

Biography of Dr. John Pombe Magufuli

Page 1: Introduction and Early Life – The Making of "The Bulldozer"

Dr. John Pombe Joseph Magufuli (29th October 1959 – 17th March 2021) was the fifth President of the United Republic of Tanzania, serving from 2015 until his death in 2021. His leadership was one of the most remarkable and debated in the country's history. Supporters celebrated him as a hard-working, anti-corruption leader who loved Tanzania, while critics accused him of being too strict, limiting democracy, and silencing opponents.

Magufuli was born in Chato District, in the Geita region near Lake Victoria. His father, Joseph Magufuli, was a small-scale farmer and fisherman, and his mother, Suzana Magufuli, was a homemaker. Growing up in a humble village family, Magufuli experienced poverty and hardship, which shaped his desire to fight for ordinary citizens later in life.

He attended Chato Primary School (1967–1974), Katoke Seminary (1975–1977), Lake Secondary School (1977–1978), and Mkwawa Secondary School (1979–1981). Teachers noted that he was disciplined, intelligent, and especially good in science subjects.

After finishing school, Magufuli became a teacher of mathematics and chemistry at Mwadui and Sengerema Secondary Schools. Later, he joined the University of Dar es Salaam, where he earned a Bachelor's Degree in Science Education in 1988. He did not stop there — he later received a Master's (1994) and a Doctorate in Chemistry (2009), making him one of the few African presidents with a science background.

Page 2: Political Rise – From Teacher to Minister

Magufuli joined politics in 1995, during Tanzania's first multiparty elections. He ran for Member of Parliament in Chato Constituency under the ruling party Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) and won. His energy, discipline, and seriousness quickly impressed President Benjamin Mkapa, who appointed him Deputy Minister of Works.

From then on, Magufuli became known as "The Bulldozer." The nickname came from his way of inspecting projects personally, firing lazy contractors, and making sure roads, bridges, and other projects were completed on time.

He served in different ministries, including:

- Deputy Minister of Works (1995–2000)
- Minister of Works (2000–2005; 2010–2015)
- Minister of Lands and Housing (2006–2008)
- Minister of Livestock and Fisheries (2008–2010)

By 2015, Magufuli was already respected as a tough, no-nonsense leader. When CCM was looking for a presidential candidate, he was chosen as a compromise between powerful party factions. Many people did not expect him to win the nomination, but he did — and soon after, he won the 2015 national election.

Page 3: Presidency – “Hapa Kazi Tu” (Here, Only Work)

On 5th November 2015, John Magufuli was sworn in as the 5th President of Tanzania. His campaign slogan, “Hapa Kazi Tu,” became the spirit of his presidency.

Major Achievements:

- Cutting Costs: Cancelled expensive government ceremonies and redirected money to buy hospital beds, school desks, and medicines.
- Fighting Corruption: Thousands of ghost workers were removed from government payrolls, and many corrupt officials were fired.
- Education: Introduced free secondary education in public schools.
- Health and Infrastructure: Built new hospitals, purchased planes for Air Tanzania, expanded roads, and launched big projects like the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) and Julius Nyerere Hydropower Project.
- Natural Resources: Forced mining companies to renegotiate contracts so that Tanzania would benefit more from its minerals.

Criticism and Challenges:

- Politics: Banned opposition rallies outside election campaigns.
- Media: Journalists and newspapers were restricted.
- COVID-19 Pandemic: He doubted the seriousness of the virus, discouraged vaccines and masks, and encouraged prayer instead.

Page 4: Family, Friends, and International Engagements

Family:

Magufuli was married to Janeth Magufuli, a quiet and respected primary school teacher. They had several children, including Jessica and Joseph. He was a devout Roman Catholic and often prayed publicly.

Friends and Allies:

His closest allies included Samia Suluhu Hassan (Vice President), Kassim Majaliwa (Prime Minister), Paul Makonda (Regional Commissioner), and Philip Mpango (Finance Minister). He valued loyalty and discipline but ruled strictly.

International Meetings and Visits:

Unlike many African leaders, Magufuli did not travel much. He believed foreign trips wasted money. Still, he attended important meetings abroad, including visits to Uganda, Kenya,

Rwanda, Ethiopia (AU summits), and South Africa (SADC summits). Most of the time, he sent his deputies to represent Tanzania.

Page 5: Death and Legacy

On 17th March 2021, Vice President Samia Suluhu Hassan announced that President Magufuli had died of heart complications at age 61. His death shocked the nation. He was buried in Chato, Geita Region, with thousands attending his funeral.

Legacy:

Supporters remember him as “The Bulldozer,” a leader who fought corruption, loved his country, and invested in development. Critics recall him as a leader who restricted freedoms and mishandled COVID-19. Internationally, he is remembered as a leader who focused on Tanzania first, even if it meant ignoring global pressure.

His successor, Samia Suluhu Hassan, became the first female president of Tanzania.

Timeline of Dr. John Pombe Magufuli

- 1959: Born in Chato, Geita Region.
- 1967–1974: Attended Chato Primary School.
- 1975–1977: Studied at Katoke Seminary, Biharamulo.
- 1977–1978: Attended Lake Secondary School, Mwanza.
- 1979–1981: A-levels at Mkwawa Secondary School, Iringa.
- 1982–1983: Taught mathematics and chemistry at Mwadui and Sengerema Secondary Schools.
- 1988: Graduated with B.Sc. in Education from University of Dar es Salaam.
- 1994: Earned Master’s Degree in Chemistry.
- 1995: Elected MP for Chato Constituency (CCM); appointed Deputy Minister of Works.
- 2000–2005: Minister of Works.
- 2006–2008: Minister of Lands and Housing.
- 2008–2010: Minister of Livestock and Fisheries.
- 2010–2015: Minister of Works again.
- 2015: Elected President of Tanzania.
- 2016–2019: Attended regional summits in Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, Ethiopia, and South Africa.
- 2019: Re-elected CCM candidate for 2020 elections.
- 2020: Won a second presidential term.
- 2021 (Mar 17): Died at age 61; buried in Chato, Geita.