



## Obstetric Fistula Surgeons in Uganda, the Unsung Heroes

Dr. Emintone Ayella Adong, Senior Consultant Obstetrician and Gynecologist at Gulu Regional Referral Hospital in Northern Uganda, Dr. Emanuel Odar, Consultant Obstetrician and Gynecologist at Arua Regional Referral Hospital in the West Nile region of Uganda, and Dr. Innocent Waromu, a trainee on fistula repair based in Warr Health Centre IV, Zombo district are some of the unsung heroes in the fight against obstetric fistula.

**Zombo district, West Nile, Uganda.** - We met this trio at Warr Health Center IV in Zombo district, West Nile sub-region of Uganda. They were just concluding their lunch break, about to set off for their afternoon fistula repair session. It was the fourth day of the fistula repair camp that would last five days. That Thursday afternoon, they were setting up for their twenty-first and twenty-second fistula repair sessions.

"We have been here at Warr Health Center IV since Monday, we reviewed 35 cases and 28 were listed for repair," said Dr. Odong. "We have repaired 20 women so far, and we hope by close of the camp tomorrow, we shall have repaired all of them."

Dr. Odong explained that obstetric fistula is a hole between the birth canal and bladder or rectum, often caused by prolonged, obstructed labour without access to timely, high-quality medical treatment.

"Fistula takes away the dignity of a woman. For example, when she walks, there is a footmark wherever she passes," said Dr. Odong.

"Some of us have developed a passion to restore this dignity. Unfortunately, the fistula repair surgeons are not many, about 30 are trained but only about half of us are operating. As you can see, we are only two fistula surgeons in the greater North [West Nile and Northern regions of Uganda]," Dr. Odong added.

### **Mobilizing women for fistula repair**

The women who came for the surgical camp were mobilized by the Village Health Teams (VHTs) and they came from Zombo district and beyond.



A nurse at Warr Health Center IV sets up for the obstetric fistula repair. © Prossy Jonker Nakanjako/UNFPA Uganda

On the fistula ward, an aura of hope filled the room, collectively transmitted by the women who had already undergone surgery, and visibly showing on their faces.

Seventeen-year-old Hope\* had gotten her repair a couple of days earlier. She narrated that she got pregnant at age 14, having gotten married a few months earlier. She had dropped out of Primary Three, running away from her father's home because she was mistreated by her stepmother. First, she lived with her Aunt in Masindi district, Eastern Uganda. Still feeling unloved, she decided to get married to her 'sweetheart', who was then 20 years old. Unfortunately, at the time of birth, she could not push the baby. The midwife had to use a vacuum extraction to help her deliver the baby. It was a baby boy, but did not survive. Days later, she realized that she could not control the flow of urine. Her partner abandoned her a few days after she got the problem.

"It haunts me that I got pregnant so early. I used to have painful menses, I was given herbs and instructions not to meet any man," Hope said.

According to UNFPA, young girls are particularly vulnerable because their bodies may not be ready for childbirth. Worldwide, pregnancy and childbirth complications are the leading cause of death among girls between the ages of 15 and 19.

But obstetric fistula does not discriminate by age. Shamim\*, a 30-year-old mother from Zewu Village in Zombo district was another beneficiary of the surgical camp. Shamim narrates that at age 20, she was carrying her first pregnancy. At the time of delivery, they could not afford the transport fare to the health center which was quite a distance from where they lived. So with her partner, they decided to seek the services of a traditional birth attendant. Unfortunately, she got complications during delivery as the baby could not come out.

By the time they took the decision to mobilize a motorcycle to rush her to Hoima Hospital, it was quite late. The Caesarian section could not save her baby because it was too tired, Shamim narrowly survived, but with a fistula. This was Shamim's second repair, to close a minor outlet that would disturb her through the night, as she would wake up wet every morning. Fortunately, her partner is very supportive and they have had three children following the first repair.



UNFPA supported the Ministry of Health in Uganda to develop a National Obstetric Fistula Strategy (2020/21 - 2024/25) as well as with the procurement of obstetric fistula repair kits. © Prossy Jonker Nakanjako/UNFPA Uganda

### **What will it take to eliminate obstetric fistula?**

Obstetric fistula has all but disappeared in developed countries with quality health care systems and skilled professionals who can perform Caesarean sections. Yet, UNFPA statistics show that an estimated 500,000 women and girls in more than 55 countries throughout sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and the Pacific, the Arab States and Latin America and the Caribbean are estimated to be living with fistula, with thousands more occurring every year.

