

{ feature }

KASAIGI: A MIDWIFE WHOSE HEART BEATS FOR MOTHERS, BABIES

BY HOPE MAFARANGA

Before she leaves her house in Mafubira sub-county, Jinja district to Buwenge Hospital, locally known as Kivejinja, Agnes Kasaigi, kneels to ask God for favour to save mothers in labour and their newborn babies.

What makes her tick

She says she cannot stand seeing a mother in pain. "Helping any mother and getting her baby out of danger gives me satisfaction."

Kasaigi, with two other midwives, attend to 50 women weekly during antenatal and they deliver between 80 and 120 mothers a month, according to the hospital's records. According to World Health Organisation, a midwife should deliver 150 babies a year.

She said about 270 women attend antenatal care, but an average of 120 come back to the facility for delivery.

"We are three midwives who work in shifts. Being the senior one and living near the hospital, I attend to more mothers than my colleagues," she says.

Joan Babirye, one of the mothers whom Kasaigi helped deliver, said she is quick and most mothers prefer her to younger midwives.

"I have delivered my three children with Kasaigi's help. She handled me well and I always refer my friends to her," she said.

KASAIGI'S REWARDS

Kasaigi says the International Midwife Award she won in 2014 encouraged her to work harder.

"I do not know who nominated me and I never knew that people appreciated my work," she says. The other winner came from Bangladesh.

The award, which is sponsored by Save the Children and the International Confederation of Midwives, goes to midwives whose operations result in a decline in newborn and maternal mortality. Kasaigi was credited for working in a rural health facility and dedicating her life to helping mothers. She beat 55 other nominees from 17 countries to win the award. Save the Children also selected her to be a champion to empower new midwives on how to save mothers and give best care to newborn babies. "I am always called upon to be part of the group to look for solutions on how to reduce maternal mortality," she says.

The passion for her profession has also come with numerous awards and trainings according to the Buwenge Hospital medical superintendent, Dr Hamzah Ndifuna.

"The hospital has won many awards because of her skills," Ndifuna says. He adds that Kasaigi is good at detecting complicated cases.

"If she calls, I come prepared to go to the theatre because by the time she does, then the situation is serious," he said.

Challenges

One of the greatest challenges is women delaying to seek medical assistance during delivery and those who do not attend antenatal clinics. Others first go to traditional birth attendants, who complicate the situation further.

She also said lack of the involvement of men in childbirth preparation is a challenge. She explains that women come without kits, while others have sexually transmitted diseases.

"When a woman has STDs, it requires that her partner is also treated. However, when a man does not turn up, it does not help because even if we treat the woman, she will be re-infected," she said.

She urged men to accompany their wives for antenatal so that they get counselling and family planning services as a couple.

She also said the midwives have to fight the misconception the community has about them and instil confidence in mothers that they will receive professional services when they go to



KASAIGI HAS DEDICATED HER LIFE TO SAVING NEWBORN BABIES AND THEIR MOTHERS. SHE ATTENDS TO 120 MOTHERS IN A MONTH. PHOTOS BY HOPE MAFARANGA

deliver their babies at the health facilities.

She said some people have tarnished the image of midwives. "There is a lot of misinformation that we are rude, which is not true.

I always go out with the village health team members to sensitise women and telling them the truth and the benefits of delivering from a health facility by a skilled personnel," Kasaigi says.

The 2014 International Midwife Award winner started her career at Jinja Hospital in 1984, after getting a certificate in midwifery from Jinja School of Nursing and Midwifery.

A few years later, Kasaigi had premature twins and left her job to nurse them. The twins, who are now 23 years old, completed university recently.

Back to the ward

After staying home for 14 years, Kasaigi opted to return to the maternity ward, but failed to get a vacancy at a government hospital.

"While I was at home with

the twins, midwives were called to update their files, but I missed that exercise. So when I was ready to return to work, it was hard to trace my file and I lost out," she said.

She did not give up the search until she eventually got a job at Buwenge, a private hospital in Jinja.

Inspiration

As a young girl, Kasaigi loved to take care of children and her mother, Clementina Waibi, always encouraged her to become a midwife.

Her desire was concretised by one of her neighbours, Sister. Okoth, who was a nurse. "Okoth used to dress smartly and was kind. Her character influenced me and I made up my mind to give midwifery my all," she says.

Trainings

Kasaigi has been trained by organisations such as PACE, Profam, Save the Children, Marie Stoppes and Ministry of Health to attain skills in family planning services, managing

HIV-positive mothers, kangaroo care, post-abortion management and helping babies to breathe.

Training other midwives

Whenever she attends training, Kasaigi offers what she calls continuous medical education to her colleagues.

"I carry material to teach them the skills I have learnt and also train our sweepers on infection control," the mother of four said.

Calls for government help

Kasaigi calls on the Government to recruit more midwives and pay them well so that they can save mothers and their babies. She says a midwife with a certificate earns sh200,000, but they need to be paid sh600,000.

Place of birth

Kasaigi was born in Namisambya village in Kamuli district in 1963 to Albert and Clementina Waibi. She is the fifth of 15 children born by her father's two wives.

{ What others say }



Hajjat Rehil Kirunda, founder of Buwenge Hospital

I have worked with Kasaigi for 13 years. She is the original midwife of our ages. During our time, we used to sit preliminary tests and whoever would fail would not be allowed to practise. We are glad to have her to train our young midwives. Kasaigi is patient with mothers and quickly identifies a delicate case. This has enabled her to save many lives. She also shows love and respect for her role as a midwife.



Doreen Mirembe, midwife

Whenever Kasaigi attends training, I feel I have also attended it because she shares whatever she learns. She has also counselled me on how to handle mothers and now I have a better understanding of the pain they suffer.



Stella Ndabirawo, nurse

The excitement she shows after delivering a mother gives one the impression that she is the one who has given birth.