

Teach vocational skills in universities – experts

By Martin Kitubi

Several educationists have called for inclusion of vocational skills training in the university curriculum to encourage innovativeness and address the unemployment burden.

Francis Tabu, the MasterCard Foundation scholarship programme manager at BRAC Uganda, said despite a large pool of unemployed graduates in the country, employers continue to search for skilled talents to fill the growing number of jobs.

He said this during the opening of a two-day post-secondary opportunities expo at Hana International School in Nsangi, Wakiso district organised by BRAC Uganda, a non-governmental organisation.

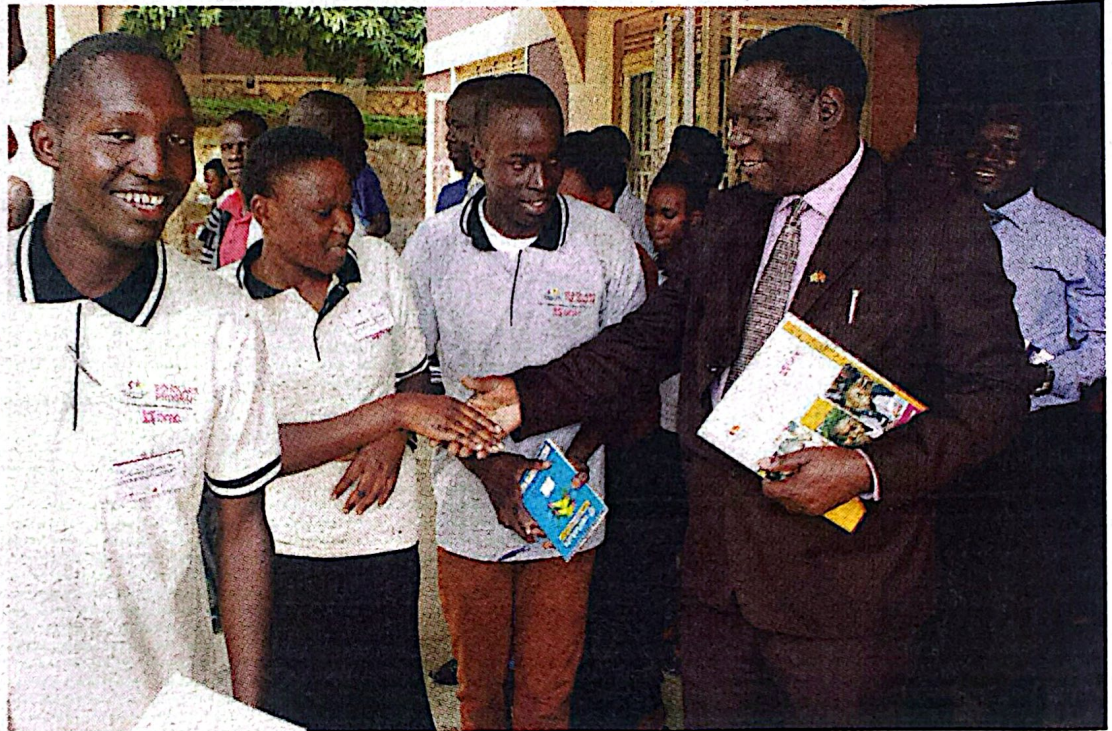
A total of 507 Senior Six leavers from 60 secondary schools across the country, who are the beneficiaries of BRAC scholars programme, attended the expo on Thursday.

"It is time Uganda embraced vocational skills. In other words, the Government should embed vocational skills in university curricula," Tabu said.

Tabu noted that there is a qualitative mismatch where people who are qualified for certain jobs, but they do not have skills needed by employers to perform certain assignments.

About 400,000 students graduate annually from both public and private institutions, but Uganda Investment Authority (UIA) estimates that only about 150,000 jobs are created in the formal sector annually. This leaves an estimated 250,000 unemployed.

"Some universities are producing unskilled graduates and yet they could have gained



Nsumba Lyazi (right) interacting with some students who turned up for the MasterCard Foundation expo at Hana International School on Thursday. Photo by Godfrey Kimono

more skills in vocational institutions."

Tabu blamed the unemployment burden among university graduates on the preference of white-collar jobs to blue-collar jobs.

"Parents have failed entry into vocational education. They discourage children from studying in vocational institutions," he said.

Robinson Nsumba-Lyazi, the director of basic and secondary education at the Ministry of Education and Sports, who was the chief guest, said: "The 21st century is looking for innovative and problem-solving individuals. Therefore, we should embrace both soft and hard skills."

The expo

Tabu also called for extension of career guidance programmes to the lower levels of education for

Prof. John Opuda-Asibo, the executive director of National Council for Higher Education, told *New Vision* that inclusion of vocational skills training in university curricula would require more funding.

However, he observed that a number of courses at universities, including journalism, medicine and engineering, have aspects of vocational skills, but require higher investment to achieve the requisite quality standards.

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learners to make best choices regarding secondary school subject combinations in line with their natural abilities.

"Many children at primary and secondary levels of education do not have career guidance. This explains why they are studying courses for the sake of passing," Tabu said.

Grace Namata, the scholars programme communications manager, said: "The country is emphasizing sciences subjects in schools, but students do not know the minimum requirements for certain courses at universities and this explains why we need to offer career guidance."

James Wamema, a student at St Mary's Kitende, said: "Information regarding available vocational skills is not known, and such engagements will help us choose the right courses."