



Communication and Marketing Department
Isebe loThungelwano neNtengiso
Kommunikasie en Bemerkingsdepartement

Private Bag X3, Rondebosch 7701, South Africa
Welgelegen House, Chapel Road Extension, Rosebank, Cape Town
Tel: +27 (0) 21 650 5427/5428/5674 Fax: +27 (0) 21 650 5628

www.uct.ac.za

9 December 2020

Dodging life as a gangster in pursuit of education



Tshediso Mahange

Photo: Supplied

When Tshediso Mahange was just 13 years old, he had endured years of emotional and mental abuse at the hands of his stepfather. That's when he made a life-altering decision: the teenager decided to pack his bags and move out of the house. With nowhere to go and no one to support him, he moved into a tiny informal structure not far from his former home.

By himself in his shack in Tsietsi in Katlehong, Johannesburg, Mahange was surrounded by crime, gangs and drugs. The growing influence of boys his age recruited by gang leaders to lead a life of crime in exchange for money was laid bare, but he was determined to chart a new path for his life. And his love for maths and science helped him to achieve that.

Next week, Mahange will join hundreds of University of Cape Town (UCT) graduands during a virtual graduation celebratory event – the first of its kind for the university since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. He will receive his bachelor’s degree in business science with a major in finance from the Faculty of Commerce on Tuesday, 15 December 2020.

“This is a bittersweet moment for me. I arrived at UCT a few years ago as a sad, lonely young boy. I didn’t have what my peers had, which was the support of a loving family – I had no one. But I was determined to do my best and to succeed,” he said.

Living by himself in a community ridden with crime and gangs was difficult, he said. To escape peer pressure, he started his day at the crack of dawn. By 06:00 he entered the school gates and spent a few hours studying before his official school day started. Similarly, in the afternoon, after school, he would spend hours in the library. In this way, he dodged the negative community influences.

“I did this so that I didn’t have to be near those negative influences. I was asked numerous times to join the neighbourhood gang, but I always declined. I didn’t want that life,” he said. Because of Mahange’s love for maths, pursuing a career in finance was always top of mind. And he was “ecstatic” when UCT notified him of his successful application. However, arriving at the university during orientation week in 2015 was like a dagger to his heart – his happiness and excitement vanished.

“As I walked onto campus with nothing but the contents in my backpack, I felt sad and alone. I looked around me and saw other first-year students surrounded by their families. Suddenly, I felt the weight of my lonely childhood,” he said. “I realised there and then that I had no family who I could share my success with, and I spent my first day in tears.”

But thanks to UCT’s mentorship programme and with the help of a faculty psychologist, Mahange learned to face the demons of his past head on. He also made a conscious decision to immerse himself in his studies and to do well. “When I made this mind shift, everything started to fall into place, and it became a bit easier for me. I began to deal with things while focused on my end goal,” he said.

Mahange said that his biggest dream is to establish a private school aimed at children from disadvantaged backgrounds. He has started the leg work already. In high school he established [Ulwazi Olubanzi Academy](#), a non-profit organisation (NPO) that tutors learners in maths and science.

“I want to take the NPO a step further. One day I want to be able to build a school and to help children with a similar fate as mine. That is my biggest, wildest dream, and I will work to attain it,” he added.

[Download high-resolution photo](#)

ENDS

Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department

Ridovhona Mbulaheni

Media Liaison Assistant
Communication and Marketing Department

University of Cape Town
Rondebosch
Tel: (021) 650 2333
Cell: (064) 905 3807
Email: ridovhona.mbulaheni@uct.ac.za
Website: www.uct.ac.za