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BEYOND THE A GRADES

Meet the bold young minds swapping prestigious careers for purpose-driven paths **P.4&5**



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Review

Burudani Express

If you are looking for a podcast that captures the heartbeat of East Africa's music scene, Burudani Express is a must-listen. The show is hosted by the vibrant DJ Kemgal, whose passion for music and artist discovery shines through in every episode. Burudani Express is not just another music podcast but a platform that samples the latest hits from East Africa while giving upcoming artists a chance to learn from industry legends. Through exclusive interviews, DJ Kemgal bridges the gap between new talent and established stars, offering invaluable insights into the ever-evolving music landscape. With a lineup of guests that includes Duffa Dili-gon, gospel icon Jimmy Gait, Kidis, and Tanzanian sensation Hanstone, the podcast delivers a rich mix of genres, stories, and career-defining moments.

Hotspot



UK reggae legend Don Campbell is set to perform in Africa for the first time. Known for his timeless reggae covers like I Can See It in Your Eyes, Storm Is Over, and Rise, Campbell will headline Reggae with a Cause, a groundbreaking concert at the Tsavo Ballroom, KICC, on Saturday, 15 February 2025. Joining him on stage will be reggae powerhouse Alborosie with his full band, alongside Kenya's own trailblazers Nazizi and Wyre, promising an electrifying night of conscious music, unity, and cultural celebration. But this isn't just another reggae concert, it is a movement for change. With all proceeds supporting the Kwale Deaf Centre, the event shines a spotlight on Kenya's Deaf community. Tickets range from KSh 1,500 to KSh 10,000, available at mtaani.com.

Compiled by Elizabeth Ngigi

Inside the viral car dealer's world of ambition, accusations, and unapologetic hustle

BY THOMAS BOSIRE

Joseph Kairo Wambui, popularly known as Khalif Kairo, has been in the public limelight in the past three months following arrests and fraud charges related to his car dealership business.

He was first arrested on December 3, 2024, at one of his car yards, and detained at Kasarani Police Station, accused of obtaining money by false pretense and pocketing millions from buyers without delivering the promised vehicles.

On January 28, 2025, Kairo faced two fraud charges: first, allegedly tricking Jeff Kyule Munane into paying Sh2.1 million for a car that he never delivered, and second, obtaining Sh2.98 million from Dora Okoth for a Subaru Outback purchase that never materialised.

He pleaded not guilty. His defence team, led by lawyers Dunstan Omari and Cliff Ombeta, argued that these charges were motivated by business rivalry.

Kairo's legal woes have ignited a firestorm, as online users share his old tweets displaying opulence and broke-bashing.

With a determined look, he talks to Nation about his journey starting from Kawangware, a low-income neighbourhood in Nairobi, to becoming a controversial figure in Kenya's car selling industry.

You have a boldness that's unusual for a 28-year-old. Where does it come from?

Because I've seen bad things growing up. I first saw murder when I was young. Things don't faze me. Growing up, we shared a toilet with 60 people. Those who have lived in the ghetto understand, you'd see maggots crawling out of the toilets. That was my life until about 2014. Selling cars helped me a lot. It helped my mom. It helped my family.

Some say your lifestyle is too flashy...

That's their problem, not mine. My mom tells me, "You should buy land." I tell her, "I want to build an AI [artificial intelligence] tool." For some people, spending Sh1 million on land is the right move. For me, investing Sh1 million into my company's website makes more sense. The watch I'm wearing? It's worth Sh200,000. Someone will say it's flashy. But for me, it's an investment. It has practical uses—weather updates, flight tracking... It's functional. People pick what they want to see.

People have said you have a



Joseph Kairo Wambui also known as Khalif Kairo poses for a picture after the interview on February 01, 2025 in Ruiru. PHOTO/FRANCIS NDERITU

The Gospel according to Khalif Kairo

powerful backer. Do you?

When I started the business, they said I was a drug dealer. That didn't stick. Then they said I had sexual relations with a prominent politician. That didn't stick. Then they said a former governor was my godfather, all because he attended a motoring event I hosted.

The truth is, my story is well-documented. My first trips to Dubai and Malaysia. My first car sales. It's all there. But people only believe what they want to believe.

Let's start at the beginning. Who is Khalif Kairo?

I grew up in Kawangware. I am the second born in a family of three. I studied in Kawangware. Two primary schools—Huduma Primary School in Congo area, one of the nastiest places in Kawangware. I walked to school every day. In my last two years of primary school, I went to a school called World Hope, again in Kawangware.

