

Tracy Akello, the young Ugandan to watch

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EDUCATION & CAREERS

Recently, the Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators (ICSA) graduated 100 students in London. Miles away in Uganda, a name caught the eye: Judith Tracy Akello.

In a record two years, Akello had completed a course that takes many close to five years. And indeed, Rita Kabatunzi, the vice chairperson of ICSA Uganda Branch affirmed that Akello's was a very impressive performance.

“This is no mean feat for a professional qualification with international standards and also obtained a merit in Corporate Secretarial Practice (CSP),” said Kabatunzi.

At just 30, Akello will be joining the rank of elite professionals – both local and international – that hold this internationally respected qualification highly regarded as a benchmark qualification for governance professionals.

“Tracy is one of the few young people already progressing in her career,” said Kabatunzi. “ICSA greatly improves her chances because she has a wealth of knowledge, can draw from international research on best practices and therefore provide valuable insight to her company.”

Knowing Akello

Finding her seemed futile, so New Vision sought out those that might know her. It did not come as a surprise that her name is associated with academic prowess. Yes, many folks from Tororo district, her home district, will attest to this.

“I remember Tracy, I remember her very well,” Lydia Kakai, an old girl of Tororo Girls’ School says. “I was not in the same class with her, but we knew her to be very focused. Oh I remember Tracy!”

In 2002, Akello topped the district in the 2002 O’level exams. “The teachers praised her; they often told us to be like her. Tracy was clearly destined for more,” Kakai said.

She was not done, far from it! When she joined Trinity College Nabbingo for her A’level and continued to soar, she went on to top her class that year and won herself a government scholarship to pursue a Bachelors of Law at Makerere University.

At Makerere, she was among the only 20 students who graduated with a second upper class honors. Again, Akello won herself a government bursary to the Law Development Centre and graduated in 2011. She immediately enrolled for a Masters of Laws (LLM) at Makerere University and graduated last year with a first class, a CGPA of 4.5. Barely completing her Masters in Law, she had taken on ICSA.

But this is not surprise to David Kamurasi, her husband and also best friend.

He says that the mother of two is a master of multi-tasking. “Tracy just recently enrolled for a PhD in a South African university, while still doing a course in international taxation, which she started before finishing ICSA,” he speaks with pride.

“Balancing books and family hasn’t been easy, but Tracy is my friend first, I have to support her.”



Life back in school

Daphne Senyonga, who not only shared a class at Law school with Akello but also resided in the same hall, is equally not surprised.

"Tracy, Tracy.....Tracy," she begins fondly. "Tracy was my co-competitor in first year for the post of culture minister in Mary Stuart Hall. I must say she gave me a run for my money." Senyonga did not see that coming. In fact, she thought beating the soft-spoken Akello would be a walk in the park.

"She came out second and ended up being my deputy. She definitely out-performed me as well," she confesses. "It is so bad to have your secretary or deputy being better than you." She admits that it might have been hard to admit then, but she can now see that Akello was a tough one. "She is very focused, very... very focused and hardworking!"

Senyonga then tells of the profuse academic discussion groups held in Akello's room for years. "Numerous people coming around to discuss, leave your place messy, eat all your food – for years

and she never seemed bothered by the little things. I love my space; I can't do what she does. She is very accommodative when she sets her targets, she never hits below the line."

Settling for less? Not Akello

Indeed, Susan Kanyemibwa, the board secretary of Bank of Uganda, who is also a Fellow of ICSA and has had the chance to interact with Akello, spoke highly of her.

"Tracy is a very hard-working lady, focused and determined to achieve greater academic height. She doesn't settle for less. And with her academic achievements she has positioned herself for higher responsibilities."

Caroline Barebwoha, a friend of Akello's, tells of her level of focus. "Tracy was a very focused lady in school. She always had the cases in law school and asked lecturers the difficult questions. It's no surprise she is where she is in life today. She was a go-getter and very smart and outspoken."

Barebwoha thinks that anyone who studied with Akello is not surprised by her career success as she was never lazy.

"A fond memory of Tracy and I was when she was having her second child while doing her Masters and I asked her 'how do you manage to balance family school and career?'," she said. "She has made it and shown motherhood isn't and should not deter you from going for gold, if you stay focused you make it."

Akello, according to husband has a knack for leadership. "While at Makerere, she was the sports secretary Mary Stuart hall, the vice president Makerere Law Society and also guild representative for Mary Stuart constituency," says Kamurasi. "And at Nabbingo, she was the senior house prefect Cecilia house, and in primary, she was a compound prefect."



Career prospects

According to Kabatunzi, the ICSA accreditation is never earned lightly. “Tracy had to work for it, putting in hours of reading but more so challenging her thinking, learning to apply knowledge to provide practical solutions and go against the grain of a theoretical approach to education,” she explains.

“It is why Tracy is set to reap benefits from her hard work according to the local branch and it is her game to lose.”

As a fellow of ICSA, Akello is now able to provide workable, practical solutions for improving not just processes but also cultures. “With this qualification, she could choose to work in the regulatory, corporate sectors, in large or SME enterprises, public or private sector.”

But even as an advocate working with Uganda Revenue Authority, Akello is a go-getter who will contribute to the success of the organization and the profession as a whole, says Kabatunzi.

“Beyond law and compliance, she has a wider pool from which to choose her specialty and now has more to offer from advice on governance best practice, risk management and eventually serving at the highest ranks of management in her advisory capacity to the board,” she added.

“Some alumni have opted for consultancy.”

She insists that even though Akello is a lawyer, this qualification allows her in addition to a corporate counsel secretary role, to specialize in governance, risk management and strategy. “She is now trained in governance, finance, strategy, risk management and secretarial practice.”

Kanyemibwa couldn't agree more and thinks that Akello's achievements will open more doors.

“As an ICSA Fellow, she is now an all-rounder. As an administrator, she can comfortably perform the role of a secretary to any board,” she says. “Her employer should look at her as a valuable resource in managerial space. ICSA exposes the trainees to some principles of accounting, company law, humanities and company secretarial practice. Backed by her legal training, Tracy is destined for greater and higher responsibilities.”

Professionally, Kanyemibwa believes that there is no turning back for Akello. “She is topnotch now. Her emotional intelligence is first-class and no doubt it would add value and effectiveness in executing any role assigned to her.”

Kamurasi says that his wife's dream is in the same line. “Her dream has been to be a company secretary/board secretary. She basically bends towards board secretariat work and tax advisory,” he says quite firmly.

“She looks up to the bank secretary of Bank of Uganda.”

Asked where he sees his wife in the next ten years, he responds: “Sitting in a board room either of a corporate entity or as a CEO.”