In Uganda, Ministry of Health statistics show that more than 1500 fistula repair surgeries are conducted annually. However, there is a backlog of more than 75,000 women awaiting obstetric repair.

Dr. Mary Otieno, UNFPA Representative in Uganda recommends strengthening the prevention aspect in addition to repair: "Women should have access to quality and timely health care before pregnancy, including family planning, as well as during pregnancy including, all antenatal care visits. Childbirth should be supported by skilled health workers who will ensure a safe births and the well-being of mother and baby. And lastly, ensuring the prevention of teenage pregnancy as bodies of young girls have not matured to go through the trauma of childbirth."

"All these are key components of safe motherhood," Dr. Mary adds.

**Compiled by Prossy Jonker Nakanjako/UNFPA Uganda**



MESSAGE FROM THE UNFPA UGANDA REPRESENTATIVE,  
**DR. MARY OTIENO**

## Working towards ending preventable maternal deaths

In this issue, the spotlight is on maternal health and its impact on the sustainable development agenda.

In Uganda, the number of women dying in childbirth has progressively reduced over the years. According to the 2016 Uganda Health and Demographic Survey, maternal mortality reduced from 418 per 100,000 live births deaths in 2006 to 336/100,000 in 2016. Even then, some 6,000 women and adolescent girls still die every year from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth. For every woman or girl who dies, an estimated 20 or 30 suffer injuries, infections or life-long disabilities including obstetric fistula.

Making motherhood safer is a human rights imperative, and it is at the core of UNFPA's mandate. We work in partnership with the Ministry of Health to strengthen maternal health systems. Our support includes: training health workers in particular midwives who are then recruited to work in hard-to-reach parts of the country. UNFPA also supports the procurement and delivery of contraceptives and other essential medicines to ensure that mothers do not die while



giving birth. This is in addition to supporting the procurement of maternal health equipment, as well as ambulances to strengthen emergency referral services, specifically in districts that host refugees.

We pledge to continue our support towards efforts to prevent and manage obstetric fistula, one of the most debilitating childbirth complications, by training surgeons and equipping fistula repair centres in regional referral hospitals across Uganda.

Our call to policy makers, community leaders and all individuals is to empower women and girls to make affirmative decisions about sex, contraception and motherhood, and to foster societies that recognize the full worth of women and girls. If they do, women and girls will be able to contribute fully to the sustainable development agenda.

We hope that you get inspired reading these stories.

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# 20

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## Act collectively to end the crisis of teenage pregnancy in Uganda

Uganda’s “serious problem” of teenage pregnancy requires collective action to prevent and respond to the crisis – and new reports by UNFPA and the Government of Uganda will be critical for national efforts to reduce unintended pregnancies.

This view was expressed by Prime Minister Robinah Nabbanja at the launch in Kampala on Tuesday April 12, 2022 of UNFPA’s flagship State of World Population report, ***Seeing the Unseen: The case for action in the neglected crisis of unintended pregnancy, and the study on’ and pregnancy, and a study on, The Economic and Social Burden of Teenage Pregnancy in Uganda: the Cost of Inaction.***

“The launch of these reports is timely, as the country and world starts to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and related health and socioeconomic challenges,” the Prime Minister said. “We must work together to support the girls who got pregnant in that period by allowing them to go back to school.”

Uganda has one of the youngest populations in the world, with 75 per cent aged below 30 years, and its young population presents opportunities and challenges. “If the right investments are made to ensure that the young people are healthy, properly educated and appropriately skilled, Uganda stands to benefit from them. If we don’t make the right investment, we stand to lose,” she added.

### **Pregnancy not a choice for half of all women**

The State of World Population 2022 report demonstrates that nearly a quarter of all women are unable to say no to sex or make decisions about their own health care, and almost half of all pregnancies worldwide (121 million) are

unintended each year.

A quarter of women in the region, some 49 million women, and 2 million of them in Uganda, want to stop or delay childbearing but are not using a method of contraception.

In his opening address, Dr. Bannet Ndyabangi, UNFPA Regional Director for East and Southern Africa called on policy makers and community leaders to prioritize urgent action to address unintended and adolescent pregnancy, to ‘see the unseen’.

“Girls who lack choices and opportunities in life, or who have limited or no access to sexual and reproductive health care, are more likely to become pregnant,” he said. “Unintended pregnancies have serious personal repercussions for the women and girls affected, for their health, education and wellbeing.”

