



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

14 December 2020

Graduand committed to changing societal perceptions on disability



Millicent Agangiba

Photo: Supplied

[Download high-resolution photo](#)

Millicent Agangiba was four years old when she was diagnosed with polio – this altered the trajectory of her life. She underwent years of medical treatment, and while her condition improved significantly, her mobility remained a challenge.

As a result of her disability, Agangiba struggled with an inferiority complex, which she explained was exacerbated by her school peers. They often mocked her disability and refused to include her in classroom and playground activities.

"Initially, I would feel lonely at school because most of the children called me names and didn't want to associate with me. My father said: 'Never mind, just learn hard and use your brain to showcase yourself.' His advice worked," she said.

Thanks to her father's advice, she conquered her feelings of inadequacy very early in her life. The young, bright mind buried herself in her books, performed excellently at school, and owing to her popularity with her teachers, she attracted many friends – both in her neighbourhood and in the classroom.

"Because of this experience, I am committed to changing the perception of society when it comes to the way people with disabilities are viewed." She breezed through her primary and secondary school years in Ghana, and when she passed matric, she received a Russian government scholarship to study computer science at the Tver State Technical University in Russia. Fast-forward a few years and this wife and mother of three will graduate with her PhD in information systems from the University of Cape Town's (UCT) Faculty of Commerce.

Agangiba started her doctoral degree in UCT's Department of Information Systems in 2015. Her research was titled "Accessibility of e-government services for persons with disabilities in developing countries" with an emphasis on her home country, Ghana.

Her research, the first-ever study of its kind for her native land, involved conducting empirical investigations into digital accessibility for people with disabilities in Ghana. She made use of a multi-stakeholder approach that included feedback from people with disabilities and software developers, as well as the government.

The findings, she explained, indicate that government, software developers and people with disabilities hold different views on what digital accessibility means, especially for people with disabilities. Her research also unravelled factors such as technological, sociocultural and political contexts that exclude people with disabilities from digital services.

Agangiba said that there have been many unforgettable moments at UCT. Shortly after her arrival she was awarded a scholarship from the Schlumberger Foundation, an international non-profit organisation (NPO) that supports women pursuing careers in science and technology.

That same year she received the L'Oréal-UNESCO Fellowship for Women in Science – the only UCT student to receive the accolade that year. And in 2017 she accepted the Best Poster Award at the 17th European Conference on Digital Government in Lisbon, Portugal. Agangiba dedicates her doctoral degree to her father, who in his lifetime provided her with ongoing support and nurtured her can-do spirit. He encouraged her to never give up and to always chase her dreams.

Even when she made the "difficult decision" to leave behind her seven-month-old baby in Ghana to pursue her PhD, she said that her dad cheered her on and assured her that the separation would only be temporary, and worth it in the end.

"I lost my father while completing my PhD. This was a difficult time for me. He was my number one supporter, a great pillar of strength and my source of academic motivation. This one's (PhD) for you, dad," Agangiba said.

She is committed to implementing her PhD research findings, and she has since established an NPO to develop accessible and affordable assistive technologies for people with disabilities in Ghana. In addition, her organisation also provides training programmes to facilitate digital integration for people with disabilities.

“This is my way of giving back to society and giving people with disabilities the opportunities they deserve in order to progress and move forward,” she said. “Everyone deserves equal opportunity.”

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