BY MOSES NAMPALA

EMPLOYMENT

INDUSTRIAL PARKS BUILD SKILLED TECHNICIANS

Young technicians at work

Angella Achieng, 26, is among the technicians freshly recruited at Chint Metres and Electrical Uganda Company Ltd, Mbale Industrial Park.

The company manufactures essential domestic electrical devices – Energy Metres (EM) fitted on electrical poles and Customer Interface Units (CIU) fitted in households ("YAKA").

Spotting a white gown, gloves, complete with a white headgear, from her desk, her gaze is constantly trained on two computer screens before her.

The right hand not only rests on a cursor but keeps on skilfully operating it, while her left hand holds a strange lever-like device that constantly flicks an infrared indicator light.

"My chore here is testing the functionality of every EM/CIU circuit board, before it's conveyed to the next production stage of assembling," she explains.

The production wing has a mechanism for identifying particular spots of defects on every circuit board.

As Uganda joined the rest of the globe to celebrate the 2026 Labour Day on May 1, with themes around the well-being of the worker, on the national scene, companies like Chint Metres and Electrical Uganda Company Ltd are blending well with the theme: "Unlocking the potential of Uganda's youth labour force. Advancing productivity and expanding opportunities for decent work."

GOVERNMENT'S VISION

Over the past decade, the government of Uganda has prioritised industrial development to transform the country from an agricultural-based economy to a more diversified and competitive industrial economy.

The shift has demanded national ambition, but most importantly, adaptation to global production trends. Lillian Namudu, the inventory manager at Chint Metres and Electrical Uganda Company Ltd, says the biggest achievement as Uganda celebrates this year's Labour Day is the success in crafting a friendly structural employment model that transforms the youthful labour force at hand from a state of incompetence to efficient human resources.

She notes that flowery academic credentials obtained from universities and tertiary institutions are not enough, but with hands-on training, the youth get practical skills needed for the job market, and to boost industrialisation.

The strategy has enhanced the competitiveness of Ugandans in both local and global markets.

SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONES AND INDUSTRIAL PARKS

According to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), Uganda is on a promising trajectory to build a strong industrial sector.

To stimulate industrial sector growth, the government has established over 27 special economic zones and industrial parks across the country, managed by the Uganda Investment Authority. Uganda's key industrial parks include Kampala Industrial and Business Park (KIBP) in Namanve, Mbale Industrial Park, Kapeeka Industrial Park, Luzira Industrial Park, Bweyogerere Industrial Park, and Kabalega Industrial Park (KIP).

Additional regions such as Gulu, Arua, Lira, Kabarole, and Mubende have been identified as development areas for new industrial parks.

Science and Technology Parks are being established in Pakwach, Kyankwanzi, Kamuli, and Rubirizi.

Meanwhile, Masaka, Rakai, and Nakasongola have earmarked land for future industrial development.

CHALLENGES

However, Uganda's journey to industrialisation faces critical challenges, including a shortage of skilled labour.

"While universities and tertiary institutions produce hundreds of graduates each year, the rapidly evolving industrial sector finds many – especially in science-related fields – trained using outdated curricula. As a result, industries struggle to find workers with the necessary practical skills," observes Namudu.

She explains that this gap is partly due to limited modern training equipment in institutions, as well as the need for instructors to upgrade their expertise. In response, Chint Meters and Electrical Uganda Company Ltd, based in Mbale Industrial Park, has introduced a rigorous three-month in-house training programme for all newly recruited employees before they are allowed to participate in the production process.

"None of the skilled labour on the market has sufficient knowledge of the production chain," says Namudu, who holds a Bachelor's degree in Electrical Engineering from Makerere University and is herself a product of the same training.

Initially, the company relied heavily on technical workers from China. However, due to the high cost of foreign labour, management, together with the government, phased out most expatriates, retaining a few as trainers for local graduates.

YOUTH SPEAK ON OUT SKILLS TRAINING

Angella Achieng, a recent electrical engineering graduate from Makerere University, says: "I graduated with a degree, but I was not fully prepared for this kind of work. The training has equipped me with practical skills, and now I feel more confident. Every day is a learning experience," she says.

Another graduate, Abraham Okanya, 28, agrees: "What we learn at university is largely theoretical. Without exposure to modern industrial practices, you remain limited.

Phiona Namugose, 28, says: "It has helped me adapt and acquire diverse skills. I now have competencies that can be applied anywhere in the world," she says.

She emphasises that continuous learning is essential in keeping up with industrial advancements.

IMPACT OF LOCAL PRODUCTION

According to Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), to reduce importation reliance and retention of foreign exchange government has moved forward to promote local manufacturing.

UBOS says the shift from imports towards local manufacturing of electric switches has been a feasible option for the nation. It is part of the larger $3b reduction in annual import costs across various sectors, reducing total imports from $7b to $4b. Recently, in a meeting with Chinese investors on a new industrial park project in Lusenke, Kayunga district, state minister for privatisation and investment Eveline Anite said: "Our Vision is not just a dream of a $500b economy, but to turn this dream into reality. We are looking at practical investments that will transform our economy and create opportunities for Ugandans."

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