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To mark 50 years of Uganda's independence, New Vision will until October 9, 2012 be publishing highlights of events and activities that have shaped the history of this country. Today, ROSELYNN KARATSI examines the changes that have occurred in the employment sector over the years.

"The good old days are gone," you often hear those who grew up in the 1960s and early 1970s reminisce. Those days, what many, who were in the civil service call the golden age of Uganda's public service, it was almost a rule to give new recruits cars and free houses.

Never mind that the biggest employer was the Government. It was also prestigious to work with the Government since the job came with a house and a car. The private sector was almost non-existent and employed few people since most of the companies belonged to Asians. "In the late 1960s, before students graduated, they were 'booked' by different companies for employment. Although it still happens today, there are a lot more students than the available jobs," says Fagil Mandy, an education consultant. Head-hunting is still practiced but it is not as evident as it was then, he adds.

He explains that as the colonial period was about to end, there was a definite need for skilled local personnel to replace the colonialists and Asians, but a few Ugandans were trained, while others had little or no experience. However, there are many more educated people today and Ugandans in major positions in different companies. Initially, top positions were a preserve of colonialists and Asians. Mandy notes that after independence, most of the influential positions were managed by expatriates and fewer Ugandans were employed by the Government unlike today.

During the Obote I regime, the country was stable economically and socially. "It was a time when Uganda was struggling to fill the employment gaps left by the colonialists," says Mandy.

The population was smaller and few people were educated, giving the learned huge chances to explore different opportunities across sectors. Schools and institutions like [Makerere University](#), which were started by the colonialists, could be counted on one's fingers. The few people that had gone to school attained an all-round education. Though there are many schools today, students do not have the will to study.

"Education is a business though it was seen as a luxury in the olden days," Mandy elaborates. Besides the insecurity and economic crisis of 1974, the sending a way of the

Indians by Idi Amin, the then president, created more gaps in the civil service. This opened doors for skilled Ugandans who were underutilised and lacked experience.

“I was nominated the headmaster of Old Kampala Primary School. Many other people got jobs and occupied the executive positions, which were a nogo-area previously,” Mandy narrates. Mandy says the quality of employees was high because the education system was integrated with co-curriculum activities, creating an all-round professional unlike the exam-oriented one today.

This has, therefore, affected the quality of employees because they lack practical knowledge. When one finished university in the 1960s to early 1990s, they were immediately taken on by employers. But as the numbers grew, this was less felt and applied.


Mandy notes that it is surprising that there are fewer committed employees despite enormous number of educated people. He says this was not the case then.


“We have more corrupt public servants, who are charged with mismanagement and embezzlement of funds. The people who earn more are the ones who are corrupt. A low pay is not an excuse either. The problem is rather the generally low morals among the population,” he says. He adds that a poor management system is also a major cause of corruption coupled with lack of creativity.


We also have to define our vision as a nation. Depending on how the Government answers this question, we must then define the vision of the country and the kind of skills needed and then tailor our curriculum accordingly, Mandy counsels. Solomon Kanyeihe, a journalist, says today’s employment landscape has completely changed compared to three to four decades ago.

“I did an interview at Uganda Prisons immediately after completing my university education in 1988 and passed. Although eight of us were interviewed, only four accepted the offer even when we had all passed the interview,” he says. He explains that 22 years ago, employers were competing for university finalists because there were fewer students at university level since there were no private universities or students.

He says it is ironical that as we celebrate 50 years of independence, many Ugandans are unemployed; the salary structures are uneven even when the value of money has deteriorated. Kanyeihe notes that the system of learning was more relevant to the prevailing economy and people unlike today’s, which is more theoretical. The enrollment has outstripped the facilities from primary school to university.

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