

By Carol Natukunda

**Y**ou have seen it before. A meeting is slated for 9:00am. There is hardly anyone in the room. It will be until an hour or two later that people start arriving.

"You know, it is African time," someone will try to throw the tired joke. However, it is actually not funny if you arrived on time and have to painstakingly wait for latecomers.

Take another example: you arrive at an office to make an inquiry. The receptionist does not even look up to greet you. She is engrossed in a WhatsApp chat – never mind that you are bringing them business.

This is an example of a perpetual habit among Ugandans that is costing companies heavily. In fact, a 2018 survey by Twaweza depicts Ugandans' poor work ethic as contributing to poverty levels.

The survey, titled *The haves and the have nots: Ugandans' views and opinions on poverty, fairness and inequality*, says over half (54%) of Ugandans say that the reason people are poor is laziness or a lack of personal effort.

In the study, fewer people mentioned external factors, such as social injustice (29%), luck (16%) and unemployment (11%). In the same vein, three times more people (62%) said hard work is the route to getting ahead in life/improving one's status as compared to education (20%). Most citizens (80%) also believe that hard work makes it easy to acquire wealth. The brief is based on data from Sauti za Wananchi, Africa's first nationally representative high-frequency mobile phone survey.

The findings are based on data collected from 1,925 respondents across Uganda, in May last year.

#### Why the poor ethics?

Quoting philosopher Adam Smith, Sam Lyomoki, the Workers MP, says: "Countries are wealthy not by virtue, but by the wealth of their virtues."

He says most developed countries are what they are because of virtues, like hard work, time keeping and honesty, among others, that are held high in most workplaces. "These are eventually felt when it comes to national transformation," he says.

Lyomoki blames Uganda's poor work ethic to the education system, which he observes is theoretical.

"Because we are training job seekers, we have people who want to be in office to wear coats and swing in the chairs. If it is an engineer, they stand on the site and start commanding small boys on what to do. But if it is an engineer in a developed country, for instance, you find them in overalls and doing what a Ugandan thinks are the dirty jobs," Lyomoki says.

# High poverty levels blamed

**OWERE SAYS MOST OF THE HANDS-ON TRAINING SCHOOLS WERE SCRAPPED AND TURNED INTO UNIVERSITIES. HE ASSERTS THAT THIS WAS A WRONG MOVE**

Usher Wilson Owere, the secretary general of the National Organisation of Trade Unions (NOTU), agrees and particularly cites the lack of training schools in the world of ethics.

"In the past, if you trained in hotel management for instance, there used to be an institution in Jinja, where people were taken through the work ethics before being rolled out. In public service, there used to be an institution, where people would be oriented before joining the work world. In these institutions, you learnt what was expected of you," Owere says.

He says most of the hands-on training schools were scrapped and turned into universities. In his estimation, this was a wrong move.

"And what do universities teach? It is reflected in their graduates. It is about completing the syllabus. I also feel there is a lot of freedom at university, where people know it is really up to them, to, for instance choose whether to attend class or not. They go with the same attitude to work," Owere says.

This is true when one speaks to employers. Josephine, 45, the proprietor of a forex bureau downtown Kampala, says she has had it.

"I receive young people desperately seeking to work. Within a few months, they start coming late. If not, they always come up with outrageous excuses not to show up. If I am not around, you know the bureau will open even at noon!" she says, adding that constant supervision is key for any company in Uganda to thrive.

#### Implications

Experts say there is a link between the work ethic and the country's productivity.



With good training in schools and reduced poverty levels, ethics at work could improve. A 2018 survey depicts Ugandans' poor work ethic as contributing to poverty



Sam Lyomoki

"When you do not make it for an appointment on time, you get into the time of another planned schedule. And what should have been done for today is delayed for tomorrow," Shamim Bagonza, a human resource consultant in private practice says. She adds: "There is everything wrong when we begin to postpone deadlines. An employee who waits until the last minute to complete an assignment often turns in lower quality work."

Furthermore, Bagonza says lack of productivity costs the company heavily. "First, you are paying the employee for no work done. This is costly in both time and money," Bagonza says.

She cites the shallow ministerial policy statements, which were earlier this year thrown out of Parliament by the Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Jacob Oulanyah.

"It was embarrassing to see ministers being sent back. We have a set deadline for the budget processing. Therefore, when you do shallow work, the



Time keeping is a virtue that workers ought to have

country loses. It means some sectors, which badly need the money, will most likely not get it, because someone was lazy on their job," Bagonza says.

The 2018 East African Economic Outlook by the African Development Bank, says while the region's labour productivity growth was positive between 2005 and 2016 at an average annual

rate of 2.4%, the lack of structural transformation and productivity growth is a main contributor to poverty and unemployment.

The report reveals further that the region is moving from being predominantly agriculture to the services and industry.

"The services sector has been the most dynamic in absorbing labour, but low-skill

services in urban areas may be prevalent, such as self-employment in transportation, wholesale, and retail. Investments in infrastructure and institutions could increase that contribution by creating an environment that is conducive," says the report.

#### Way forward

Owere feels that work ethics begin at home.

# on poor work ethics



In an era of social media, most young workers are taken by the gossip on the WhatsApp and Facebook forums

"I grew up seeing my family loving people and respecting them. Our background, teaches people that when they

go to work, they are serving the nation," Owere says. He stresses that in an era of social media; most young workers

are taken by the gossip on the WhatsApp and Facebook forums. "We need to put in place

orientation institutions so that people can do what they are supposed to do, in a given time," Owere says.

MP Lyomoki says there is need to move from contractual leadership to transformational leadership.

"Corruption is rampant because people want to do things anyhow for the time they have been given an office. In transformational leadership, it is about teamwork. It inspires workers to innovate and create change that will help everyone grow and shape the future success of the company and thus the nation," Lyomoki says. He agrees with Owere, saying there is need for labour colleges to look into work ethics. Narrating his own story, Lyomoki says he has started a training school, which targets housemaids and health workers. "That is my personal contribution, because these two occupations deal directly with our everyday lives. I hope we can make a difference at the national level, if we had the political will to do this," Lyomoki says.

Moving forward, Owere says they will continue sensitising workers under their umbrella organisation on how to do better.

## POOR PAY

Lyomoki, however, says many workers have a poor work mind set due to the poor remuneration packages.

"When the pay is poor, for instance and you show as management that you are not willing to change, people will report to work because they have to. And that will not make an impact," he says.

For most positions in corporate companies today, Lyomoki says some people are not hired on merit, but rather who they know in the organisation.

"We have a challenge, where people that are not fit for the job are hired. Somehow, they skip the rigorous interview processes and are hired. Such a person will take their work for granted and even go an extra mile to swindle funds.

We have people in offices who think they cannot be sacked, because they were handpicked," Lyomoki says.



To the hands  
that labour and  
the minds that  
wont rest until  
the job is done

**HAPPY  
LABOUR DAY**

Plot 15, Yusuf Lule Road.  
P. O. Box 36316 Kampala  
Tel: +256 414 231921  
Email: info@unoc.co.ug



[www.unoc.co.ug](http://www.unoc.co.ug)