



BY OWEN WAGABAZA

# WHY ALEMI CHOSE VOCATIONAL OVER A BACHELOR'S COURSE

**J**ames Alemi used to sell groundnuts on the streets of Koboko town, to supplement his grandmother's efforts to raise his school fees.

"My father had gone to work in Sudan and did not leave upkeep for my grandmother and I," Alemi says.

Today, the 33-year-old is one of the most sought after and self-made experts in Land Rover vehicle diagnostics and repair, thanks to the skills he got from vocational training. He is also a mechanic for other European vehicle brands, such as Volkswagen, Benz and BMW.

Alemi, the proprietor of Kampala Range Rovers and Kampala Auto-diagnostic Centre, was honoured with a presidential visit last year, in recognition of his efforts to curb youth unemployment.

Alemi employs over 20 people at his garage and trains up to 30 with skills in motor vehicle repair and maintenance.

## STARTING OUT

When Alemi's father returned to Uganda in 1993, they moved to Kampala. Alemi joined Shimonon Demonstration School and, later, Kireka Grammar Junior School, where he sat his Primary Leaving Examinations in 1999. He emerged the best pupil in Mpigi district, and third in the entire country.

He proceeded to King's College Budo, for O'level and, then, St Lawrence Ciuzen's



## ALEMI'S ADVICE

I advise everyone, especially the youth, not to shun vocational courses. The future belongs to those with a skill that they can exploit to earn an income.

With vocational courses, one not only earns good money, but they are able to employ others, hence reducing the unemployment burden.

Had I gone for that economics degree, I would probably be employed somewhere or still on the street, looking for a job. With my vocational skills, I am earning money and employing over 20 people, as well as skilling hundreds of youths. Each of us needs to learn a skill.

High School for A'level.

Despite performing well in A'level, Alemi opted for a vocational course in Advanced Certificate Automotive and Power Engineering at Nakawa Vocational Training Institute.

"They had offered me a course in economics at Kyambogo University, but I had no interest in it. I, therefore, opted for a vocational course," Alemi says.

"I was also inspired by my father who was running Nigotech Garage in Ntunda, Kampala. The garage specialised in the repair of Land Rover vehicles. He was

making enough money and would regularly remind me that venturing into mechanics was worth thinking about."

## OPENS OWN GARAGE

In 2012, together with three of his former classmates from Nakawa Vocational Training Institute, they set up a garage. They repaired all sorts of cars, especially Japanese cars, which are common in Uganda.

A year later, Alemi did not feel like he was in control of his destiny, so, he opened his own garage - Kampala Range Rover Ltd in Najjera, Kampala

- to fulfill his dream of self-employment.

He started out with sh3m from his savings. Of this, sh1.5m was paid as rent for three months for the space where he would operate. The rest of the money went into fencing off the place with iron sheets, acquiring some basic tools and setting up a small office on the premises.

"By the time I left my father's workshop, I had 15 permanent customers who

would specifically ask for me to handle their cars because they felt I had exceptional skills. These were my first customers in the new place," he says.

Alemi started with 12 employees, 11 men working on the cars and one woman who helped him with finances and administration. Over the years, Kampala Range Rovers Limited has grown in manpower, clientele and equipment.

"Cars these days need modern technology, especially the new Land Rover and Range Rover models, plus other European cars. Everything is computerised. To give my clients the best service, I have acquired auto-diagnostic tools," he says.

Client-wise, the business has grown to over 50 regular clients, ranging from politicians, diplomats, businessmen and corporate leaders. On average, Alemi works on about 10 new first-time clients every month, which is considerable growth.

In addition, he gets regular and repeat business from expatriates, staff of the British

High Commission and some Chinese contractors, like the China National Complete Plant Import Export Corporation and their staff. His business has also crossed borders, as he has clients from as far as Burundi, Rwanda, DR Congo and South Sudan. As a result, he sometimes travels to such places, to work on his customers' cars or the clients come looking for him in Uganda.

## SKILLING THE YOUTH

Soon after opening his own garage, Alemi decided to take part in fighting unemployment by equipping the youth with skills in automotive repair and maintenance. He started training people from all walks of life, both educated and uneducated, on mechanics.

"I train up to 30 youth every year and, since 2013, over 260 have been equipped with skills that can earn them an income. We train their hands, hearts and heads," Alemi says.

Mustapha Lule, the young man famously known for jumping from a floor on Mabirizi Plaza in a bid to commit suicide, is one of the beneficiaries of Alemi's generosity. The 19-year-old, now in his second year, says the sky is now the limit.

"I had totally lost hope, but I am now buzzing with energy and I have dreams. Alemi has counselled me and given me hope. I now want to set up my own garage and a spare parts shop," Lule says.

Alemi (right) explaining to the President how his business operates



## The President's promise

On August 1, 2015, President Yoweri Museveni was on his way to Dwaaba to commission a hospital, when he stopped in Najjera, near Alemi's workshop. On his way back, he dropped in again. Luckily, Alemi was around and he chatted with the President about his business.

On August 24, the President paid Alemi another visit and was impressed with what Alemi

was doing in skilling the youth. The President asked Alemi to put all the requirements he needed to transform his garage into a modern auto garage and service bay, in a comprehensive proposal and submit it to his staff, which Alemi did.

The total cost of the expansion plan came to about sh600m, with sh350m required

to complete the first phase alone. The President promised to help him. But he is yet to get anything, something which he says has disappointed him.

With support from the Government, we will train more people and inspire those who shun such kinds of jobs. We want to impact lives of as many youths as possible," Alemi says.



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