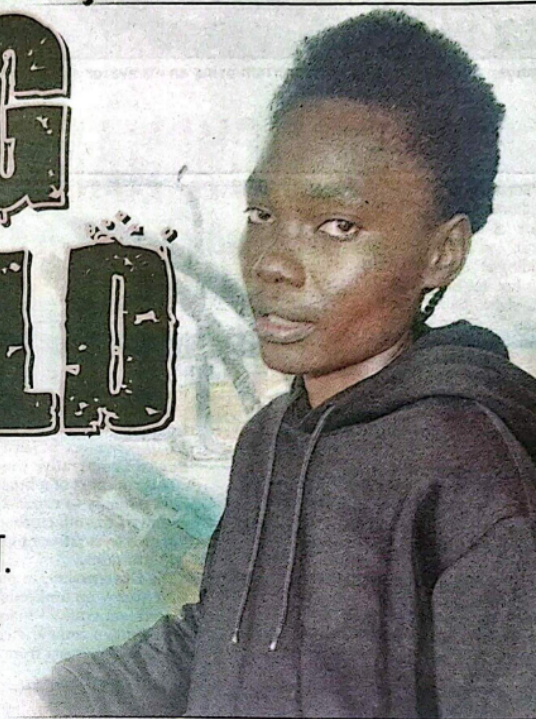


NANYANZI BREAKS BARRIERS AS MBALE'S YOUNGEST SENIOR EXCAVATOR

BREAKING THE MOULD

IN A FIELD DOMINEERED BY MALE PARTICIPANTS, ARIANA NANYANZI HAS GAINED RECOGNITION FOR BEING COMPETENT. ORIGINALLY WRITTEN OFF FOR WANTING TO BE A MECHANIC, NANYANZI IS NOW CERTIFIED TO USE A VARIETY OF HEAVY MACHINERY. SHE TOLD HER STORY TO MOSES NAMPALA



At only 23 years old, Nanyanzi is a senior excavator

When Ariana Nanyanzi waved her left arm through the window of an excavator cabin, she signalled for another truck in the waiting queue to come for loading.

As soon as the truck reversed into position at the ideal spot, she skilfully and swiftly swung the giant arm of the earth mover, drifting it down to a nearby mound of earth, scooping murram and hoisting it onto the back of the truck.

In a matter of minutes, the truck was full. Once again, she waved her arm through the excavator's cabin window, signalling the next waiting truck to come for loading.

At only 23 years old, the towering, pencil-thin young woman is a senior excavator operator in the works department at Mbale Industrial Park in Mbale city, Mbale district.

Nanyanzi has dared to demystify

what for ages has been an exclusively male-dominated chore.

She turns heads and still draws curious looks and open comments of disbelief.

"That pencil-thin little girl can't be the person operating that huge machine," peers fondly mutter in consternation.

While statistics on female excavator operators in Uganda are not explicitly provided, data in the labour ministry catalogues indicate that the group remains a very small emerging minority within the construction industry.

Nanyanzi possesses a permit to operate the gigantic earth mover.

Besides the excavator, she also operates graders, cranes, road compressors, low loaders and heavy trucks.

"I've always wished to go for things that are way different from the

Besides the excavator, she also operates graders, cranes, road compressors and heavy trucks.

obvious feminine taste," Nanyanzi attests with a mischievous smile.

Watching the female figure inside the excavator cabin going about her business can be fascinating. You notice that her kind of work is highly technical and demanding.

"When I'm inside the cabin, my attention is focused on nothing

except the levers and acceleration, depending on the particular chore the machine is set to do. When wrongly operated, the machinery's arm can be destructively dangerous, even deadly to people in the vicinity, which explains why I don't entertain distractions when at work," she says.

"Everybody around respects me, probably because of the way I carry myself. I must confess that I've never encountered any form of sexual harassment from either workmates or the dozens of truck drivers I serve."

Although the nature of the work the machine does is demanding, the levers that operate it require a soft touch.

"In the beginning, I would get backaches and chest pain, but it must have been a result of tension and excitement that comes with a new job, as the discomfort has since fizzled out," Nanyanzi says.

During peak periods, she loads 70-80 trucks with murram in a day. When business is low, she may load about half that number.

Nanyanzi also does minor mechanical work on the machinery when it breaks down and can easily detect when it has developed a major mechanical problem.

"Normally, when there is a malfunction in the system, I report to my immediate supervisor and it is fixed immediately," she explains.

Reflecting, Nanyanzi confesses that her career path began with a strange instinct that developed in her mind after school.

"I was never completely sure, although deep in my heart I held a conviction to do unusual things in an effort to unlock my full potential.

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