

# FROM WORK TO WORKING IT, EMINENT **WOMEN IN UNIFORM** SHARE EXPERIENCES THAT PROVE **THEY'RE MORE THAN JUST A PRETTY FACE**

## Arise Reporter

*Women are intelligent, creative, strong, self-driven and talented. They are also beautiful, shapely and aesthetic. Why is it, then, that women are often valued based on their looks rather than their abilities or accomplishments? The fact remains that a woman's identity isn't based on something as superficial as beauty, and it extends a lot deeper than her appearance. Conversations with the following women confirm that, indeed, behind every woman's exterior is a whole plethora of talents and traits much more impressive than beauty.*



### **Barbara Birungi Mutabazi** **Founder, Women in Technology Uganda (WITU) and Hive Colab**

Her love and passion for technology started in high school when she failed to get a seat in a computer classroom owing to the high number of students and very small number of computers. A teacher noticed a little girl who stood outside the classroom window during every lesson trying to learn. He gave her a seat.

Later, when Birungi got a job at a tech consultancy firm, she realised that she was the only woman in a group of 10 men. It was then that she conceived the idea of creating a place where young women looking for industry-relevant training opportunities, mentoring and networking opportunities could come and learn from one another. That was when the idea of Women in Technology Uganda (WITU) was conceived.

“Women in Technology Uganda was created as a place where women could come and learn about technology, business and leadership and, in turn, become innovators and business leaders. I wanted to create a movement of women technologists and encourage young women to become tech professionals,” says Birungi.

Birungi wanted a place that would embrace young women who have dropped out of school owing to poverty and give them hope for a bright future through technology education and business development support, link them to jobs and empower them to be part of the decision-making on issues that concern their lives and communities.

Birungi argues that since technology continues to shape Africa’s economies, women and girls should not be left out in this important field.

Because of her work with WITU, Birungi was a recipient of the Anita Borg Change Agent Award in 2014 and a 2017 Mandela Washington Fellowship. Birungi is also the founder of Hive Colab, an innovation hub and start-up incubator in Kampala.

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**Hellen Izama**  
**Principal Project Engineer at National Water and Sewage Corporation**

Attached to the Planning and Capital Development Department of the National Water and Sewage Corporation (NWSC), Izama deals with the water treatment plants and its supply for consumption.

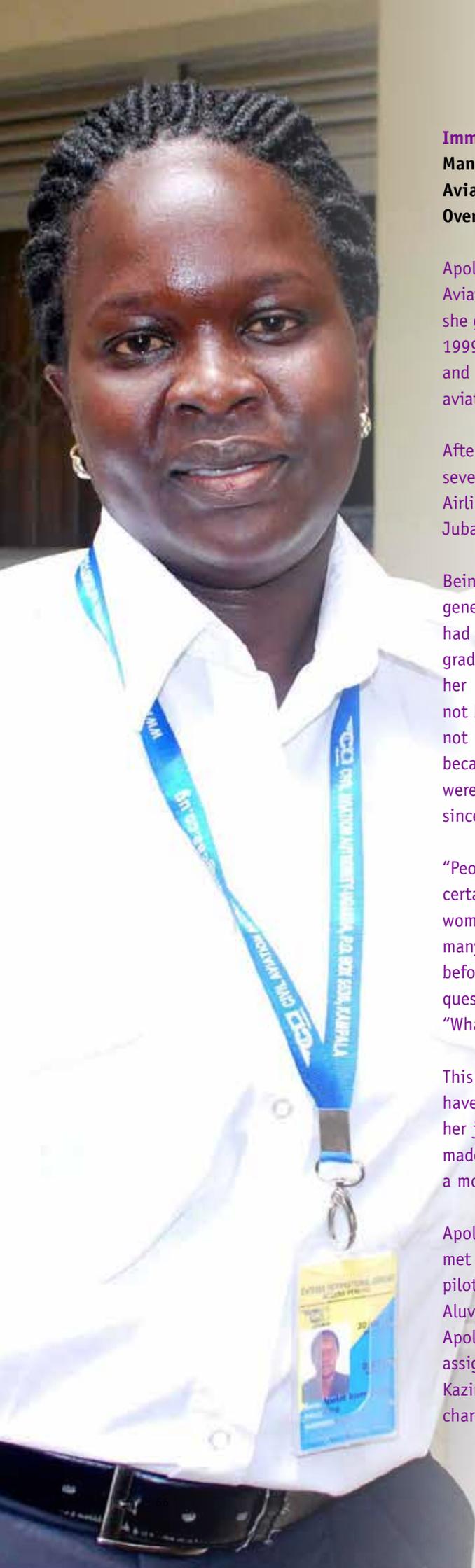
Right from school, Izama has had a passion for the sciences. “First, I was lucky to have a dad who was an engineer and that, I can say, was my first encounter with the engineering profession long before I got to know what exactly it involved,” she says. “It did not matter being inspired by a man but the fact that I had someone as a role model was enough.”

