



Using signals, Ssenyonjo earns a living in loud Kampala city

SENYONJO SIGNALING IN THE LOUD TAXI TRADE

By Sarah Awor

Umar Ssenyonjo, a resident of Kyaliwajala, Namugongo road, is a taxi conductor. He wakes up earlier than most of us and reports to his duty station.

What stands out about the father of two, who is in his late 20s, is that unlike his fellow conductors who yell out the routes they ply in a bid to attract passengers, Ssenyonjo goes silently about his business.

He uses sign language to attract clients to his taxi and to negotiate fares. He has a speech and hearing impairment.

HOW HE STARTED

According to Arunah Ssempijja, the driver of the taxi in which he operates, Ssenyonjo was a garbage collector, who went from one house to another picking heaps of garbage and would earn between sh500 and sh1,000. He was then enticed into the taxi business five years ago by his friend, Bosco, but it took the drivers awhile to understand his signs because he is short-tempered.

"Whenever a passenger gave him less money, he would make loud noises and signal furiously, hoping that the person would understand what he was trying to say. He would also reject the money being given to him and either tells the passenger to sit back in the car or top up the fare," Ssempijja narrates.

The drivers later got used to his behaviour and now works well with him.

Describing what a hardworker Ssenyonjo is, Ssempijja says he (Ssenyonjo) is at the Kyaliwajala stage by 6:00am from Monday to Saturday and does not return home until 9:00pm.

Ssenyonjo is tough and strict about fares. He does not allow people to



Ssempijja, Ssenyonjo's boss

without the full fare to board his taxi: "That is the only problem I have with him. He sticks to a particular amount of money, yet as the day goes by, the charges vary. It is a challenge convincing him to

adjust," Ssempijja says.

Apart from this, Ssenyonjo is as competent as any other conductor. He signals to alert potential passengers of the taxi's destination and when one wants to know about the fee, he uses his fingers to explain the fares.

"When someone wants to alight, they either tap his shoulder or bang the roof of the taxi to catch my attention so I can stop. Ssenyonjo will then sense it and open the door," Ssempijja says.

EDUCATION BACKGROUND

Ssenyonjo is the third-born of four children in his family. He says he did not go far in school. He spent his childhood doing odd jobs to earn a living.

When we asked him to write his name, he asked for a pen and paper and although his handwriting looked shaky, he spelt it as Ssenyojo Umar, missing out a letter. Asked which class he stopped in, Ssenyonjo wrote P7.

CHALLENGES

Ssenyonjo's friend helped us to inquire about the challenges he encounters while on job and he explained that the passengers take advantage of his condition to pay less than they should, claiming that he went past their destination. This upsets him.

Similarly, he says others in the taxi business are not as understanding as his driver, so he clashes with them a lot. He says one habit he finds annoying is when a taxi driver parks his vehicle in such a way that blocks his (Ssenyonjo's) taxi and he cannot get passengers into his. This, he says, frustrates him. Apart from this, Ssenyonjo is happy with his job.

According to Ssempijja, Ssenyonjo earns between sh23,000 and sh25,000 a day. Ssenyonjo says he is happy with his earnings and that he loves his driver.



Ssenyonjo at his duty station in the city