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### **Invest in a better future for all**

The increased occurrence of teenage pregnancy during COVID-19 is a reminder of the vulnerabilities and inequalities that women and girls face every day in their safety, health and wellbeing, education and economic security, the Ambassador of the Netherlands in Uganda, Karin Boven, said. Each year, more than UGX 645 billion (\$182 million) will be spent by the government on health care for teen mothers and the education of their children, the Cost of Inaction report states.

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**Dr. Bannet Ndyabangi,**

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Teenage pregnancies decrease household incomes and jeopardize the country's strategy for achieving a demographic dividend, which is built around adolescents and young people being healthy, educated and skilled to contribute to the economy, the Minister of State for Planning, Amos Lugolobi, stated.

“If no action is taken, more girls will get pregnant and die in childbirth. More girls will not complete their education. Government expenditure on health care for teen mothers will more than double. We must step up the challenge of addressing teen pregnancies and preach the gospel of ending child marriage. Convince parents to give girls an equal chance at school and an education,” he urged.

### **Data to ensure no one is left behind**

Data and statistics are vital for evidence-informed policies, plans and budgets, said Dr. Mary Otieno, UNFPA Representative for Uganda, speaking on behalf of UN Resident Coordinator Susan Ngongi Namondo. “Unless we complete the unfinished business of the ICPD (International Conference on Population and Development) Programme of Action and realize the investment case for ensuring sexual and reproductive health and rights for all, and for girls’ and women’s empowerment and gender equality, reaching the ambitious SDGs by 2030 will be difficult, if not impossible.”

On achieving a demographic dividend for Uganda, she advised that keeping girls in school longer and empowering them with the right information to make the right reproductive choices to delay onset of childbearing is a key strategy. “The burden of teen mothers and their children is with us, and we need to act together, be accountable and ensure no one is left behind,” she said.



Dr. Jotham Musinguzi,

Director General, National Population Council

Dr. Jotham Musinguzi, Director-General of Uganda's National Population Council, agreed teenage pregnancy was a barrier to the nation's quest for a demographic dividend. The teen pregnancy rate is high and rising – more than 30,000 teenage girls became pregnant each month in 2021 (over 1,000 daily), including about 250 children under 15 – mostly due to sexual abuse or coercion. Just 5 per cent of teen mothers are employed in professional occupations.

In a panel discussion on the socio-economic burden of teenage pregnancy, the speakers discussed study findings that showed most girls who get pregnant don't get a second chance at education, hence the need for an education re-entry programme.

“As religious leaders, we strongly believe child marriage, which leads to teenage pregnancy, is a human rights violation that robs a girl of her childhood and denies her opportunities to determine her future, and contributes to an intergenerational cycle of poverty,” said Sheikh Muhammad Ali Waiswa, Second Deputy Mufti of Uganda. “In our view, the beginning of a marriage for a child is often the end of an education. Whereas marriage can wait, education never can.”

The close link between teenage pregnancy, gender-based violence, economic vulnerability and gender inequality was highlighted, as well as the significant bottlenecks for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence in accessing justice.

Strategic collaboration between religious institutions and government needs to be strengthened to end teenage pregnancy and child marriage, while young people have a role to play in advancing their peers' ability to exercise agency and access sexual and reproductive health and rights.

“What should be done to promote unintended pregnancies, particularly to fight child marriage and teen pregnancy?” asked Daisy Kandole, a youth advocate for sexual and reproductive health and rights for young people. “Meaningful participation of young people – youth-friendly services and information, being there for young people in our different capacities, and using a multisectoral approach.”

**Compiled by Lindsay Barnes/UNFPA**

# Adjumani District Applauds Support of Denmark Towards Refugee Response Interventions

Local leaders in Adjumani district have applauded development partners and non-governmental organisations operating in the region for the support towards humanitarian response interventions. Peter Data Taban, the Resident District Commissioner (RDC) said that Adjumani district is very unique in that 60 percent of the Population are refugees, mainly from South Sudan.



Danish Minister for Development Cooperation, Flemming Møller Mortensen checks out a bedcover that is made by women at Nyumanzi Women's Safe Space in Nyumanzi refugee ©Prossy Jonker Nakanjako/UNFPA Uganda

**Adjumani District, West Nile, Uganda:** Taban was addressing the Danish Minister for Development Cooperation, Flemming Møller Mortensen, the Ambassador of Denmark to Uganda, Nicolaj Petersen, the UNFPA Uganda Representative, Dr. Mary Otieno, and other development partners who visited Adjumani district recently to interact with beneficiaries of the UNFPA supported programmes that are funded by the Government of Denmark.

