

Dr Wilfred Nahamya, an economist and deputy executive secretary of technical vocational education and training assessment at the Uganda Vocational and Technical Assessment Board (UVTAB), says skills development is critical to increasing gainful employment and strengthening Uganda's economy. In an interview with *New Vision*, Nahamya explained how reforms in technical and vocational education are equipping Ugandans with practical skills while opening new pathways to employment.

Q What is UVTAB's role in combating unemployment in Uganda?

A The 2019 reform, the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Policy of 2019, is part of broader reforms in technical and vocational education and training after realising that it plays a bigger role in reducing youth unemployment.

The skilling agenda, anchored in the Fourth National Development Plan and Vision 2040, concentrates on areas such as manufacturing, construction, hospitality and hotel management, as well as electrical installation. The aim is to increase the number of technicians because ideally, you require more technicians than engineers and designers. On average, you find that an engineer would require to work with more than 20 technicians at certificate and diploma level.

How does UVTAB practically skill Ugandans, especially the youth, to get jobs?

We manage to skill them because of the broader placement area. When you go into plumbing, you find that water coverage is increasing in the rural sector. Electricity is also being extended to rural areas, alongside solar energy installation. All those areas need technicians.

Our training and certification is also linked to the hotel and hospitality sector. When you talk about increasing tourism, we certify tour guides and people in different areas of the hotel sector. That is in terms of placement,

UVTAB SKILLS TO END EMPLOYABILITY GAP

PHOTOS BY MARY KANSIIME



A view of Uganda Vocational and Technical Assessment Board building in Kampala on August 19

where youth find jobs.

The TVET Act 2025 also gives UVTAB a mandate in curriculum development. This goes beyond conventional long-term curricula of two years or one year. It allows us to develop training and assessment packages or modules that people can take to learn particular skills that can give them gainful employment.

I can come and train only in terrazzo making as a module, or laying tiles as a module.

How flexible are these modules for people in the *jua kali* sector?

These modules last three or six months because training in certain modules may not take long. After accumulating certain modules, I can still be given a long-term certificate, which allows me to move vertically.

I can accumulate more modules, get another module, go to the world of work and work, then come back and get a certificate.

If I am trained as a mechanic, I can go to the Middle East and work and come back. It is made in that

flexible way.

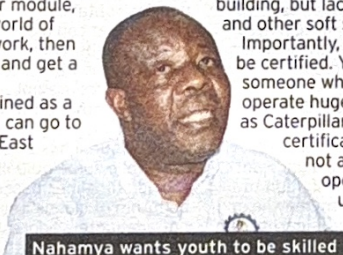
What happens to already skilled artisans?

We are going into what we call informally acquired skills. When you move downtown to Kisekka Market, Katwe and so on, you will find someone who is good at wiring automated cars, but may not express himself well in English. He speaks Luganda but understands what he is doing.

We want to certify them through a system called Recognition of Prior Learning. For instance, someone may know how to make *luwombo* without having studied through the conventional school system. Perhaps they were an apprentice or learnt from their mother. We want to certify them.

Certification also gives them additional soft skills. You can have the skills to do good plumbing or building, but lack communication and other soft skills.

Importantly, they need to be certified. You may find someone who knows how to operate huge equipment such as Caterpillars, but has no certificate. Companies will not allow someone to operate machinery unless they are certified.



Nahamya wants youth to be skilled

Trainers must, therefore, keep upgrading their skills. Somebody teaching electrical installation should also be able to install.

What are the biggest challenges facing TVET?

One major challenge is that vocational and technical training is costly. Because it emphasises hands-on training, institutions need materials and expensive equipment.

There is also the stigma that TVET is for failures. We who went to Makerere used to think those who joined technical institutions had failed. That stigma still exists.

This is linked to the degree syndrome, where every home wants a degree, even when the graduate may not get a job.

How can training costs be reduced?

Apart from development partners, we are emphasising "learning through production". A TVET institution teaching carpentry and joinery can produce furniture for neighbouring schools instead of having them buy from Kampala.

Students learn through production while institutions generate income.

At Nakawa Vocational College, for example, members of the public take vehicles there for repairs, supporting teachers and the institution. Once this is emphasised, students can work and their fees can be subsidised.

Is there evidence that TVET is working?

We have done a tracer study to establish where our alumni are and whether they are doing relevant work.

We found that over 70% get employment in their first year after completion. Most importantly, over 70% are placed in jobs related to their training.

To me, this shows that government should put in more effort because the tracer studies show that government is investing in the right thing.

The increasing numbers are also an indication that there is demand for vocational and technical skills. People are realising that their children have gone to university but have no jobs. The TVET money may not be a lot, but it is a start to gainful employment.

How different is vocational training from the traditional university setting?

People will study in the traditional university setting, but we are asking: "Wait a minute. You are studying, but is it going to give you employment?"

The issue is not even about the certificate because our curriculum is competence-based. The emphasis is on hands-on skills: What can I do?

It is based on three things: Skills, knowledge and attitudes. Attitudes include soft skills such as communication and life skills.

It is competence-based and hands-on. Once you have those skills, people will be able to get employed and unemployment will automatically reduce.

How competent are trainers?

The Government has increased funding to the sector, including centres of excellence at technical college level. The sector and the TVET Act are also streamlining training, including certification of trainers.

We have trainers who qualified 20 years ago, yet technology has changed. If you trained in automotive technology 20 years ago, you may have trained on carburettor vehicles, which are no longer commonly produced.



UGANDA VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL ASSESSMENT BOARD

UVTAB STREAMLINES TVET ASSESSMENT, CERTIFICATION OF TVET COMPETENCIES AND DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT OF CURRICULUM AND TRAINING PACKAGES IN UGANDA

UVTAB MANDATE

UVTAB is responsible for the Assessment and Certification of Competencies obtained through Formal and Informal Technical & Vocational Education and Training and development and management of TVET curriculum and training packages. (The Technical & Vocational Education and Training Act, No.3 of 2025)

Do you have a skill, learnt on the job but not certified?

01

Enrolled for any TVET academic programme up to Technician Diploma (Competency Level IV)?

02

Do you want a specific TVET curriculum or Training Package? Contact UVTAB Secretariat

03

REGISTER FOR UVTAB ASSESSMENT AND CERTIFICATION