

Long ride for boda man's son to a medical degree

A childhood marked by struggle and sacrifice ends in triumph at Makerere's graduation ceremony.

BY JACINTA MARIA KANNYANGE

Fulugensio Kasekende is among the hundreds of students who received degrees during last week's 76th graduation ceremony at Makerere University in Kampala.

Born in Namasuba, Makindye Ssabagabo in Kampala, Kasekende grew up in a family of very humble means. His father, a boda boda rider, who worked at Owino and Mini Price stages, single-handedly raised seven children after their mother left when Kasekende was only five years old.

Against all odds, Kasekende's journey from a struggling pupil to a university graduate is a story that lights a fire in many hearts.

He began his primary education at Happy Kids Primary School in Namasuba in Primary One before transferring to Namasuba UMEA Primary School. He remained there until Primary Three.

The 24-year-old recalls that he struggled academically during his early years, partly because overcrowded classrooms made it difficult to concentrate.

"My academics were very poor. I was always among the last students in class," he says.

Concerned about his son's performance, his father enrolled him in evening classes and later transferred him to a private school.

At St Elizabeth Primary School in Namasuba, Kasekende's performance improved significantly. He studied there up to Primary Five. However, in Primary Six he had to transfer again after the family was forced to relocate because of accumulated rent arrears.

They moved to Kitemu on Masaka Road. Despite the long distance, his father continued taking him and his sister to St Elizabeth every morning on his boda boda because he could not afford another school.

Kasekende recalls that his father worked at several stages in town. Sometimes the children had to move between different stages looking for him before they could return home.

"At times we would only leave for Kitemu at around 10pm after he finished working," he recalls.

After dropping them off at school, their father would leave them with transport money for a taxi back home. "Sometimes we would spend the money on food and walk all the way from Namasuba to Kitemu," he adds.

To shield them from the cold during the early morning rides, their father bought them gloves.

Despite studying in schools far from home and facing numerous challenges, Kasekende remained determined and completed Primary Seven with a first



Fulugensio Kasekende (right) with his father after graduation at Makerere University last week. PHOTO/COURTESY

grade, scoring Aggregate 8.

After completing primary school, Kasekende feared he might not continue to secondary school because of financial constraints. A few weeks before Senior One began, he had still not received his Primary Leaving Examination pass slip because of unpaid school fees.

However, he obtained a recommendation letter from the school and knocked on many doors in search of admission.

He later joined St Lucia Secondary School in Namasuba, Wakiso District for his secondary education. During school holidays, he worked in the school gardens, digging and slashing grass to help offset part of his school fees.

"The only bursary I was offered required me to slash the compound, the school forest and gardens during the holidays," he says.

Kasekende continued doing the work throughout his O-Level years. Despite the physically demanding labour, at the end of Senior Four, he scored Aggregate 11, emerging as the second-best student at the school.

For Advanced Level, he requested the director of St Lucia Secondary School to allow him to stop the manual work. His classmates often saw him digging or slashing the compound, which made him uncomfortable.

"Because of my good results, the director allowed me to stop digging so that I could focus entirely on my studies," he says.

He did Biology, Chemistry, Mathematics

and ICT. Kasekende scored 16 points at A-Level, making him the best student at the school. His performance earned him a government scholarship to pursue a Bachelor of Education in Biology and Chemistry, a course he had not planned to study.

While his parents and teachers celebrated the achievement, Kasekende had always dreamed of becoming a doctor. He remembers his father encouraging him to pursue medicine after

realising that he was strong in science subjects. "My dream was always to become a medical doctor," he says.

After making inquiries and praying about the decision, he resolved to repeat Senior Six in 2019, a move that many people criticised.

"Many people called me mad and said I was ungrateful," he recalls.

However, the school director supported his decision. Repeating Senior Six was not easy. As a boarding student, he had only the basic school requirements and no pocket money. He admits that he became depressed at times.

Turning point

During the second term, however, a teacher whose name he prefers not to mention helped him secure admission at Buddo Senior Secondary School. He scored 19 points in the final examinations.

The results opened the door to Makerere University, where he pursued a Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery.

"That was the happiest moment of my life; I saw the excitement on my father's face. He had been depressed because of my decision to repeat, but at that moment he felt like a saved man," Kasekende says.

Although he received a government allowance of Sh550,000, Kasekende soon realised that pursuing a medical degree came with many hidden costs.

"Midway through my course, I started selling clinical coats for anatomy dissections to my colleagues," he says.

He promoted the small business through social media, which helped him gain visibility and expand his customer base.

Through grit and determination, Kasekende successfully completed his degree with a cumulative grade point average of 3.66.

For the boda boda rider's son, the journey to the halls of Makerere University has been a long ride but has finally reached its destination.

3.66
KASEKENDE'S
CGPA



On his decision to repeat S.6:

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