

# Ugandan Obama fires up Bufumbira South campaigns

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*At only 28 years, Bernard Sabiti is the young prodigy that has fired up the campaigns in his constituency with his Obama-like confidence and enviable intellect, writes **Dennis D. Muhumuza***

At the height of the Obama mania in early 2008, a young Ugandan took his fascination with the then US presidential candidate by forming Ugandans For Obama (UFO), a movement of Obama's diehard admirers that within a few days had over 100 registered members. The brain behind UFO was Bernard Sabiti, who two years later, finds himself on the campaign trail, seeking to represent Bufumbira South constituency in Kisoro District.

His Obama-like confidence, eloquence and enviable intellect has driven many into composing songs and slogans of praise in his honour.

"Representing my people in parliament was childhood ambition," he says assuredly. "I stand for integrity in politics, truth, hope and change."

The born-again independent candidate is tussling it out with NRM's Tress Bucyanayandi who is also the incumbent MP, FDC's Joseph Munyaneza and another independent candidate, John Tereraho.

"Mine is a struggle to get our country out of the quagmire of corruption, which is in part rooted in the methodology of electing our leaders with politicians taking advantage of people's poverty to bribe voters," he says. "I've tried to unequivocally denounce such actions on the local FM

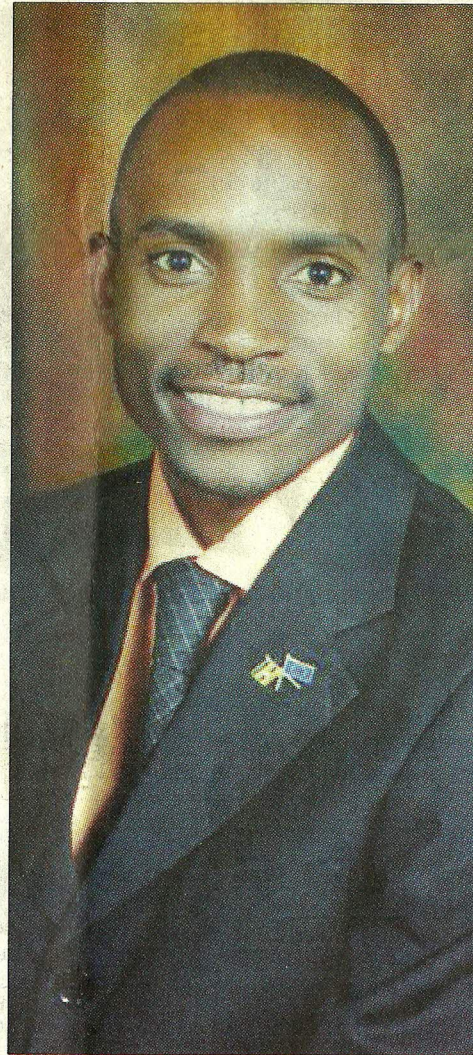
stations and wherever I'm having rallies and the response is great. In fact, my opponents are scared dead and are beginning to realise their money won't take them far in this election!"

Sabiti quickly adds, "I've been found between a rock and a hard place, with my most vocal and influential campaigners telling me to do as others are doing - give some money, booze, soap etc., to voters to stand a chance. The soul of this nation is so fundamentally flawed that in Muramba Subcounty, I was almost beaten for calling people and just reading them my manifesto without buying them local brew at least."

The lanky contestant has made it his preoccupation to urge voters to vote wisely.

"Leadership is such a serious virtue that it is ridiculous for anyone seeking it to think they can buy that mandate," he says. "That should be the first indication to us that this person is a mere pretender because he violets the most basic of leadership tenets. Let's look at qualities that make a good leader and elect someone based on those qualities."

In his manifesto, poverty eradication comes on top: "I've felt the pangs of poverty myself through the tough childhood that I underwent, and the depriva-



tion I suffered as an infant when I lost my parents."

Kisoro is well endowed with fertile soil and reliable rain fall, he argues, and

that people are hungry because of poor leadership and unreliable representation in parliament. Sabiti also promises to invigorate the tourism, improve education as well as find the antidote to the water shortage in his constituency.

The light-skinned and soft-spoken contestant was born to David Sebujiangwe and Jurita Mukandanga of Kisoro, south western Uganda, and attended Giten-deri Primary School, Kabindi Secondary School for O'Level and proceeded to St. Paul's Mutorele S.S. for A' Level. He then joined Makerere University in 2003 for a Bachelors degree in Social Sciences, majoring in Psychology. He returned to Makerere in 2008 for a Masters of Science degree in Population and Reproductive Health and has since been working with Straight Talk Foundation.

Sabiti says he devours books like breakfast cereal, with Charles M. Sheldon's *In His steps: What Would Jesus Do*, as one of his favourites.

"I like his insistence that in a bid to be Christ-like, today's Christians should ask themselves; 'What would Jesus do?' before doing anything," he says. "Although he was dismissed as trivialising Christ by applying him in the world's social troubles, Sheldon was a decisive voice of the social gospel in the mid 19th century and his books are still relevant today."

He may not be the "political rock-star" that Obama became on his way to becoming the first African-American president, but Sabiti quotes Job 19: 25 (*My Redeemer lives*) to denote his optimism.

Come the February 18 polls, he hopes to overshadow his opponents by winning the majority vote off the 53,000 registered voters in his constituency, thereby becoming one of the youngest legislators in the 9th parliament.