LETTER OF THE DAY

Cash handouts can only do so much

The current situation facing Uganda's young population represents a critical juncture for their development.

The 2024 National Population Census conducted by the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (Ubos) reveals that Uganda's population has reached approximately 45.9 million people who are predominantly under the age of 30.

Youth unemployment stands at about 16 percent and more than 40 percent of young people aged 15 to 24 are not in employment education or training.

The young population represents Uganda's most valuable resource for economic development.

Young people lose chances to connect with national leaders because these interactions only involve leaders giving financial assistance for personal needs.

The rising dependency pattern creates major obstacles to obtaining sustainable wealth building solutions because it causes people to lose their motivation to work and pursue business development.

The youth need to stop begging for cash handouts support from the President and instead request the President to allocate funds for community development projects.

The community needs to demand strategic investments because those investments will create new opportunities that will benefit the entire community.

Young people need to understand that they must work with others in this process. The government has implemented policies which have led to increased dependency among citizens. Multiple youth programmes throughout history focused on providing cash assistance to both formal and informal youth organisations. The programmes operate with good intentions but they fail to establish effective multiplication systems and repayment methods and proper programme evaluation.



The challenge exists because there is no unified approach to youth development which focuses on essential skills and increases productivity while enabling youth to enter the job market. Youth programmes show a pattern of operating in separate parts while responding to immediate needs. The funding system allocates resources to various organisations which include community groups and professional content creators but lacks an effective method to evaluate results and assess economic effects.

The recent case demonstrates how youth dialogue platforms can fail to achieve their intended mission. The *Jazz with Jajja* programme aimed to establish direct dialogues between young people including content creators and digital influencers and national leaders to create an environment for entrepreneurship development and national development discussions. The participants of the programme used the platform to ask for personal financial assistance instead of supporting community-based solutions. The dialogue focused on individual promises instead of requiring investments for local infrastructure and apprenticeship programs and market access development.

The missed chance becomes evident when assessing Uganda's main problems because the nation has more than 159000 kilometres of roadways but only 28 to 30 percent of its highways are paved which results in terrible or absent conditions for rural and secondary roads.

The government needs to solve this problem because 80 percent of Ugandans live in rural areas which possess only 30 percent of their healthcare resources while youth use platforms such as *Jazz with Jajja* to request personal benefits because they lack understanding of essential infrastructure funding which needs to be established for better economic development and social growth.

The government needs to establish a new youth empowerment framework which needs to guide its work. Uganda requires a comprehensive plan which will enable young people to engage in trade across Africa through better financial management than its current method of distributing cash to different areas throughout the country.

A national apprenticeship program could be a suitable starting point. Unemployed youth could be able to acquire skills in the industries, agro-processing plants, and service sectors. At the same time, vocational and technical skills training should be increased for young people not in the formal education system.

Uganda also needs to focus on value addition. Rather than exporting primary products and then in turn having to import manufactured goods, young entrepreneurs ought to be assisted in processing coffee, fruits, spices, hides, among others.

If Uganda's youth are provided with the necessary skills, they will be in a position to provide processed agricultural products, digital services, and manufactured goods to African countries. This will help create jobs, generate foreign exchange, and create genuine economic independence for Uganda's youth.

In addition, youth mobilisation ought not to be left only to individual appeals. Young people ought to be mobilised to advocate for apprenticeship programmes, functional markets, better infrastructure, and policies that promote value addition and trade.

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