He thanked the development partners for the funding that has enabled the district to bridge the gap in service delivery, ensuring that refugees co-exist peacefully with the host communities.

Elaborating on the unique hospitality that the people of Adjumani have extended to refugees, the Adjumani Woman Member of Parliament, Hon. Jesca Ababiku said that it is all possible because of the shared belief in humanity. "Thus we shall ensure that there is value for money for the programmes you support in Adjumani," she told development partners.

Interacting with refugee women at Nyumanzi Women's Safe Space in Nyumanzi refugee settlement, Minister Mortensen commended the local authorities and development partners for ensuring the delivery of high impact interventions.

"You are showing us that this initiative through CARE is changing your lives," said Minister Mortensen after listening to stories of change narrated by the women.

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CARE International Uganda is one of UNFPA's implementing partners of the Women, Adolescents, Youth (WAY) Rights and Empowerment Programme that is funded by the Government of Denmark.

At the Safe Space, refugee women and girls meet, exchange information and experiences, and rebuild social assets and community networks. They access information and referrals to sexual reproductive health services, including family planning, maternal healthcare for pregnant women, prevention and response to gender-based violence, as well as livelihood skills for economic empowerment.

Minister Mortensen commended Uganda for the unique refugee model where refugees are hosted in settlements instead of camps and are able to share services with the host communities, including health, education, among others.





The Adjumani Resident District Commissioner, Peter Data Taban (second right, front row) led the district team that welcomed the Danish Minister for Development Cooperation, Flemming Møller Mortensen (third right, front row), accompanied by the Ambassador of Denmark to Uganda, Nicolaj Petersen (first right, front row), the UNFPA Uganda Representative, Dr. Mary Otieno (third left, front row) and other officials.  
© Prossy Jonker Nakanjako/UNFPA Uganda

The UNFPA Uganda Representative, Dr. Mary Otieno commended the government of Denmark and other development partners, that commit funds to UNFPA to support the implementation of interventions that integrate resilience-building strategies within development programmes, enabling populations to access sexual reproductive health and rights services, even in humanitarian context.

“UNFPA works to deliver a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe, and every young person’s potential is fulfilled, including in the humanitarian context,” Dr. Mary said.

“Thanks to the generous support of development partners like Denmark, UNFPA has been able to address the needs of pregnant women, vulnerable women and girls, and healthcare workers (midwives, doctors, nurses, etc) in the humanitarian and development nexus.”

To date, Uganda is hosting over 1.5 million refugees and asylum seekers, according to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. Adjumani district has a population of 482,814, of which 238,800 are nationals while 244,014 are refugees, mainly from South Sudan.

**Compiled by Prossy Jonker Nakanjako/UNFPA Uganda**

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The Minister of Health, Hon. Dr. Jane Ruth Aceng (center in red) receives keys for the Ambulance for Kamwenge district from the UNFPA Representative Dr. Mary Otieno (left) and the Ambassador of Japan to Uganda, H.E. Ambassador Fukuzawa Hidemoto (second left). Right is the Member of Parliament for Kibale County in Kamwenge district, Hon. Eng. Cuthbert Abigaba Mirembe, and the Director Curative Services at the Ministry of Health, Dr. Charles Olaro (second right).

## UNFPA hands over ambulances and equipment to Ministry of Health to advance access to sexual and reproductive health services

**Kampala, 16 June 2022** –The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), with funding from the Embassy of Japan in Uganda and the Embassy of the Netherlands in Uganda has handed over two ambulances and an assortment of equipment and supplies to the Ministry of Health to support interventions to advance sexual reproductive health and rights.

The two ambulances worth USD 130,000 (UGX 481 million) were procured with funding from the Embassy of Japan in Uganda to support Palabek Kal Health Center III in Lamwo district and Rukunyu Hospital in Kamwenge district. This is in addition to one ambulance that was handed over to the Ministry of Health early this year, with funding from UNFPA core resources to support Lalogi Health Center IV in Omoro district.

The Minister of Health Hon. Dr. Jane Ruth Aceng thanked the Embassy of Japan, the Embassy of Netherlands and UNFPA Uganda for prioritizing maternal health including in humanitarian settings.

“As a mother, but also a minister responsible for the education of children in this country, I feel that this is alarming, it puts our country at risk and therefore, deserves our attention,” the First Lady said.