In high school, I studied at Dagoretti High School for one year; then transferred to a school called Kahuho, where I finished in 2012. I joined Zetech Universi-

ty in 2016 for a business administration course but dropped out.

I mostly grew up with my mom. You know, in Kenyan society, sometimes you have a child with someone, but you don't end up married. My dad was present, but it wasn't an easy childhood.

You've spoken about your son. What's fatherhood like?

My son was born when I was 20. It's not easy, especially when you're not married to the mother. But being a parent is the best thing. He pushes me to work hard. I want to build a solid foundation so none of my children go through what I did.

Why did you drop out of college?

I started selling cars. Then, I went back to school in 2019 to pursue my commercial pilot training. I finished the course last year.

I've always been a car person. I think my dad played a role in that. He loves machines. Growing up, I was always interested in cars, even as a toy.

And my mom had a small kiosk in Kawangware, next to a garage. I remember spending time there,

hanging around cars. So, I grew up around cars.

When did you start selling cars?

I was 18. I finished KCSE on November 5, there's a photo on my Facebook page of that day. Two weeks later, I posted the first car I sold—a Subaru Legacy. My first commission was Sh58,000. I knew some guys who worked at Subaru Kenya. I saw their lifestyle and thought, "This looks like a very interesting career."

How did you grow your business with nearly zero experience?

I did sales at a showroom for two years, then resigned in March 2017. I became a freelance broker, selling cars on my Facebook page. That's when I founded my first sales page—Khalif Kairo. I did brokerage for three years. I worked with a couple in Kiambu who owned a car yard. They held my hand. In 2020, just as Covid-19 was starting, I co-founded a company with two other people. But two years later, we had a fallout. That's when I started Kai and Kairo.

I left due to a disagreement.

I ceded my shareholding, gave back the rights to the company, and walked away. I was not kicked out. People have been pushed out of companies before, but that was not my story. I decided to leave.

Starting over wasn't easy, but I built this company from scratch. People think once you start a business, you'll have a rosy forever-and-ever story. That's not always the case.

Why the business name Kai and Kairo?

Khalif is my high school nickname. Kairo comes from my Kikuyu background. In Kikuyu, "U" is pronounced "O," so "Carro" is "Cairo." I have dated a Carole before, but the name has nothing to do with her. My grandmother and my sister are both called Carole. So, "Cairo and Carole" pays homage to my family.

You often post your travels abroad online, to Japan, the US, Jamaica... How do you finance these trips?

The company funds my business trips. People see the fun side on social media, but they don't see the work behind it. I've travelled to Japan countless times for car deals. My trips to the US are mostly to visit my mother, who is a resident there, but we are also looking at business expansion into the Caribbean and West Africa.

Some people argue that you're living lavishly for someone facing financial challenges.

I live within my means. The trips I take are either business-related or personal. When I was closing an aircraft deal in South Africa, I stayed in a bedsitter, spending Sh3,000 a day. But no one talks about that.

Are you a billionaire?

I've never done a formal valuation of my net worth, but I believe my company is worth over a billion. Our dealership platform alone is worth tens of millions of dollars. That's what investors look at; potential, not just liquidity.

Yet critics argue that your lifestyle doesn't align with someone in financial distress.

People misunderstand net worth and liquidity. You can have assets worth billions but still struggle with cash flow. It's a common business reality.

There's been a lot of talk about your dating life. Do you consider yourself a womaniser?

That's inaccurate. Last year, I dated two women. That's it. In Nairobi, the average man probably dates 10 or 20 women. I've never had a scandal where a woman claimed I cheated.

Regrets?

None. I'm just being me.

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Read the full story on nation.africa

Humour

Finally, Safara sees a way to find financial independence

Even a hustler like me could now afford to go for two properties!

BY MIKE SAFARA

“Break a leg” in theatre language means “good luck” as you go on stage. It comes from the Greek theatre where people stomped their feet instead of clapping, so the expression meant may the actor/actress be so great, that an audience member should break a leg from stomping their fantastic performance.

For me, after literally breaking a leg over December holidays, it meant instead of running all over town for the next hustle to put a roof over my head in rent, I had to sit down and finally see what gigs I could get over the Internet.

“Find FIRE – Financial Independence, Retire Early!”

That was the pop-up advert that came up as I perused through my Instagram feed.

