

## ■ EDITORIAL

# Youth unemployment: Time to run, not walk

The latest labour market survey by the Uganda Bureau of Statistics paints a grim picture: Despite having a higher number of a working-age population, 17.9% of Ugandan youth remain unemployed, which is an increase from 17% in 2021. The employment-to-population ratio, measuring working-age individuals with jobs, stands at a mere 44.7% nationally, with huge regional disparities. Bunyoro leads at 57.3%, while Bukedi languishes at 28.0%. This gap reveals a nation failing to harness its youthful population, which is its greatest asset.

The economic landscape shows services (50.5%) and agriculture (37.1%) dominate employment, but 87.6% work in the informal sector with minimal security or benefits. The gender gap is equally concerning — 53.1% of men work versus 37.4% of women. Economically, this underutilisation stifles productivity and tax revenue; socially, it fuels frustration, crime and brain drain among our most energetic citizens.

While government initiatives like PDM, Emyooga, YLP and GROW, among others, have created opportunities, the persistent unemployment rates prove these efforts are insufficient. Industrial parks employ only 29,705 people, a reflection of 1.3% of formal workers, highlighting our limited progress.

We must, therefore, undertake more interventions, including scaling agricultural value chains: With 37.1% employed in farming, processing facilities could transform subsistence agriculture into job-rich enterprises. We should also leverage digital platforms to connect skilled youth with global markets, accelerate industrial park development while ensuring women's inclusion in manufacturing. We can also redirect resources from ineffective programmes toward sectors showing promise.

While job creation is not a walk in the park, we must abandon the myth that it happens passively. We, therefore, need to be intentional in ensuring that more youth are skilled and are productive to turn our youth bulge from a challenge into a competitive advantage.



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