Izama says being a woman in engineering is not rosy. “First, you belong to the minority. In engineering class, for example, we were only eight girls in a class of ninety students. The situation is not much different at the workplace. The problem with belonging to the minority is it may kill your confidence. Your views are not taken seriously because you are few.” Belonging to the minority, however, motivates her to work harder so as to succeed.

Izama recalls her experience with starting out in engineering in the Department of Plumbing. “It was strange for my colleagues because they had not studied or worked with female engineers. They used to tease me. But I would beat them at their game by correcting their mistakes and physically showing them how it is done. I developed vital skills required for the job. In the end, I got respected for my work,” she says.

Izama attended St. Joseph’s Girls’ Secondary School Nsambya and St. Mary’s College Namagunga before joining Makerere University for a Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering, and is currently pursuing a master’s degree in civil engineering at the same university. Izama is a member of the Uganda Institution of Professional Engineers.

Over the years, Izama has mentored several young women. Through NWSC’s Young Water Professionals Programme, she moves out to schools and offers career guidance to girls, including demystifying myths about sciences.



**Immaculate Apolot**  
**Manager Flight Operations, Civil Aviation Safety and Security Oversight Agency**

Apolot trained at the East African Civil Aviation School in Soroti, from where she graduated as a professional pilot in 1999. She was the second female pilot and the first to venture into general aviation.

After graduation, Apolot worked with several organisations, including United Airlines, Eagle Air, FEEDER Airlines in Juba and Uganda Air Cargo.

Being the first Ugandan female pilot in general aviation, Apolot says she has had her share of challenges. Even after graduating as a professional pilot like her male counterparts, Apolot could not be immediately recruited. This was not because she was incompetent but because the companies she approached were sceptical about employing her since she is a woman.

“People assumed I could not handle certain assignments because I am a woman,” she recalls. For example, on many occasions, when she appeared before an interview panel, the first question the panellists asked her was, “What if you got pregnant?”

This meant that Apolot would not have to conceive or else risked losing her job. Such conditions automatically made her postpone plans of becoming a mother.

Apolot got a breakthrough when she met Captain Elly Aluvale, a Kenyan pilot and proprietor of United Airlines. Aluvale got interested in employing Apolot as a female pilot. Her first assignment was to fly the late Gen. Kazini to DRC. She flew a five-seater chartered plane and that marked the

beginning of her flying experience.

Nevertheless, the challenges never ceased. She recalls an incident when she was preparing to fly passengers to Adjumani. “Being a small young girl fresh from Soroti Flying School, one passenger stubbornly said he could not be flown by a young girl. Fortunately, my captain intervened and told him off. He was advised to either stay or allow to be flown by a female.

In 2015, Apolot joined the Civil Aviation Authority as a Flight Inspector. In November 2017, she was appointed Manager Flight Operation at the Civil Aviation Safety and Security Oversight Agency. In 2018, during the International Women’s Day celebrations, Apolot was recognised with a medal of excellence.

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**Lt. Colonel Edith Nakalema**  
**Head of State House Anti-Corruption Unit**

Edith Nakalema is a serving Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF) Officer. Her reason for joining the military was to make a personal contribution to the transformation of Uganda's security forces. With a diploma in business studies from Uganda College of Commerce Kabale, Nakalema first worked in the Accounts Office of the UPDF.

She rose through the ranks of the UPDF up to lieutenant colonel. She was recently appointed to head the Anti-Corruption Unit at State House, after successfully completing a 14-month Higher Command and Staff course at the Joint Services Command and Staff College in Watchfield, Oxfordshire,

United Kingdom. She is the first Ugandan military officer to enrol at the academy and the second in Africa.

Nakalema's recent appointment to head the Anti-Corruption Unit at State House, a job outside the military, got her to work, or at least learn to work, with government structures and bureaucracies. "I am naturally a fast paced person, but I am glad I am learning to abide by the rules (bureaucracies)," she notes.

Upholding Christian values and the determination to make a personal contribution to developing Uganda are her strongest points.

The first-born of five children, Nakalema was born to Eiyasafu and Midrace Sserwadda of Kashari village in Mbarara district in 1974. She

attended Mbarara Junior School and Rwentanga Primary School for her primary education. Later, she joined Rutoma Secondary School for O' level and Kibubura Girls School for A' level. She thereafter joined Uganda College of Commerce Kabale for a diploma in Business Studies, graduating in 1998. In 2010, while she was a Finance Officer at the Special Forces Group (SFG), Nakalema pursued a degree in Logistics and Procurement Management at Nkumba University.