I could already picture myself reading a popular novel under a palm tree in Mombasa, with the hustle-and-bustle of the city far away, as I saw that my path to ear-

ly retirement was through owning my own affordable, amazing apartment.

I called the digits on the ad, and next thing I know, a Sam on the other end of the line is telling me all about the lifestyle I could enjoy as a member of their real es-

tate club.

“Is this guy for real?” I thought, and in spite of being on crutches, I decided to pay a visit to their offices earlier this week.

“If you snooze, you lose on opportunity,” I reminded myself on the cold morning I had to get up

and take a taxi to Thindigua, and had been tempted instead to curl up beneath my warm duvet, and doze.

I was going to a place called Sunset, and on the way, I found myself singing a rhyme I last sang in Primary School, about the iconic

Sunset Hotel in Kisumu:

“Sunset hotel is very come-for-table/ you ask for ‘chicken’ they give you all their kitchen... Nyal Gunga, is full of paranormals...”

Soon I was sitting at this soft-wood outdoor café, being served by a dreamy-eyed lady called Terry whose selections of juices looked like healthy stuff to drink.

In no time at all, a savvy quartet had arrived to explain to me, Mike Safara, how their whole investor thing worked.

A young man called Ryan marketed the plan to me, intelligent eyes intense behind his black framed glasses as he spoke about what it would mean to own real estate.

Then a friendly guy, Migwe, in an ‘Igwe’ (AFC T-shirt) dared me

to dream about owning my own apartment, instead of paying rent every month without equity.

By the time a very comely young woman called Martha showed me the investment plan that started just below the Sh14,500 mark, I was sold.

I mean, we were talking about sums like Sh200 K a year, and in just over a decade, when I turned fifty, I would have my own home.

I was paying rent at Sh30 K a month to landlady Karen.

At this rate, I could even dare go for a couple of units – and when this tall gentleman called Rich gave me a tour of Sunset, with its quiet places, sunny spaces, complete with a rooftop view, I had fallen in love with the idea.

How had the legendary architect Leo M. Charo even constructed these paradoxically picturesque buildings, I wondered as I called a cab, clutching my crutches as I dialed to avoid them falling to the curb?

Once I was back in the flat, I carefully went over the math with a calculator, and got more and more excited.

Even a hustler like me could really afford to go for the two properties!

But it would mean that I would have to move to the Thindigua area and live in one of the apartments.

Luckily, I had noticed that the area and the apartment block itself seemed pretty much self-contained.

“Maybe I can even live in one apartment, and rent the other out as an Airbnb!”

Today, I will have to give a one-month notice to the caretaker, as per my lease – but I can live with that. They say life begins at 40. It’s about time Mike Safara’s did.

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Movie Review

ORIGINAL INSIGNIA PRODUCTION

KASH MONEY



A promotional poster for new Kenyan Netflix Original Series 'Kash Money'. PHOTO: I POOL

BY MICHAEL OCHIENG

KASH MONEY
Genre: Drama
Where: Netflix

Kash Money is an enthralling Kenyan drama series that delves into the lives of a powerful family dynasty. The series, produced by Insignia Productions and directed by Phil Bresson and Grace Kahaki, features an ensemble cast that includes John Sibi-Okumu, Sanaipei Tande, Amara Tari, Lenana Kariba, and Janet Mbugua.

The plot centers around the Macharia family, a wealthy and influential dynasty embroiled in a web of power struggles, secrets, and betrayals. The patriarch, played by John Sibi-Okumu, is a formidable figure whose decisions shape the fate of his family. Sanaipei Tande portrays his wife, a socialite whose glamorous facade hides a troubled past. Their children, played by Amara Tari and Lenana Kariba, navigate the challenges of living up to their family's legacy while grappling with their own ambitions and desires. Janet Mbugua delivers a standout performance as a relentless journalist determined to uncover the truth behind the Macharia family's facade.

One of the most striking aspects of Kash Money is its cinematography. The series employs vibrant colours and dynamic shots that enhance the storytelling. The opening scene, featuring a daring encounter, immediately sets the tone and showcases the director of photography's talent for visual storytelling. The attention to detail in makeup, hair, and wardrobe further adds to the authenticity of the characters and the world they inhabit.

The soundtrack is another standout element, with music carefully curated to complement the visuals and elevate the emotional impact of each scene. The lighting design is equally impressive, creating an atmosphere that draws viewers into the narrative. Key moments in the series include the revelation of long-buried family secrets, intense power struggles, and heart-wrenching confrontations. These pivotal scenes are executed with finesse, leaving a lasting impression on the audience.

