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Nakajubi, 18, ready to balance school with political office

At 18, Efrance Nakajubi is ready to serve her people, while also balancing her school obligations.

BY BARBRA NALWEYISO

When most teenagers in rural Uganda are preoccupied with books and distant dreams of future careers, Efrance Nakajubi is already confronting the heavy realities of leadership, community service and political responsibility.

At just 18 years and still a Senior Three student at Blessed High School in Kiganda Sub-county, Kassanda District, Nakajubi won the position of Female Councillor representing Kayunga and Kasambya parishes at Kiganda Sub-County. She is one of the youngest elected political leaders in Uganda's history.

Her victory, secured on the Opposition National Unity Platform ticket, has startled many in her largely ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) party-dominated community. It has also ignited hope among youth, especially girls who rarely see one of their own ascend to a political office.

Those closest to Nakajubi say the signs of her journey to public leadership were evident long before campaign posters dotted villages and trading centres.



Efrance Nakajubi (seated), newly elected female councillor for Kayunga and Kasambya parishes. PHOTO/ BARBRA

Leader at the core

Raised in Kayunga Village, Kiganda Sub-county, she lives with her father, Isaac Sande, and mother, Regina Nakate, who say that their daughter's curiosity about leadership and governance emerged early.

"Even as a child, she loved discussing community issues," Nakate reminisces. "She often asked why money meant for youth and women programmes only trickled to their village. She once told me that when she grew up, she would become a leader to ensure people benefited from these government initiatives."

That early curiosity soon evolved into action. In primary school, Nakajubi served in various pupil leadership positions, a pattern she carried into secondary school. By Senior One, she boldly contested for the position of head prefect, competing against older and more experienced students.

"I had just joined the school and was competing with a Senior Three student," she says. "He only beat me by one vote. Instead of giving up, I contested the following year, and I am currently among the student leaders."

While many young people confine leadership ambitions to school compounds, Nakajubi had bigger dreams

Her first formal step into community politics came when she contested and won the position of Secretary for Women's Affairs among youth leaders at the parish level. That victory further emboldened her political confidence.

The leadership bug

But it was Uganda's 2021 General Election that fully ignited her political ambition.

Watching youthful politician Frank Kabuye win the Kassanda South parliamentary seat in 2021 planted a powerful conviction in Nakajubi's mind.

"If a young person could become an MP, then I could also lead," she repeatedly told sceptical peers who dismissed her ambitions as unrealistic.

Later, as local elections approached, she realised no woman was contesting for the Female Councillor seat on the NUP ticket against the NRM flag bearer, Mariserina Nassuna, who had held the position for a decade.

"I thought, "Why not me?" Nakajubi recalls. "I applied for the party card and was fortunate to be endorsed."

Unlike many political campaigns dominated by slogans and party rhetoric, Nakajubi's message was grounded in her community's daily struggles.

She spoke passionately about early marriages that continue to rob young girls of education, poverty that forces children out of school, and the chronic shortage of clean water.

"These are children just like me who should be in school, not in marriage," she says. "I want to table a motion in council to debate how we can end early marriages in our community."

She also raised concerns about education quality in public schools, saying that even when pupils attend school, many teachers are absent. "Children spend the whole day playing without being taught. Improving education must be a priority," she explains.

But perhaps no issue strikes home than water scarcity, and Nakajubi says the water they drink is yellow, drawn from ponds where cattle also drink from. Moreover, the four villages in Kayunga Parish have no borehole at all.

"I want to start with at least one borehole so that my people can access clean water. Even if it does not serve all villages, it will be a good start."

Campaigning pains

Running as an Opposition candidate in a largely NRM-dominated area presented formidable obstacles. As she campaigned alongside fellow NUP candidate, Mustafa Ssekimu, Nakajubi says she encountered a political culture increasingly shaped by voter handouts.

"This government has created a wrong mindset," Ssekimu says. "People believe every leader must give them money before they vote. Many times they asked us, 'What have you brought us to eat?' If you don't give them money, they think you cannot lead."

Nakajubi admits the campaign was financially draining and often humiliating.

"I did not have money," she says. "Sometimes, I failed to raise transport fares and walked from one village to another."

Yet she pressed on, relying on community mobilisation, personal conviction and door-to-door engagement rather than cash incentives.

While many were wowed, her political move shook others. For example, her mother confesses that she was initially terrified when she learnt Nakajubi was contesting on the NUP ticket. With frequent reports of Opposition supporters being arrested or abducted during elections, fear consumed her.

"I was very scared," Nakate says. "She was even competing against an older woman with grown-up grandchildren. I told her father that our daughter might be harmed because she belongs to NUP, whose supporters are often abducted."

But Nakajubi remained firm, gradually comforting her mother that nothing would happen. "Her courage slowly gave me strength," her mother says.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of Nakajubi's journey is that it continues alongside her education.

As she prepares to join Senior Four, one of the most academically demanding years in Uganda's school system, Nakajubi remains determined not to abandon her studies.

She has already engaged school administrators, such as the head teacher, who have pledged flexibility when council duties arise.

Nakajubi's teachers describe her as disciplined, focused and unusually mature.

"She understands responsibility," one teacher says. "We believe she can balance leadership and academics."

In a country where political leadership is often associated with wealth and entrenched networks, Nakajubi represents a quiet but powerful shift.

To many girls in Kassanda's villages, where poverty and teenage pregnancies are rife, her victory offers a new narrative of possibility.

Her dreams stretch beyond councillorship. Her parents reveal she frequently speaks of one day becoming a Woman Member of Parliament for Kassanda District. The vision that once sounded like a childhood fantasy now feels increasingly plausible.

For now, she continues her daily routine of school uniform in the morning, council responsibilities in the evening, straddling two demanding worlds with remarkable resolve.

At 18, while many are still discovering who they are, Nakajubi is already shaping the future of her community.

GROUNDED MANIFESTO

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