TRUTH EVERYDAY

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📄 **JOBS & CAREER**

Meet Sekalala, the Makerere student billionaire

Abdu Sekalala studies while his innovations make him money. Photo by Patience Ahimbisibwe

At just 22 years, Abdu Ssekalala's appearance is that of an ordinary student, but looks can be deceptive. The young man, is no ordinary student, while his colleagues await to celebrate sitting their last exam, he is already thinking about his next big challenge, how to improve his first innovation, a computer application. While others worry about where to find a job and earn their first salary, Sekalala is keenly watching the number of downloads of his application in one column while he calculates the financial return the hits make in the other.

Sekalala is a student of at Makerere University's School of Computing and Informatics Technology (CIT) who has so far developed at least nine internationally recognized mobile phone applications that are not only building his career as an innovator but minting millions for him.

Sekalala got his break when Nokia, an international mobile phone company organized a special training session to help software developers hone their skills. The training in April and May last year presented a major break for the young man, whose application has crossed quarter a million hits so far.
While Sekalala's success has excited his colleagues and trainers at Makerere, the challenge is where he will manage to control the excitement and keep focused. Sekalala says this is exactly what he is gunning for.
Software development has lately become an a global hit to make dollar millionaires and billionaires with the likes of Mark Zuckerberg founder of the social networking site Facebook, which he founded with colleagues while a student at Havard in 2004. Mr Zuckerberg is only 27 and is worth US$17bn (one and a half times bigger than the entire Ugandan budget for last year).

Finding success
Sekalala's most successful application is the Wordbook which has already gone commercial and is making for him a Euro per down load or Shs3,200. Wordbook is a dictionary application with word of the day capability fully packed with definitions, examples and a selection of related words.

Speaking to Jobs and Career, Sekalala said his current success was guided by a clear focus and paying attention and making the best of the training opportunity

when it presented itself.

"I paid attention throughout the sessions because I didn't want to miss any information that I would [later] need. When we were asked to develop our own, I put my best and luckily my applications have been adopted by Nokia," Ssekalala told Jobs and Career.

The applications are available on the Nokia Ovi Store with one of them, the Uganda Theme is a free download which has attracted over 300, 000 downloads making it the third most downloaded application.

The Nokia Ovi Store, is the firm's application store. The greatest number of the downloads was registered in the Asian countries of India and Thailand.

Advice to young people
There is nothing impossible once you are determined to achieve your goals. He encourages young people to utilize all chances available while still in school.

The College's training was aimed at improving the student's mobile application development techniques to enable the public use Ugandan products world over and improve the visibility of the local software developers in the country.

His other applications
101 Romantic SMS, WhirlSports, nLightFlashlight and Tutu translate are free but have adverts provided by an Indian-based firm Vserv. Ssekalala is paid for the different brands that advertise through his applications.

He has already achieved his one million target downloads for his mobile applications and is set to earn $1million (about Shs2.5billion) before he turns 23.

"I make at least $100 (Shs250,000) a day from one application. I don't have to look for a job after I finish school. In fact I make money while am seated in class learning and make more money than my lecturers," Ssekalala boasted.
Michael Niyitegeka, a computer and information technology lecturer at the university said it is one of the university's strategy to partner with government and the private sector to familiarize the students with employers so that they get to know what is needed before they are there.

Ssekalala already owns two companies; Gogetta which employs eight people and Foo Technology with seven employees. The companies focus on mobile and website development.

"Ever since I was a kid, I always wanted to do something with computers and my biggest motivation has always been a desire to innovate and leave a mark that says I was once here," he said.

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