

Beyond P7: The untapped promise of TVET

CELEBRATED civil engineer Dr Morris Odoch Odrua, who helped construct Jinja city's iconic Nile Bridge, never set foot in a secondary school classroom. Instead, this PhD holder chose the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) pathway immediately after P7, which he says is the foundation of his career. Odrua's story breaks the myth that TVET is only for academic "failures." It shows that there are clear, viable pathways to success beyond the traditional Senior One rush, something Ugandans should embrace.

The education ministry says TVET now offers structured progression from P7 all the way to PhD level. As a Ugandan, you can choose any option, either TVET or secondary school. Unlike the conventional academic route that eats up 25 years before securing employment, TVET students can become employable by age 16. A vocational certificate takes three years compared to four for O'level, meaning that by the time a secondary student graduates and enrolls for A'level, a TVET learner could already be pursuing a diploma.

However, the greatest barrier to TVET is our collective attitude. Even though enrolment in TVET programmes is rising, societal prejudice persists, treating skills education as second-



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class. This mindset gap is widening as job markets demand practical competencies while thousands of graduates remain unemployed. Ironically, many of our children waste six years in secondary school only for them to spend years after university

without work, while TVET graduates enter the workforce immediately with applicable skills.

Countries powering the global economy, including China, Germany and the US, have long recognised that skilled workers drive economic transformation. Therefore, primary school-leavers should consider TVET as a pathway to economic empowerment.

The Government needs to scale up sensitisation about the over 50 government-sponsored and about 100 private institutions now admitting directly from P7. Scholarships and modular programmes allow flexible progression to even the highest qualifications. Employers are now interested in someone who can do something, not just academic papers.

If Uganda is to fulfil its dream of being Africa's skills powerhouse and solve its youth unemployment challenge compounded by the rapidly growing population, it needs to double its effort in ensuring that Ugandans embrace skills, such as electrical installation, bricklaying, plumbing, pipe fitting, leatherwork, shoemaking and garment design, among others. It is this skilled workforce that is powering sectors, such as oil and gas, manufacturing, tourism and ICT.