

ENG. KAHERU: HERO WHO HELPED LIGHT UGANDA

PHOTO BY WILSON ASIMWE

By Wilson Asimwe

He offered solutions when every one in the room thought the challenge at hand was impossible. His contribution to Uganda's engineering landmark projects was outstanding. These were some of the remarks by mourners during the burial of Eng. Kenneth Kaheru at Katikara village, Hoima district on Wednesday.

He died at the age of 56 on February 27 in Nairobi, Kenya, where he had been hospitalised. Mourners described Kaheru as a distinguished engineer, whose integrity and excellence helped shape Uganda's electricity sector.

It was a sombre mood as speaker after speaker eulogised Kaheru as one of the country's most distinguished, yet largely unsung engineers whose work helped power the nation and transform communities.

He was described as a rare public servant whose contribution to Uganda's electricity sector was immense, enduring and foundational – yet delivered without noise, self-promotion or compromise.

Dr Kaliisa Kabagambe, the chairperson of the Bunyoro Kitara Kingdom Royal Commission and presidential advisor on oil and gas, described Kaheru as a principled and assertive engineer who could not be swayed by pressure or convenience.

"He was a man who resisted being arm-twisted. Kenneth stood for what was right, even when it was difficult," Kabagambe said.

Kabagambe praised Kaheru's technical brilliance and dedication, crediting him for playing a key role in the successful delivery of Uganda's three major hydropower projects: the Owen Falls (Kiira) extension, the Bujagali Hydropower project and the Achwa Hydropower Project.

"When we started the Bujagali project, I directed that Kenneth be appointed deputy project director in charge of technical work," Kabagambe recalled. "And I thought then – and I still believe today – that I made the right decision."

Kabagambe recounted a defining moment during construction at Bujagali that highlighted Kaheru's exceptional problem-solving skills.

After construction had begun, engineers encountered a massive challenge: a wide section of soft rock directly



Phillip Kaheru (holding a mic), his siblings and mother (seated-second right) eulogising Kaheru, during the burial at Katikara village in Kigungu parish, Hoima district on Wednesday



Museveni (third-right) speaks to Salini Contractors and employees; Bill Groth, Glenn Gaydar and Kaheru (second-left) and others during a tour of the Bujagali Hydropower project in February, 2011

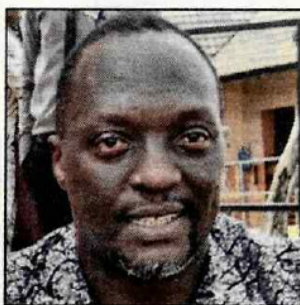
in front of the dam structure that threatened the project's stability and risked costing the country enormous sums.

"Kenneth came to me and said 'we have a very big problem,'" Kabagambe said. "The soft rock was about 20 metres wide, and even after drilling 50 metres, we had missed the schist in the middle."

Faced with a potentially crippling setback, Kaheru proposed an innovative solution.

"He suggested we create an elongated cofferdam – block the water completely and divert the river to the other side – so that we could study the rock in detail," Kabagambe explained. "We needed to know its thickness, depth, softness and all the geotechnical parameters."

The excavation took three months. Engineers then poured reinforced concrete from 20 metres below the surface all the way up, stabilising the structure and



Kaheru

allowing construction to proceed safely.

"I was extremely delighted," Kabagambe noted. "A problem had been detected, analysed and solved. That was Kenneth – professional, thorough and solutions-oriented."

A LEGACY BEYOND CONCRETE AND STEEL

In a written eulogy, Bill Groth, the former resident construction manager at Bujagali Energy (2008-2012), said Kaheru's contribution went far beyond engineering. "Kenneth's professional and

personal contributions left an enduring legacy; not only for the project, but for the people it touched," Groth wrote.

He noted that Kaheru oversaw aspects of the project well beyond power generation, playing a central role in community development initiatives including the construction of schools, health facilities, rural electrification projects and water distribution systems on both sides of the Nile.

Zakalia Lubega, who worked with him at Bujagali Energy, described Kaheru as a man who valued substance over show. "Kenneth lived by a simple truth: true influence does not need noise; it requires integrity," Lubega said.

He credited Kaheru with helping shape Uganda's energy infrastructure, noting that his dedication was etched into the Kiira Power Station, Bujagali Dam and Achwa Hydropower Project.

He added that Kaheru despised corruption in all its forms.

BIODATA

EDUCATION

- Kitante Primary School
- Kilimani Primary School, Kenya
- St Mary's High School, Nairobi (O'level)
- King's College Budo (A'level)
- University of Surrey, England - Bachelor of Engineering (civil engineering)

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

- Owen Falls Extension (Kiira Power Station) – civil engineer inspector
- Bujagali Hydropower Project – deputy project manager
- Achwa Hydropower Project – Project Director
- Namanve Industrial Park – Senior technical consultant
- Founder and manager, KIES Technical Services.

Another former colleague, Eng. Dan Mayanja described Kaheru as hardworking and deeply committed to excellence. "When Kenneth was working on the Owen Falls extension, he would sometimes leave us during social gatherings, even at midnight, to go and witness a concrete pour," Mayanja said.

"That level of dedication is reflected in the quality and structural integrity of the plants he worked on."

Mayanja also spoke of Kaheru's compassion, noting that he quietly supported many people in need wherever he worked.

Beyond his professional life, Kaheru was an accomplished sportsman and intellectual, participating in scrabble,

chess, rugby, squash, football, snooker, pool and sprinting.

In a written tribute, Daudi Migereko, the former lands minister, described Kaheru as highly resourceful and instrumental in major national projects, including the Namanve Industrial Park, where he served as a senior technical consultant.

"His departure is a very big loss to the engineering fraternity, to Uganda and to all of us," Migereko said.

A CHAMPION OF SCRABBLE

At a funeral service held earlier at St Andrew's Church in Jinja, Nelson Woiria Kyagera, the president of the Scrabble Association of Uganda, paid tribute to Kaheru – formerly known as Kenna or KZ – for his scrabble circles.

"He was extremely brilliant and yet very humble," Kyagera said. "A fast learner, a patient teacher, a mentor and a friend without borders."

Kyagera said Kaheru used his personal resources to promote scrabble locally, nationally and across Africa, while mentoring younger players.

In recognition of his contribution, the Office Scrabble Club Jinja and the Scrabble Association of Uganda have resolved to establish an annual Kenneth Kaheru Memorial National Scrabble Tournament.

Dr Ruhakana Rugunda, the special envoy for special duties in the office of the President described Kaheru as a duplicate of his father, the late President Yoweri Museveni. During a requiem mass at All Saints cathedral, Nakasero, Rugunda said Kaheru had taken the values of his father – principles of integrity and accountability.

Zach Kaheru was the first Chairperson of Public Accounts Committee and is remembered for being tough on holding public servants accountable. He also served as the treasurer of the External Wing of National Resistance Army during the liberation war.

FAMILY AND FAITH

In a deeply emotional written eulogy, Kaheru's mother, Stella Kaheru, said her son devoted his life to serving Uganda.

She thanked President Yoweri Museveni, who personally called her to offer condolences and contributed sh15m towards burial arrangements.

The retired bishop of Bunyoro Kitara Diocese, Samuel Kahuma, urged Ugandans to emulate Kaheru's professionalism, humility and service.