This is a compelling series that combines strong performances, stunning visuals, and engaging storytelling. It offers a captivating glimpse into the lives of its multifaceted characters and explores themes of power, family, and ambition. Fans of drama and character-driven narratives will find this six-part drama series an absolute delight.

MyNetwork Cover Story

Why top Kenyan students are walking away from 'prestigious careers'

When straight-A students choose purpose over prestige, magic happens

BY JACKSON NGARI

You've just aceed your national exams; straight As in your Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) results. The excitement is overwhelming, and everyone around you starts calling you a "top achiever." With such results, society has already determined your future: you're bound for one of the "prestigious" courses in university. The path is set. But months later, you find yourself sitting in a lecture hall, staring at textbooks, and facing the stark reality that the course everyone believed you would thrive in doesn't ignite the passion you expected. It's not exciting. It's not "giving," as Gen Z might say. You start questioning everything: Is this really the life you want?

For some, the dissatisfaction becomes so overwhelming that they make the bold decision to leave university altogether, choosing to pursue something that aligns with their passions. Others decide to swap their courses for what their hearts desire. Many might view this as a fall from grace for top scorers, but the truth is, those who choose to follow their passion often find greater success.

In this week's MyNetwork issue, we spoke to four former top scorers who made the courageous leap from conventional academic paths to follow their true callings. Today, they are thriving in careers that excite them, proving that sometimes, the road less traveled is the one that leads to fulfillment and real success.

Building from the ground up

Enoch Kambale, 24,
Founder of Jobzy, dropped



Enoch Kambale, 24, Founder of Jobzy

out of university to focus on his passion for tech, creating a recruitment platform that has helped over 20,000 job seekers.

At just 16, Enoch Kambale, now 24, was already teaching himself to code. By the time he was 18, he had developed Jobzy, a recruitment platform designed to connect job seekers with employers. But like many top-performing students, societal expectations steered him toward a traditional academic route.

"I joined the University of Nairobi to study Computer Science because I thought it would sharpen my skills," Kambale says. "But it was very theoretical. I was sitting through lectures on abstract concepts when I wanted to build something real."

The Covid-19 pandemic provided Kambale with a unique opportunity to focus on Jobzy. The app quickly gained traction, and by the time he was a first-year student, it already had over 20,000 users. "I remember thinking, 'Why am I in class when the work I'm passionate about is waiting for me outside?'" he says. "When I got serious about my startup during Covid, it wasn't just about coding—it was about giving it my full focus and energy."

However, Kambale's decision to drop out was not made lightly. He had to confront the societal stigma attached to leaving university. "In Kenya, a degree is almost like a badge of honour," he reflects. "Dropping out felt like I was betraying expectations."

Kambale credits his father's unwavering support for helping him navigate that period. "My dad always believed in me. He told me that success isn't about a certificate but about solving problems and creating value," Kambale shares. "That meant the world to me, especially when I was facing so much external pressure to stay in school."

By the time he was 20, Kambale was running Jobzy full-time, with the startup expanding across Kenya, Ghana, and South Africa. Securing significant funding, the platform grew, and Kambale's dream became a reality. "Leaving university was the best decision I ever made. It wasn't easy, but it was worth it. I've learned that success isn't one-size-fits-all—it's about doing what excites you."

Looking back, Kambale adds, "I had to take the leap and believe in myself. Even though it was a huge decision, I've never looked back. I learned more by taking the risk than I ever could in class."

The satisfaction of seeing real-world impact drives his passion. "Seeing my app help over 20,000 young people find jobs has been incredibly inspiring," he says.

For Kambale, dropping out wasn't about rejecting education but rather about pursuing his passion with full focus. "If I could achieve this while juggling school, imagine what I can do now that I'm fully dedicated," he explains.

Kambale is candid when discussing the traditional academic route. "You can't be a self-taught

surgeon," he says with a laugh. "But in tech, you can learn the best lessons from real-world experience. MBA programmes teach you how to manage someone else's business, not how to start your own. For entrepreneurs, school isn't always the best route."

His advice to young people feeling pressured to follow a prestigious career path is simple: "Don't drop out just because it seems cool. Make sure it aligns with your goals. I dropped out because I knew what I wanted and why I wanted it."

Kambale emphasizes advising that one shouldn't feel pressured to pursue a career path based on their grades, but know what they truly want to do, and not let anyone stop them. "I encourage parents to support their children and believe in their dreams because life isn't linear. There are many ways to succeed."

