

By Nelson
Mandela Muhoozi

Jacob Marksons Oboth's election as Speaker for the 12th Parliament yesterday marked the culmination of one of the country's most quietly calculated political journeys.

For years, Oboth has operated away from the noise, theatrics and populist battles that often dominate the country's political landscape.

Soft-spoken, legally grounded and institutionally minded, he built his influence steadily through committee rooms, legal drafting, parliamentary procedure and disciplined political engagement.

Now, as Speaker, Oboth steps into one of the country's most powerful offices, carrying with him decades of legal and parliamentary experience and a deeply personal story rooted in rural struggle, resilience, humility and faith.

His rise from a village school in Tororo to the chair of Parliament reflects the trajectory of a man who says leadership is not built through noise, but through "consultation, trust and service rendered over time".

Born on April 13, 1971, in eastern Uganda's Tororo district, Oboth grew up in West Budama, the constituency he later represented in Parliament. He is the eighth and last born of only boys.

Unlike many elite political figures whose stories are tied to privilege and expensive schools, Oboth's educational journey was marked by hardship and uncertainty.

In an exclusive interview with *New Vision*, Oboth described a childhood shaped by financial struggle, but anchored by determined, loving parents.

"I went to a rural school in my village called Muwafu Primary School in Tororo," he said.

Oboth recalled scoring seven aggregates in Primary Seven. He later joined Manjasi Secondary School in 1988.

Yet, despite his academic brilliance, school fees remained a constant obstacle.

"My parents couldn't afford the fees, which were about sh14,400," Oboth said.

The financial difficulties forced him to leave schools repeatedly in search of affordable alternatives. After briefly attending Manjasi High School, he transferred to Kiyeyi High School, an institution he jokingly described as having "nothing high about it apart from the name".

JACOB OBOTH'S ROAD TO SPEAKERSHIP

PHOTO BY MARIA WAMALA



Oboth (centre) celebrating with other members of Parliament upon being declared winner in the speakership race for the 12th Parliament. This was at Kololo Independence Grounds, yesterday

His educational survival often depended on opportunity, faith and the kindness of others. At one point, Oboth worked at a construction site in Buziga for an employee of National Water and Sewage Corporation (NWSC) who needed "an honest young man" to safeguard building materials while he attended school.

That arrangement enabled him to continue his studies at Gaba Secondary School before later completing O'Level at St Denis Ssebugwawo Secondary School in Ggaba.

Even then, financial pressure persisted.

After staying home for two years searching for school fees, Oboth eventually joined Toro High School for A'level, partly because the arrangement there allowed him to combine studies with support from missionaries.

He dismisses claims that he

was "picked from the streets", clarifying that while life was difficult, he never lacked parental care.

POLITICAL BREAKTHROUGH

Oboth's political breakthrough came in 2011 when he won the West Budama South parliamentary seat after defeating then labour state minister Dr Emmanuel Otaala.

His victory survived a court challenge, firmly establishing him as a serious political figure in Tororo politics.

Oboth was re-elected in 2016, becoming the first legislator since 1996 to win a second consecutive term in the constituency.

Inside Parliament, Oboth quickly distinguished himself through technical competence and committee work.

Over the years, he chaired several influential committees,

including the one on rules, discipline and privileges; and the legal and parliamentary affairs committee. He was also a member of the House's natural resources committee.

Oboth also led the parliamentary ad hoc committee that investigated Uganda's electricity sub-sector, further enhancing his profile as a legislator comfortable handling technically complex and politically sensitive assignments.

PARTICIPATION IN AGE LIMIT REMOVAL

One of the defining moments of his parliamentary career came during the controversial Constitutional Amendment Bill No. 2 of 2017, which removed presidential age limits from the Constitution.

As chairperson of the legal and parliamentary affairs

BEYOND POLITICS

Beyond politics and law, Oboth's personal life presents a more relaxed and human side often hidden from the public.

He reflected on his youthful athletic talent: "In the record of Tororo in 1996, I was the fastest man in Tororo. I could be the Usain Bolt of today".

Though he eventually abandoned competitive athletics after joining the university, sports remain part of his identity. He also enjoys music and plays guitar, particularly gospel music.

Oboth describes himself as deeply social and accountable to a close circle of friends who openly challenge and advise him whenever necessary.

"I have friends, a group of about eight to nine people that I am accountable to who can call me out and say, 'Here you are going wrong,'" he said.

He says faith remains central to his life, adding that he enjoys attending church whenever possible.

committee, Oboth oversaw consultations involving over 50 stakeholders, including civil society groups, legal experts and government officials.

Despite criticism from sections of the Opposition and civil society, Oboth's supporters argued that he handled the process with procedural discipline and legal consistency.

EARNING TRUST WITHIN NRM

Ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) party insiders say this approach gradually earned him trust among powerful figures in government and security circles.

That trust became even more apparent when President Yoweri Museveni appointed him defence state minister, thrusting him into Uganda's highly-sensitive security establishment at a time when the country was heavily engaged in regional peace-keeping missions and counterterrorism operations.

Some observers say the defence ministry suited his temperament. Unlike politically combustible ministries that thrive on public drama, defence

requires caution, discipline and engagement.

In 2024, Museveni elevated him to full minister of the ministry, replacing Ssemplija and significantly boosting his stature within the ruling establishment.

As minister, he represented Uganda at regional defence engagements, participated in discussions on Somalia and eastern DRC security matters, and oversaw key defence policy decisions involving Uganda's UPDF.

Defence ministry permanent secretary Rosette Byengoma praised his spirit of patriotism. "Oboth has been patient because he always talks about how to support the President, our party, NRM and country at large," she said.

Byengoma added that Oboth is "somebody with a murderer's sense of humour because in a difficult, he always throws in a word that will throw you off your chair through his jokes".

PREVIOUS SPEAKERSHIP BIDS
According to Oboth, his interest in the Speaker of Parliament seat emerged in 2016.

"I first showed interest in contesting for the Speakership in 2016," he said, recounting the heated political tensions that emerged at the time between former Speaker Rebecca Alitwala Kadaga and the late Jacob Oulanyah.

During that internal contest, Oboth says President Museveni jokingly warned the two leaders that if they failed to calm down their rivalry, he could bring a "dangerous substitute [Oboth]".

Though the position ultimately went to Kadaga and Oulanyah remained deputy speaker, Oboth says the moment reflected growing recognition of his institutional preparedness.

"I have been prepared for leadership over the years, especially within Parliament. It is not something that one should primarily approach as merely personal ambition," he said.

OBOTH'S PLU ENDORSEMENT

Oboth's eventual rise to the Speakership gained momentum after endorsements from the pressure group Patriotic League of Uganda, chaired by Chief of Defence Forces Gen. Muhoozi Kainerugaba.

Muhoozi publicly praised Oboth's performance, describing him as "the best minister in our government for the past five years".



Oboth

BRIEF FACTS

- **1997:** Joined Makerere University in 1997 for a bachelor of laws degree, graduating with honours.
- **2002:** Joined the Law Development Centre and completed his diploma in legal practice
- **2002:** Legal career starts at Mugisha and Company Advocates on Nkrumah Road
- **2003:** State Attorney under the justice ministry. Oboth spent nearly a decade serving in the ministry, largely advising local governments from the regional office in Mbale, a role that deepened his understanding of governance and public administration.
- **2006:** Wins scholarship for master of laws at the University of Minnesota. He was also a part-time lecturer at the Islamic University in Uganda for about four years while still serving in government.

Deputy attorney general of the Tieng Adhola Cultural Institution.