equip students with the hands on, practical experience needed to thrive in Uganda's rapidly changing economy.

The curriculum is outdated in some cases, and students graduate with theoretical knowledge that doesn't meet the dynamic needs of industries such as agriculture, technology, manufacturing, and entrepreneurship-sectors that hold the potential for job creation but require more specialised skills.

For many young Ugandans, the challenge is more than just finding a job, it's survival, with limited job opportunities in the formal sector, many youths have turned to the informal economy, which while providing some income, often comes with precarious working conditions and little to no social security.

From boda-boda riders to street vendors, many young people are resorting to self-employment out of sheer necessity. The result is an economy that is increasingly dependent on precarious, low wage work with few benefits, leaving many young people vulnerable and stuck in a cycle of poverty.

The emotional toll of this reality cannot be overstated. Young Ugandans are not just facing unemployment, they are facing a crisis of hope. The pressure to provide for their families, to live up to societal expectations, and to secure a stable future weighs heavily on them. This desperation can lead to a sense of helplessness, pushing many towards risky behaviour or even mental health struggles.

Education reform is imperative. Universities and vocational institutions must evolve to offer courses that are in line with the demands of the job market. There is an urgent need for programs that teach practical,

entrepreneurial, and technical skills that will empower graduates to either create their own opportunities or effectively participate in the formal job market.

Additionally, there needs to be a greater emphasis on entrepreneurship. With the right support, mentorship, and access to capital, though Ugandans can harness their creativity and drive to build businesses that contribute to the local and national economy.

The government in partnership with private enterprises, must create an environment that fosters innovation and gives young entrepreneurs the resources they need to succeed. Finally, increased investment in the private sector and infrastructure development could provide jobs for thousands of young people.

The government should encourage both local and foreign investment industries such as agriculture, manufacturing, and technology-sectors that have vast untapped potential for growth and job creation. As these industries expand, so too will opportunities for employment, reducing the unemployment rate and creating a sustainable future for the next generation.

Conclusively, the unemployment crisis is not a challenge that can be ignored any longer. It's a ticking time bomb, one that threatens to undermine the potential of an entire generation. But it's an opportunity for bold, transformative action that can turn the tide and provide young Ugandans with the future they deserve.

It's time for Uganda to invest in its youth. I hope with time we see the fruits of a prosperous, youthful and vibrant economy which lives up to the expectations of every graduate, dreamer and every young Ugandan.

Atim Edith Labeja,
Writer and lawyer