For Kambale, success isn't just about the growing number of users or secured funding—it's about real-world impact.

From bakery to tech

Paul Simiyu, 26, found his passion in tech, transitioning from medicine to computer science.

Paul Simiyu's story is one of reinvention, defying the odds, and embracing second chances. His path to success wasn't linear. It was a journey through failure, hard work, and unexpected discoveries that led him to a career in tech.

Simiyu's academic journey took an unexpected turn after his first KCSE attempt. "I scored a C plain, and I thought that was the end of my academic life," he recalls. He had faced struggles throughout his secondary school years—frequent transfers, clashes with authority, and a disconnect from the formal education system. "I felt like I had failed in life," Simiyu says. With no clear direction, he turned to work at Millbaker's bakery, where he managed inventory and performed other duties. Education seemed like a distant dream.

But life had other plans. Simiyu's father, seeing his despair, encouraged him to retake the exams. "My father believed in me," Simiyu recalls. "He told me I could do it again, and his belief gave me the courage to try."

In a twist of fate, Simiyu not only passed his KCSE with an A during his second attempt but also earned a spot in Kenyatta University's medicine programme. "It felt like redemption," he says. "It was my second chance." But the reality of student life soon set in. By the end of his first year, financial challenges prevented him from sitting for his exams. "I remember feeling defeated, sitting outside the exam hall because we couldn't pay the fees," he says. "It was one of the lowest moments of my life."

Returning to the bakery, Simi-



Paul Simiyu, 26, POOL

I thought success meant having a prestigious job like a doctor or lawyer. Now, success is about finding something you're passionate about.

Paul Simiyu



yu found himself working night shifts again. One evening, out of boredom, he Googled his name and stumbled upon an admission letter from Masinde Muliro University for a Computer Science course. "It was like a lifeline," he says. "The application deadline hadn't passed, and that discovery changed my life."

Switching from medicine to Computer Science wasn't an easy transition. "Letting go of the prestigious image of being a medical student was tough," he admits. But despite doubts from others, Simiyu embraced his new path. "I had to remind myself that life isn't about sticking to one path. It's about adapting."

Simiyu's new career in tech came with challenges, but his past experiences had strengthened him. "Every time I got knocked down, I felt like I lost a piece of my ego, but I grew stronger," he says.

Simiyu's view of success has evolved. "In high school, I thought success meant having a prestigious job like a doctor or lawyer. Now, success is about finding something you're passionate about."

Today, Simiyu thrives in tech, building software and finding fulfillment in solving problems. "Failing KCSE at first was the best thing that happened to me. It taught me resilience."

Finding freedom in digital marketing

Sarafina Nyawira, 25, despite excelling in Business and IT, Sarafina chose digital marketing over a corporate tech career.

Sarafina Nyawira's academic journey is impressive, but it's her decision to pivot away from a traditional career path that stands out. As a top performer in her KCSE exams, Nyawira was expected to join Kenya's elite in fields like medicine or law. However, despite her stellar grades and a degree in Business and Information Technology (BIT) from Pan Africa Christian University, Nyawira chose an unconventional path—

If I had stuck to the conventional path, I wouldn't be as happy or fulfilled as I am now.

Sarafina Nyawira



Sarafina Nyawira, 25, POOL

digital marketing.

"I was always the high achiever," she recalls. "Everyone expected me to do big things in the tech industry." But during her attachment at a tech firm, Nyawira began questioning her path. "I was doing my job well, but something didn't feel right. The corporate world seemed to stifle me."

During a long holiday, Nyawira stumbled upon digital marketing. "One day, I was casually scrolling through YouTube and found a tutorial about growing Instagram accounts," she says.

Nyawira thought digital marketing was just a hobby at first, but as she started experimenting with social media strategies, she realised she had a natural flair for it. "It was like a lightbulb moment," she says.

She began dedicating her free time to learning everything about digital marketing, reading books, taking online courses, and practicing different strategies. "It was a gamble, but I realised people were willing to pay for this skill," she recalls.

By the time Nyawira graduated, she had made the decision to move away from the tech industry to pursue a career in digital marketing. It wasn't an easy choice, especially since her family had expected her to follow a conventional path. "My family was skeptical. They couldn't understand why I was leaving a stable job offer in the tech industry to pursue something so uncertain," she says.

