



Joseph Nkaheza (Seated) and some members of LitWorld Company pose beside the chopper during the Innovations Awards in Kampala recently. PHOTO BY ABUBAKER LUBOWA

# Nkaheza's aircraft story not about to end

BY DERRICK WANDERA  
editorial@ug.nationmedia.com

Joseph Nkaheza, 29, stands about 5.5 feet tall. He is relatively dark with some scars on both hands and a part of his face.

These [scars] are a reminder of his failed attempt at making a plane that can fly and land safely.

"I broke both hands when I attempted to land. I had flown the plane for about 10 minutes. But it failed to land. I did not know what to do. I just switched off the engine and it came tumbling," he says, as he stretches out his arms to reveal the gross scars around the knuckle area.

Nkaheza speaks softly with a calculated approach to every question, exuding a rare form of brilliance for a Primary Seven drop out.

His is a story of a self-taught man who through his craftsmanship has written a new chapter as the only Ugandan who has attempted to assemble a flying chopper.

At only 17 years, Nkaheza was already out of school and without parents to push him through the trials of life; he had to think of an option.

"When I saw that I was not doing well in class, I opted out and started seeking jobs to till people's land. It was a hard life because around the same time I had lost my parents," a resident of Rwampara in Mbarara District says as he narrates how for a long time he would survive off odd jobs such as washing and repairing cars,

electronic appliances and other types of machines.

"I did not have to go to school to do all these things. I visited garages and observed as other mechanics went about their work," he says.

It was during this time that Nkaheza picked interest in mechanics and has for five years now worked on a number of projects, among them assembling motorbikes out of steel, old engines and other fabrications.

The motorbike, which is supported by a Bajaj motorcycle engine, inspired him on

A video grab shows Nkaheza's chopper fly during a test attempt. COURTESY PHOTO



Nkaheza has made a chopper and a motorbike. COURTESY PHOTO

## Improving the chopper

Nkaheza together with other friends have made a company - LitWorld Company - through which they will ensure that they improve the features on the chopper so that it can fly.

According to Justus Niwagaba, the projects director, they are working on two issues key among them resetting the engine and adjusting the propellers to allow the chopper fly and land when it need to.

They are also working on a way through which they can make the chopper lighter to allow it fly freely.

"We have realised that the chopper is a bit heavy. We need use aluminum instead of steel. However, compared to steel we need a lot of money because aluminum is quite expensive," he says.



and while repairing a fan during his routines he developed an idea that led him into doing a chopper.

"The fan slid off the table that I was repairing it. I had already been told to fall down. It kept in space until I fell. It felt a lot of energy that pulled me. It was an intriguing moment," he says.

This, he says, gave him the idea of an object with a rotating propeller, and it is then that he started thinking about making a plane.

"It took me a month to formalize the idea. I gave it so much time but when I started on it I doubted I could make it. It was running in my head," he says.

For two years, Nkaheza has used various machines, key among them a motorcycle engine (which was originally with more power), steel bars and pipes that he curved into a chopper.

### First test

His first test was in Mbahara and ended up disastrous as he experienced his first crash that broke both his hands and left him scarred on the face.

"I called my friends and other people to witness my first flight. My attempt was successful but trouble came when I attempted to land and failed. I switched off the engine and that is when it came crashing," he says.

The crash forced people around to flee as well as attracting others to see what was happening.

The crash was a key learning point that has pushed him on to ensure that he makes a chopper that can fly and land safely. This determination has seen him assemble another plane, which also crashed during another test routine.

Such is the story of Nkaheza, a man who has written with both physical and emotional scars.

Three years ago, the father of a child separated with his wife, who could no longer stand Nkaheza's "madness" and obsession with planes.

"She told me if I continued with my madness she was going to leave. In the end she left me with the children," he says in a dejected tone.

According to Nkaheza, the project since inception consumed a conservative estimate of Shs9m, part of which has been spent on metal (Shs5.5m) and Shs3.5m on an engine.

To have a properly complete product, he estimates that such a project would need at least Shs25m.

Nkaheza is proud that his work has been recognised because he was recently invited to be part of the Innovations Awards that were conducted in Kampala at the Kampala Serene Hotel.