

RENEWED PUSH FOR YOUTH JOBS AND MINIMUM WAGE

By Ivan Tibenkana

Uganda's push to transform its youthful population into an engine of economic growth took centre stage at the 4th Annual National Labour Convention and Expo 2026, where leaders called for practical, urgent action to address unemployment, skills gaps and labour market inefficiencies.

TANGIBLE SOLUTIONS

Opening the convention, Vice-President Maj. (rtd) Jessica Alupo framed the gathering as more than dialogue, urging stakeholders to focus on tangible solutions.

"This convention is not just a meeting; it is a call to action. Let us focus on what works; apprenticeships, enterprise development, digital innovation and stronger linkages between education and employment."

With 73.2% of Uganda's population aged between 0 and 30 years, the country's economic trajectory will hinge on investments in human capital, particularly health, education and skills development. The speakers across the forum emphasised the need to bridge the gap between education and employment.

\$\$ Parliament is ready to urgently handle minimum wage disparities

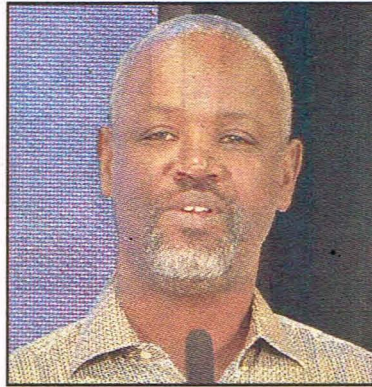
ALIGNING THE YOUTH

Allen Kagina, the chairperson of the TVET Council, stressed the importance of competence over numbers.

"The future of Uganda will be determined by what the young people can do, not by how many they are," she said, calling for improved training systems, better instructors and stronger alignment with industry needs.

Douglas Opio, the chief executive officer of the Federation of Uganda Employers, warned that the transition from school to work is a significant barrier faced by young Ugandans.

Alupo outlined the Government priorities over the next five years,



Deputy Speaker of Parliament Thomas Tayebwa

including promoting industrial growth, strengthening enterprise development, enhancing skills systems and improving labour administration. She emphasised that success will require collective responsibility.

Government, Alupo noted, cannot act alone, urging the private sector to drive job creation, employers to invest in their workforce and workers to embrace productivity and discipline.

Beyond economic and policy discussions, the convention also highlighted the role of values and mindset in shaping the workforce.

BEYOND STATISTICS

Apostle Grace Lubega urged leaders to look beyond statistics and focus on purpose and character among young people, arguing that sustainable productivity requires both skills and a strong value system.

Running parallel to the broader labour discussions was renewed political momentum around the long-debated minimum wage.

FAST-TRACKING MINIMUM WAGE

Deputy Speaker of Parliament Thomas Tayebwa signalled a shift in urgency, committing lawmakers to fast-track a resolution within six months.

"We can crack this in six months. Government can also deliver in a timely manner, so, I hope we can move quickly because for us as parliament, we are ready. This has been a long effort that we should have done yesterday, not even today," Tayebwa said.

Uganda currently operates without a universally-enforced minimum wage, leaving many workers, particularly in the informal sector, vulnerable to low pay and insecure contracts.

The issue has also spilled into international labour markets,

especially in the Gulf, where Ugandan migrant workers often face unfavourable terms.

REGIONAL VOICE

State Minister for Gender, Labour and Social Development Davinia Anyakun indicated that regional efforts are underway to address wage disparities affecting migrant workers.

"We had a meeting last month. One of the resolutions we made is to have decent and standardised payments for our people. We realised that Philippines, Pakistanis and other nationals are being paid more money for the same job. So, we intend to move as a region in these negotiations," Anyakun said.

Held at Kampala's Serena Hotel last week and convened by the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, the two-day forum brought together government officials, employers, workers' organisations, development partners, academia and civil society.

The convention was held under the theme, *Unlocking the Potential of Uganda's Youth Labour Force: Advancing Productivity and Expanding Opportunities for Decent Work.*