But Nyawira remained firm. "I didn't want to be stuck in a career that wasn't right for me. I wanted to build something of my own and have the freedom to work on my terms."

Her transition wasn't without challenges. Initially, it was difficult to find clients and establish her reputation in a competitive industry. "The first few months were tough. I had to work twice as hard to prove myself," she admits.

Eventually, her perseverance paid off. Nyawira built a solid client base, offering services such as social media management, content creation, and digital advertising. Today, she is a sought-after digital marketing consultant with a growing portfolio. "It's been a journey, but I've carved out a niche for myself," she says.

Her success has allowed her to explore another passion—education. Nyawira has authored two books on personal branding and social media strategy, both aimed at helping entrepreneurs and professionals build their online presence. "Writing the books was my way of giving back," she explains. "It also established me further in my field."

Looking back, Nyawira has no regrets about her decision to leave the corporate world. "If I had stuck to the conventional path, I wouldn't be as happy or fulfilled as I am now. Digital marketing has given me the freedom to work with exciting clients and do what I love."

She adds, "Success isn't about having a fancy title or a big paycheck. It's about creating a life



Sharon Selah, 24, POOL

that works for you."

From Architecture to Tech

Sharon Selah, 24, shifted from architecture to computer science after realizing the traditional path wasn't for her.

Sharon Selah's academic journey wasn't straightforward. "In high school, I knew I'd score an A, but I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life," she admits. Despite her academic success, she didn't feel drawn to traditional career paths like medicine or engineering. "I turned to a relative for advice, and he suggested architecture because someone he knew was doing well financially in the field," she recalls.

After researching online and learning that architecture was one of the highest-paying professions, Selah decided to pursue it. But once she began her studies, it didn't take long for her to realise that architecture wasn't for her. "Architecture is grounded in art, and while I was good at the science aspects, I struggled with drawing and sketching," she explains.

By her second year, Selah knew she needed a change. "My family was supportive when I decided to switch to Computer Science," she shares.

Selah didn't discuss her decision with many people outside her immediate family, but transitioning from architecture to tech came with its own challenges. "I felt left behind. My peers were two years ahead of me when I switched courses, and it was tough knowing they'd graduate before me," she says.

To finance her studies, Selah worked as an online writer, learning time management and resilience along the way. "Those experiences helped shape my work ethic."

Once she transitioned to Computer Science, Selah found her footing. "Tech was versatile and had endless opportunities," she says. Initially, her decision was driven by practicality, not passion. "I wanted something as profitable as architecture, but with a shorter timeline. Medicine was too long, so Computer Science seemed like the perfect compromise."

However, as she delved deeper into her studies, Selah discovered a passion for tech. "Exper-

imenting with algorithms and code was exhilarating. There are so many ways to solve a problem, and that really excited me."

Graduation marked a major milestone for Selah. "I got a job almost immediately—maybe the same day I graduated," she says. "That was the biggest win for me."

Looking back, Selah sees Computer Science as offering limitless career possibilities. "You can move into design, development, cybersecurity—there's something for everyone in tech," she says. "You just have to find your niche."

Selah credits her time in architecture for shaping her determination. "Architecture was tough because I wasn't good at art. That discipline translated directly into my success in tech."

Now a successful software developer, Selah advises others to research career paths thoroughly before making decisions. "Make sure your choice aligns with your strengths, not just your interests."

Her advice? "Research, research, research. Understand what day-to-day life in that career looks like. Success isn't about sticking to one path; it's about finding what fits you."

The hype Vs the reality

The journeys of these young people challenge Kenya's traditional perception of success. For decades, careers in medicine, law, engineering, and architecture have been viewed as the ultimate achievements. But these individuals prove that success is multifaceted and deeply personal.

"KCSE grades are overhyped," Simiyu says. "They don't define your future. What matters is how you adapt and find value in what you do."

Selah sees value in self-awareness. "Before choosing a career, research your strengths and understand what the day-to-day work entails. Don't just follow societal expectations," she advises.

For Nyawira, fulfilment trumps convention. "Success isn't about playing it safe. Sometimes you have to take risks to find what truly makes you happy."

Kambale believes the future belongs to innovators. "We need to celebrate people who think differently and create solutions. That's where real success lies," he says.

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Benefits I have been out of the country three times courtesy of athletics

National decathlon record-holder and long jumper Edwin Too

Q&A

Battling odds, training in alleys, and chasing records—inside the world of Kenya's top decathlete.

Where did the inspiration for decathlon come from?

