

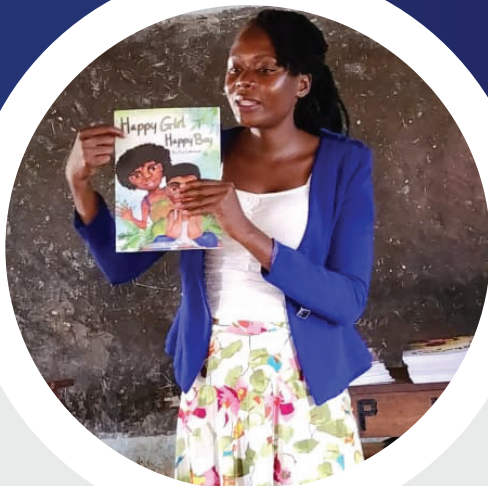


COMMONWEALTH

SCHOLARSHIPS AND FELLOWSHIPS  
ALUMNI ASSOCIATION OF UGANDA



# ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT AUGUST 2025 ZAHARAH NAMANDA



Zaharah Namanda's journey is a **powerful one**. It's a story of resilience. She grew up in Ntinda, Kampala, in a loving home of six children. Her single mother worked tirelessly to provide a dignified life, doing all she could to afford quality education for her children.

Zaharah remembers her mother as loving, caring, and fully present. Every time Zaharah brought homework home, her mother was there to help, and Zaharah consistently ranked among the top students in her class. Despite her demanding work, Zaharah's mother spent time with her children, instilling in them the values of honesty, authenticity, and most importantly, creativity. But at just 13 years old, Zaharah's life changed forever when her mother passed away. Suddenly, she became the head of the family, caring for her younger siblings, including an eight-month-old, a two-year-old, and a ten-year-old. Their aunt sold their late mother's house, forcing them to relocate to Kulambiro, Kampala. Childhood for Zaharah was replaced with the responsibilities of parenting.

Making the most of their resources, Zaharah managed to start a small **business selling clothes on market days**. She juggled this with school and looking after her siblings. Then, at 16, she secured work as a brand ambassador promoting beauty products like Movit hair products. Amid these hardships of balancing work and school, she developed leadership, communication, and organisational skills that would later define her career and calling.

# A LONG WALK TO EDUCATION

After completing primary school, Zaharah dreamed of joining secondary school. But finding sponsorship seemed impossible. She knocked on the doors of 21 schools in search of a scholarship. Twenty schools turned her away. The 21st saw her passion, resilience, and integrity, and gave her a place. **Zaharah honoured that trust by excelling, emerging as the best student in both her Ordinary and Advanced Levels.**

Her stellar performance earned her a government merit scholarship to Makerere University, where **she graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Economics.** She went on to complete several short courses in civic leadership, public policy, research, and conflict resolution from prestigious institutions around the world. She later earned an MSc in Education, Public Policy, and Equity at the University of Glasgow as a Commonwealth Scholar in 2021.



## TURNING PAIN INTO PURPOSE

Her own struggles ignited a passion to help others, especially girls who, like her, had to shoulder family responsibilities too soon and often gave up on their dreams. Determined to be part of the solution, Zaharah founded the **Africa Education & Leadership Initiative (Africa ELI)** to create access to quality education for vulnerable children, particularly girls from poor and refugee communities.

From a humble “briefcase office” to a permanent address, Zaharah has built an organisation that has:

- Provided over 3,000 academic scholarships
- Trained more than 10,000 young people in life skills
- Partnered with dozens of schools
- Supported the mental well-being of teachers and students
- Given over \$50,000 in special assistance to schools
- Trained 500 teachers and student leaders

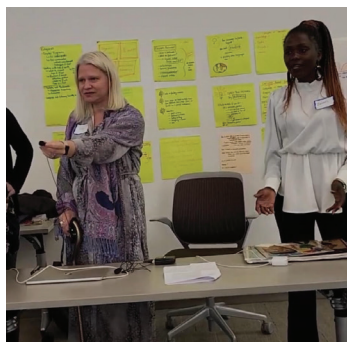


# ACHIEVEMENTS AND RECOGNITION

Her work has earned her multiple awards, including **the 40 Under 40 recognition and the Women Sustainability Forum Award for advancing refugee girls' education in Uganda**. She has been featured in Great Insight Magazine by the European Centre for Development Policy, and her article A New Africa for the Youth: Beyond Colonial Thought has been reprinted in international newspapers. Zaharah has also moderated high-level conversations on inclusive education at the African Union.

From a determined teenager knocking on 21 school doors to an award-winning leader influencing education policy, Zaharah's journey is a testament to persistence and purpose. She believes that every girl who stays in school has the power to change the future of her family and community.

Today, she continues to champion inclusive education for Uganda's most marginalised children, proving that even the toughest beginnings can lead to a legacy of hope. Her dream is to build a values-based school that offers holistic education to young leaders, with a special focus on girls from challenging backgrounds. She believes such challenges shape character, build resilience, and fuel the determination to do better.





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