

We were not ready for independence

THE TOTAL STUDENT POPULATION IN MAKERERE UNIVERSITY WAS 364, WRITES PAUL BUSHARIZI

Fifty four years ago, the Union Jack came down at Kololo airstrip and the Uganda flag went up, signalling the end of colonial rule and a descent into chaos that we are only beginning to unravel.

In hindsight, we were not ready for independence – we were a small country in the middle of Africa, mostly illiterate, with huge infrastructure deficits and institutional inadequacies, without the capacity or the temperament to run a modern state.

Some disagree. “We were ready for independence,” insists Kavuma Kaggwa, who turned 26, weeks after Uganda gained independence in 1962.

“The British concentrated on education, agriculture and later on medicine. At independence, we had an agricultural officer at every Gombolola (LC3). We were graduating doctors from Mulago Hospital. The leaders of our political parties were very educated men,” he adds.

Milton Obote swearing in as prime minister on October 9, 1962. South Korea had 27,000km of tarmac in 1962 when Uganda got independence. Today Uganda has about 20,000km of tarmac



For good measure, he throws the anecdote of Dr Dionysius Bamundaga, a pioneer graduate of Mulago medical school, who was the first

indigenous doctor to operate a European. “The provincial commissioner (PC) of northern Uganda’s wife in 1953 got an

infrastructure, we are only just catching up to where they were in 1962!

If we take South Korea as an example, in the year of our independence, it was still reeling from the after effects of civil war that had split the peninsula into two.

They had a per capita GDP of \$103, while we were at \$62. That may give the impression we were nearly toe-to-toe with them at that point but place this figure against a figure like secondary school enrolment and the chasm between our two situations becomes apparent.

While as noted above our O’level enrolment was about 2,000, South Korea had an enrolment of 620,000 for the comparable age groups. Note too that today we only just double their 1962 secondary school enrolment figures.

By another measure, the doctor to patient ratio in South Korea was 0.344 per 1,000.

It is now about two doctors for every 1,000 South Koreans. Figures for Uganda were hard to come by, but today we have a patient to doctor ratio of 0.41, we are just better than South Korea in 1962.

These disparities are reflected wherever you look.

South Korea had 27,000km of road in 1962, today Uganda has about 20,000km. The Asian nation was generating 1,512 Gwh of power 54 years ago. We are now doing about 3,000 Gwh according to official figures.

The point is that comparing ourselves against the south eastern nations at the time when we attained independence is a false base.

Of course, the colonial authorities’ primary mission was not to educate or empower Ugandans, so our deficiencies in manpower and infrastructure should come as no surprise.

And there are no guarantees that they would have worked hard to bridge those deficiencies except for the benefit of an elite few. But knowing this puts into sharper perspective the losses to the country caused by the lost decades of the 1970s and 1980s, which can be argued were due to the very same shortfalls in human capacity that we inherited.

So for those who were there, do they still think we were ready?

“Very much so. For me those comparisons with Asia do not interest me very much, after all when are you ready?” presidential media advisor John Nagenda asked.

“I was not interested in politics at the time, but the feeling was it was time and we would sort ourselves out on our own.”

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appendicitis attack while in Gulu and there was no time to get her to Nakasero Hospital, which was where Europeans’ were treated. Bamundaga who was the provincial medical officer at the time volunteered his services which the PC grudgingly accepted. The operation was a success and soon after Governor Andrew Cohen made a radio announcement that indigenous medical doctors could operate on Europeans.”

The case of Dr Bamundaga is more a case of an exception to the rule.

According to the 1962 Civil Service Survey, there was no chartered accountant, solicitor, architect or pathologist and there was only one geologist, one veterinary officer, one entomologist and two dentists in public service.

This should not have come as a surprise since total enrollment at Makerere at that time, the sole university, was only 364. There were about seven million Ugandans at independence.

While the civil service was not the only employer at the time, it dominated the private sector, especially in its employment of specialist skills.

The scarcity continued into the administration where the same survey showed that of the 408 executive class posts in the civil service, Ugandans only filled 102, while another

106 were vacant. In the super scales which were just below executive class, it was even worse with Ugandans only filling 269 or about 20% of the 1,250 positions available.

But this should not have come as a surprise. In 1962, there were only 364 students at university, JC Ssekamwa reported in his book “*History & Development of Education in Uganda*” going on to revealed that there were 1,991 students in O’Level in the whole country at the time. The number of students graduating from O’level in 1960 was 700. It is not clear whether this means they were moving on to A’level or not.

To get a sense of how deficient our manpower training was at independence, if O’level enrolment had kept pace with the population growth there would be just under 10,000 students in lower secondary school today.

Today there are about 1.3 million students enrolled in secondary school.

In lamenting our backwardness there are those who never tire of reminding us that in 1962 Uganda was at par with some South Eastern Asian nations – South Korea and Singapore, who now enjoy developed world standards.

A cursory look over the data not only shows that not to be true, but more embarrassingly shows in key areas such as human resource and





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54th Independence Anniversary

The Board of Directors, Management and Staff of Cotton Development Organisation (CDO), extend sincere congratulations to H.E. Yoweri Museveni the President of the Republic of Uganda and to all Ugandan on this 54th Independence anniversary.

As Uganda makes steady progress, CDO pledges to continue working with all stakeholders to promote investment along the Cotton Value Chain in Uganda. Cotton lint and cottonseed are raw materials which have multiple levels for industrialization. Value addition to these raw materials has the potential to create jobs, contribute to improving and stabilizing farm-gate prices, maximize foreign exchange earnings, create import substitution and thereby contribute to moving Uganda to middle income status.

**LONG LIVE H.E. YOWERI MUSEVENI,
LONG LIVE THE PEOPLE OF UGANDA.**