I was inspired by my friend and fellow decathlete from the Kenya Police Service, Gilbert Koech. My passion for the sport was further fuelled by my wife, Eunice Kadogo, a regular national team sprinter. I would accompany her to training camps and the airport when she travelled for international championships, only to return home alone. This got me thinking a lot.

One day, I told her I dreamed of a time when we would go to camp together and fly out for competitions. She encouraged me, saying that I could do it, especially after I scored 6,100 points in decathlon at the nationals in 2018. She told me that with proper training, I could go far.

Since she trained rigorously, I decided to start training as well. I competed in the long jump and won some Athletics Kenya meets. Seeing my potential, I participated in the 2019 African Games trials at Kasarani and emerged first. However, I fell short of qualification by just 118 points.

I later won the national decathlon championship and finished third in the long jump. Then, the Covid-19 pandemic hit, suspending sports for some time, but I kept training.

In 2022, as the African Senior Championships approached, I focused on long jump and won several Athletics Kenya meets in both long jump and decathlon. At the 2022 national trials for the Mauritius Athletics Senior Championships, I secured my ticket, qualifying alongside Koech.

In Mauritius, I placed fourth with 7,011 points. That moment made me more optimistic. I believed that if I pushed harder, I could go further. I trained alongside my wife and later joined Utawala Star Sprints Club, where I have been coached by Perpetual Mbutu since 2023.

Tell us about the records you have in decathlon. I have broken Kenya's national decathlon record three times. Unfortunately, they were not ratified due to technicalities. Decathlon must be conducted in a single stadium with the correct equipment, including a wind gauge for long jump. Sometimes, these facilities are unavailable, making record ratification impossible.

Despite these setbacks, I never lost hope. At the African Games trials, I once again broke the national decathlon record, though it was not ratified. Nevertheless, I was named to Team Kenya for the African Games in Accra, where I competed in both decathlon and long jump.

In decathlon, I won silver with 7,140 points, breaking Charles Kokoyo's 1982 Commonwealth Games record of 7,076 points. This time, I believe my record will be ratified because it was achieved at an international event.

During the decathlon, I recorded a long jump of 7.82 metres. In the separate long jump event, I finished fourth with 7.71 metres, tying on points with a Cameroonian. I missed out on bronze due to a lack of a second-best jump,

having failed in five attempts. My rival had a valid second jump, securing the medal.

Who is your role model in decathlon?

I developed an interest in decathlon after watching Gilbert Koech compete for Kenya Police in 2016. The sport fascinated me, and I admired how he travelled internationally with Team Kenya.

For two years, I followed his performances, drawing inspiration from his dedication. He represented Kenya multiple times, including at the 2018 Commonwealth Games in Australia. His achievements opened my eyes, and I decided to pursue decathlon. Along the way, I added long jump to my events.

What challenges have you faced as a decathlete?

There are so many challenges. To begin with, our stadiums are inaccessible if you don't have the money to pay for you to practice. Decathlon is a very technical event. You can't just wake up one day and say, I'm going to do decathlon. You have to train for 110 metres hurdles. You can't just wake up and do pole vault. Hurdles and pole vault equipment are only found in the stadium. Even high jump and long jump equipment is in the stadium. You must have discus cage for discus and then there is the javelin. For you to practice well, you have to do these in a stadium. Decathlon also needs a lot of things. Every event has its own kit. So, there have been a lot of challenges be it in the javelin, the hurdles, the shot put, the discus. ...I've been training by the grace of God. You see, this season, we don't know where athletics will take us. All the main stadiums used by athletes are closed for renovation, so we have to look even for alleys to train. But you can't go to a track

and train pole vault or put hurdles on road to train there because cars will run over them. Decathlon also needs a lot of funding. In athletics, funding is important. You can't go train there and sleep hungry. You have to regain your strength. It means you have to eat well. To be successful in athletics, you have to train well. To train well means you have to access the training facilities.

How have you benefited from athletics?

I have been out of the country three times courtesy of athletics something that maybe would have been impossible to do. Secondly, my body is healthy because I keep fit by training. The money I get from the sport is also enough to buy me food. It's not a lot, but it helps. Another benefit is that I got employed by Kenya Prisons Service because of athletics. The former Commissioner General of Prisons John Wari-

oba also promoted me from the rank of a Constable to the rank of a Corporal because of athletics. These are the biggest benefits I have got so far from athletics.

What is best moment in sport?

