Refugee will take back home an MA degree

CANAAAN MDLETSHE

A REFUGEE from the Democratic Republic of Congo, André Mpiana, will return to his war-torn country with a masters degree in food security, thanks to his persistence and belief in education.

He will graduate from the University of KwaZulu-Natal’s School of Agricultural, Earth and Environmental Sciences.

Mpiana, a refugee from Lubumbashi in the eastern DRC, has been living in South Africa since 2009. He not only escaped the political upheaval in his home country but also registered to study at the university.

He had studied to honours level at the Institut Supérieur des Techniques Médicales, focusing on management and administration.

“I worked as a hospital administrator in my home country until the unrest and then fear of marauding armed M23 rebels escalated to a point which forced many of us in the eastern DRC to flee our homes,” he said.

Mpiana, 52, together with his wife and six of his seven children, left the DRC as soon as they were able, taking nothing with them. They were separated from their daughter, who was 16 at the time, with whom they were reunited in South Africa after she made her way to the country with other refugees.

Mpiana was unable to speak English when he arrived in South Africa but overcame the language barrier and managed to complete his masters thesis in what is his third language.

Speaking of Mpiana’s approach to the language barrier, his supervisor Dr Maxwell Mudhara said: “He maintained a positive attitude as he was always willing to exert himself under obviously challenging personal circumstances.

“His efforts, supported by the college bursary, resulted in a good quality product from his research.”

After more than four years in the country, Mpiana and his family have still not been granted refugee status, making it impossible for him to get formal work in order to support his family, who live together in a one-roomed shed on a property belonging to their church.

His eldest daughter does informal salon work on the weekends to try to contribute to their livelihood and the school fees of the younger children, while his wife sells sweets to University students near the campus.

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