

Regional News

Ariana Nyanzi has navigated the male-dominated environment with confidence, repairing vehicles and earning the respect of clients.

BY FRED WAMBEDE

As celebrations of women continue this month, 23-year-old Ariana Nyanzi, a Senior Four dropout from the rural village of Bulubandi in Iganga District, has beaten the odds to become one of the few female excavator operators in the country.

After dropping out of school in 2021 due to financial constraints, Ms Nyanzi, born to Mr Fred Matende and Ms Prose Nankwanga, joined a busy garage at the Mbale-Sino Industrial Park in Industrial City Division, Mbale City, where she began working as a mechanic.

Her first role was as a "spanner girl".

Working as a mechanic, Nyanzi navigated the male-dominated environment with confidence, repairing vehicles and gradually earning the respect of clients and colleagues.

"At first, I worked as a spanner girl. The mechanics, all of them men, used to send me to bring different types of spanners. Some ridiculed me, while others supported me until I learnt the trade," she says.

After two years in the garage, Nyanzi—whose childhood dream revolved around working with machines—shifted to the department of machines within the same industrial park, where operating excavators is the main trade.

Even before joining the department, she would often walk past construction sites after work and stand at a distance observing the operators.

She watched in admiration as the men manoeuvred the joysticks, scooping earth with the bucket and carefully controlling the giant machines.

How school dropout, 23, got excavator job



Ms Ariana Nyanzi, 23, a senior four dropout sits on an excavator at her work station at Mbale-Sino Industrial Park currently. Nyanzi is one of the few female operators of excavators in the country. PHOTO/FRED WAMBEDE

"I picked interest in excavators. Many of my colleagues, who were all men, told me I could not handle what they called a 'man's machine', but I told them I would manage it. I decided to join the department of machines and I was given a master to try my luck," she says with a beaming smile.

Nyanzi sat her Primary Leaving Examination (PLE) at Bulubandi Primary School and later studied up to Senior Four at Iganga Parents' Secondary School in Iganga District.

Growing up, she faced numerous challenges, including limited access to edu-

cation and basic necessities, as her parents were peasant farmers.

"My childhood was hard, but there were things I loved doing. I wished to become a mechanic, driver, electrician, or builder," she says.

Now working as a senior excavator operator, Nyanzi says it took her four months to master the skills required to operate the machine.

When *Daily Monitor* visited her work site at Mbale Industrial Park, the reporter found her climbing into the cab of an excavator. Her hands gripped the controls and, slowly, she moved the joystick. The bucket dug into the earth and scooped up a load of soil.

"To learn the machine, it depends on

watch in surprise and admiration.

She says when she first operated the machine as a certified operator in June 2024, her hands trembled slightly as she held the controls, but her determination remained firm.

Nyanzi is among about 13,500 employees working at Mbale Industrial Park, which was commissioned in 2018 with a total investment portfolio of \$500 million (Shs2.2 trillion) and sits on 619 acres of land.

She earns Shs900,000 per month as a senior excavator operator.

"I use part of the money to support the education of my siblings. I am happy and I have made the excavator my dream machine," she says.

The Mbale-Sino Industrial Park currently hosts 78 factories, of which 60 are operational. The factories produce a variety of goods, including glass, textiles, household detergents, mobile phones, smart televisions, baby diapers, clothes, LED bulbs, among others.

Raw materials for the factories are sourced from Uganda, India, China, Korea, the United States and Dubai.

Last year, President Museveni commissioned four additional factories at the park, including Unisteel Investment Uganda Limited, Nice Textiles Uganda Limited, Xinlon Textile and Garment Technology Co Ltd, and Timber Paper Industry Co Ltd.

Nyanzi encourages both girls and boys to embrace vocational education, saying skills-based training can help address unemployment.

"Vocational training programmes help us discover our passion. I urge young people, especially girls, to work hard and sacrifice their free time to practise and improve their skills," she says, adding that she is willing to train other girls interested in learning how to operate excavators.

Mr Daniel Mulunga, one of her colleagues, describes Nyanzi as patient and hardworking.

"You cannot become an operator if you are not patient because there are many challenges you go through," Mr Mulunga says.

Mr Laurent Zhang, the administration manager of the industrial park, says Nyanzi is currently the only female excavator operator at the facility.

65%

Women in employment. Of 13,500 employees at Mbale-Sino Industrial Park, about 65 percent are female, according to Mr Laurent Zhang, the administration manager of the industrial park.

how quickly you grasp the concepts. If you are a quick learner, you can take about three months, but if you are slower, it can even take a year. For me, it took about four months," she says proudly as fellow workers—most of them men—

**13,500
WORKERS AT
MBALE PARK**