

Hundreds of men and women, some of whom are school dropouts, have got jobs in Mbale factories in its industrial area.

# Mbale factories create jobs for school dropouts

BY FRED WAMBEDDE

**B**efore Mbale city fully wakes, the Mbale-Tirinyi road, which leads to Mbale-Sino Industrial Park, is alive with activity.

Hundreds of young men and women move from either direction of the road, most on foot and a few others on boda-bodas from their respective villages within Mbale City and neighbouring areas to the park.

By the time the factory gates open at 7am, the area is packed. Lines begin to form as security guards carry out checks to allow the workers to enter.

Among these is Beatrice Logose, a 22-year old Senior Three dropout, who now works as a crane operator in Unisteel Investment Uganda Limited, one of the factories operating in the park, which opened in 2018.

"I am working and happy because as a school dropout, I never imagined anyone would employ me. However, when I came to the park seeking employment, I got an opportunity. After acquiring skills, I can now operate a crane and other heavy machines," Ms Logose says, adding that the only requirement to get the job was a letter from the village chairperson and a National Identity Card.

She adds that although they work with machines, their safety is guaranteed through the use of improved technology and personal protective equipment such as gumboots, gloves, helmets, overalls, safety shoes and belts.

Ms Logose is one of the over 13,500 employees working in the park. The park, which was commissioned in 2018 with a total investment portfolio of \$600m (Shs2.3 trillion), sits on 619 acres of land.

Ms Ariana Nyanzi, a Senior Four dropout from Bulubandi in Iganga District, who works as an excavator operator, says she earns Shs900,000 per month. She says this money helps her to adequately take care of her needs.

"I use part of the money to support the education of my siblings. I am happy that I have made the excavator my dream machine," she says.

After dropping out of school due to



Some of the workers in one of textile factories at Mbale Sino Industrial Park. PHOTO/ FRED WAMBEDE

lack of fees in 2021, Ms Nyanzi joined a busy garage in Mbale-Sino Industrial Park to work as a mechanic. She started as a spanner girl and she navigated the male-dominated space with confidence, fixing vehicles and in the long run, earned respect from clients and colleagues alike.

"As a spanner girl, the mechanics, all of them men, often sent me to bring different spanner types. While some ridiculed me, others supported me until I learnt the trade," she says.

After two years as a mechanic, Nyanzi, whose childhood dream revolved around machines, shifted from the garage to the machines department, mainly operating excavators, within the same industrial park.

"I picked interest in the excavator machines but most of my male colleagues, told me I could not handle what they called a man machine. To prove them wrong, I joined the department of machines and was given a master to try my luck," she says, with a beaming smile.

Ms Rose Nambozo, another employee, says after numerous job searches within Mbale City, she finally got a job at

## PRODUCTS PRODUCED

Currently of the 82 factories, 62 are operational, producing a variety of goods, including glass, textile, household detergents, mobile phones, smart televisions, baby diapers, clothes, LED bulbs, tubes, electrical meters and socks.

Mbale Sino Industrial Park.

"Before joining the park, my situation was bad. I am thankful that with this job, I can provide my children with education, medication, pay rent and meet my basic needs," she says.

Ms Nambozo says the establishment of the park is a blessing to the single mothers and school dropouts in the region. She says the park gives mothers a three-month maternity leave and provides pads to the girls and women working in the park.

"I appeal to single mothers and other women to apply for the jobs so they become productive," she says.

Ms Brenda Nagudi, working at Chint Metres Electrical (U) LTD as an electrical engineer says they are provided with rings to protect them from electric shocks as they carry on their duties. She adds that she has learnt how to assemble, solder, and repair electricity meters, skills she now uses even within her community to earn more money.

"The working environment is generally friendly, especially for women. We work from 7.30am to 6pm and are paid on time," she says.

Ms Lilian Namuddu, an inventory manager at Chint Meters and Electrical (U) LTD, says there are rarely any accidents because the workers are provided with protective gears.

## Worker welfare

Some workers in the parks also demand action on the minimum wage legislation, saying this will enable them to get decent pay. Mr Moses Mugoya, a human resource administration manager, says the worker welfare is key to the growth of factories.

"A worker is the heart of the factory so we must uplift their welfare if we need

results. We must also recruit able and competent workers," he says.

*Daily Monitor* also learnt that factories in the park have put in place strategies and technologies to control emission of gases into the air to mitigate pollution. For instance, the wastewater from factory production processes is treated and reused by factories for more production and other uses such as cleaning printing glasses and mixing chemicals.

Last year, President Museveni commissioned four more factories in the park, including Unisteel Investment Uganda Limited, Nice Textiles Uganda Limited, Xinlon Textile and garment technology Co Ltd, and Timber Paper Industry Co Ltd.

## Changing faces of city

Mr Abdullah Madoi, the mayor of Industrial City Division in Mbale City, says the park has changed the skyline of Mbale City.

"This area has now transformed from subsistence farming to a thriving industrial hub benefiting thousands of families," he says.

Mr Kennedy Mushemeza, the public relations manager for Sino-Uganda Mbale Industrial Park, says employees are paid according to their skills and productivity, with more skilled and productive workers earning higher wages. "Out of 13,500 employees in the park, 65 percent are female," he says.

Mr Laurent Zhang, the administration manager of the park, says the recruited workers undergo fresh training to equip them with skills for future sustainability.

"A person without a skill can be trained in various skills such as tailoring, electronics, electrical engineering, welding, painting, construction, among others," he says. He adds that employees undergo continuous training in high-tech factories such as phone and television assembly plants, to ensure long-term sustainability.

The Mayor of Mbale City, Ms Joyce Matuka Kidulu, says apart from job opportunities, the park has increased access to affordable goods and skills development.