My best moment was when I got my first medal in an international competition held outside Kenya at the 2023 African Games in March 2024. I got silver and I broke the national record in Accra, Ghana. I went to Cameroon and got bronze at the Africa Senior Athletics Championships the same year. To get these two medals from international competitions in one year and also earn a job promotion through athletics are my best moments. My worst moment was failing to qualify for the 2019 African Games. I had high hopes, but I didn't manage to make the team. The following year, coronavirus broke out and I thought that it was the end of my athletics career after sports were halted. But I'm happy things went back to normal and I'm

here pushing for more glory.

How do you prepare yourself if decathlon competition on the horizon?

In a day, you do five events during competitions, so you have to rest well before the material day of the games. If you are competing on Friday and Saturday, you have to give yourself at least two to three days of active rest. You can do some light exercise on Wednesday, but on Thursday, you can sleep, take water, rest well and eat well. Then on the day of the competition day, you have to wake up early and prepare yourself because decathlon requires five gears in a day. Prepare your gear, get ready, eat well and prepare your bag because there is no leaving the field until you finish the last event of the day. The same applies for the following day.

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In Brief

The rise of a decathlon star

-Edwin Kipmutai Too is a top Kenyan athlete specialising in decathlon (a gruelling 10-event athletic contest, consisting of 100 metres run, long jump, shot put, high jump, 400 metres run, 110 metres hurdles run, discus throw, pole vault, javelin throw and 1500 metres run) and long jump.

-Born in 1995, Edwin attended Koibeiyon Primary School in Bomet County and then Sosit Primary School in Bureti County where he started high jump while in Class Seven

-He introduced decathlon into his athletics career when he joined Chebitet Secondary School in Kapkatet in 2010.

-Edwin competed in high jump at the East Africa Secondary School Games in 2013 in Lira, Uganda

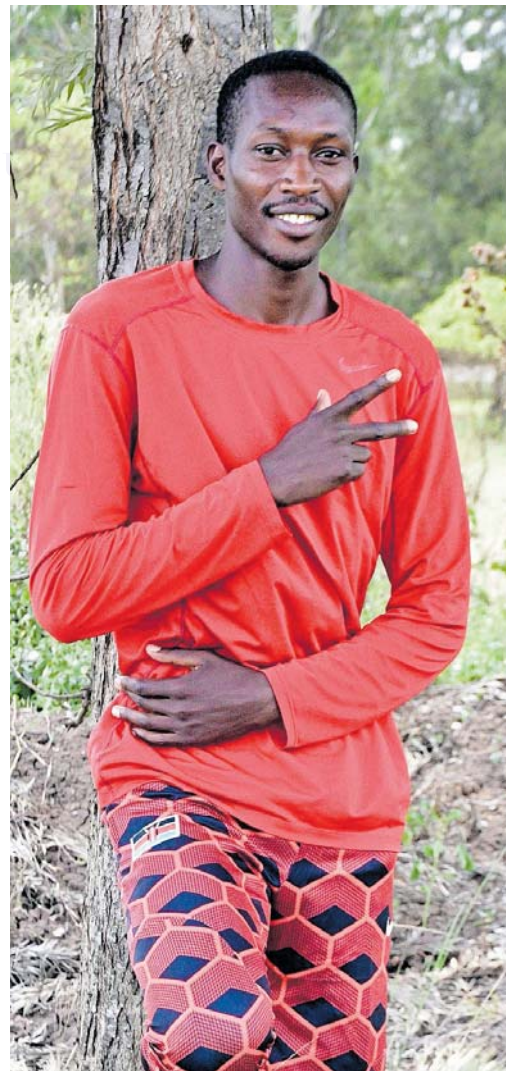
-He joined Prison Staff Training College (PSTC) in Ruiru in 2014.

-Edwin once competed in race walking in primary school and even later on in life attempted the 400 metres race during trials for World Athletics Relays Championships in 2014, but did not make the team.

-He won silver in high jump at the 2016 national championships on the first day and made himself busy for the remaining two days of the championships by competing in decathlon where he joined his friend from the Kenya Police Service, Gilbert Koech.

-Edwin graduated from PSTC in 2015 and continued representing Kenya Prisons in high jump at the national level until 2017.

-He had a breakout year in 2024, winning silver at the African Games in Ghana and bronze at the Africa Senior Athletics Championships in Cameroon.



Edwin Too a dec-athlete engages in some stretches after the interview at Prisons Staff Training College (PSTC) on February 01,

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