“The ambulances will be part of the National Ambulance fleet and will be used for Emergency response and referral, with focus on high burden disease conditions like Maternal and Child health conditions, Road traffic Injuries and intra-facility transfer. They will be part of the regionally coordinated ambulance service, and in this case they will be part of Gulu and Fort Portal Regional Referral Hospitals’ fleet. The Districts will however be responsible for ensuring the security of the ambulance, its professional use, and ensuring the safety of equipment therein”, said Dr. Jane Ruth Aceng.

She noted that the day to day operations of the ambulances will be funded through the National Ambulance Service Fund, Results-Based Financing (RBF), Primary Health Care (PHC) funds and locally generated resources.



At the handover ceremony, H.E. Ambassador Fukuzawa Hidemoto said that the support is part of the Government of Japan's response, commitment, and support towards refugees and host communities as well as the COVID-19 response in Uganda.

"The role played by emergency vehicles such as ambulances in quality health service delivery cannot be over-emphasised. The procurement aims at strengthening the emergency obstetric referral system including support to the operations of ambulance services in refugee settlements and host communities in Western and Northern Uganda. I must therefore congratulate Dr. Otieno and her team for observing the project timeline in procuring the ambulances," said H.E. Hidemoto.

Through UNFPA, the Embassy of Netherlands in Uganda invested USD 127,288 (UGX 471 million) to support the procurement of 90 computers, 90 printers, and 90 internet devices to strengthen the electronic Logistics Management Information systems (eLMIS) for Reproductive Health Commodities. The equipment will be distributed to select health facilities in West Nile and Acholi sub-regions to support the online ordering and reporting for Reproductive Health and other commodities.

"Efficient logistic management at lower health facilities, is fundamental for last mile commodity security. With this support, the Netherlands contributes to enabling people to access and utilize sexual and reproductive health services that meet their needs," said Ms. Ruth van Zorge, First Secretary Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights, Netherlands Embassy.

In addition, a total of 2,342 manual vacuum aspiration kits worth USD 120,730 (UGX 446 million) were procured under the UNFPA Supplies Partnership Programme, and will be distributed to Health Centre IIIs and above across the Country with guidance from the Ministry of Health.

According to the UNFPA Representative, Dr. Mary Otieno, the overall support is intended to strengthen emergency referrals, post-abortion care, and electronic logistics management systems for reproductive health commodities.

"I call upon the recipient districts and health facilities to ensure that these ambulances, manual vacuum aspiration kits and the electronic equipment are used for their intended purposes and are well-maintained and hence able to operate for a longer time," said Dr. Otieno.

The UNFPA Representative in Uganda, Dr. Mary Otieno commended the Governments of Japan and the Netherlands for the generous support towards the mandate of UNFPA to deliver a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person's potential is fulfilled, and committed to continue working with the Government of Uganda to ensure that sexual and reproductive health and rights issues remain on the agenda of development partners.

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**"We should have the commitment to do whatever we can within our different areas where we work to ensure that we address the challenges of defilement, child marriages, teenage pregnancies and most importantly promote positive parenting," the Vice President said.**

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**L-R:** First Secretary Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights at the Netherlands Embassy, Ms. Ruth van Zorge, the Ambassador of Japan to Uganda, H.E. Ambassador Fukuzawa Hidemoto, The Minister of Health, Hon. Dr. Jane Ruth Aceng, the UNFPA Representative Dr. Mary Otieno, and the Director Curative Services at the Ministry of Health, Dr. Charles Olaro.



Celebrating 100 Years of Progress: Midwives march through Kabale town, South Western Uganda, in commemoration of the International Day of the Midwife, 5th May. © UNFPA Uganda/Prossy Jonker Nakanjako

## Celebrating 100 Years of Progress: Midwives are Central Figures in the Global Effort to Upholding Rights and Choices, Promoting Health and Protecting Life

**Kabale district, Western Uganda** – At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in Uganda, Midwife Anne Tushemereirwe of Kabale Regional Referral Hospital did everything possible to save a mother and her twins. Unfortunately, the mother had advanced symptoms of COVID-19 worsened by hypertension. The doctors and nurses who did everything possible to save her life lost the battle on 31st January 2022.

At that moment, Sister Anne resolved that she would do everything in her power to save the babies, who were just seven-months (twenty-eight weeks), weighing 1.3kgs and 1.01kgs respectively.

“I worked with the father of the twins, Justus Ssalongo, who was desperate to see his babies live,” said Sister Anne.

Unfortunately, one of the twins did not make it, she died shortly after. But still, this did not dampen the resolve of Sister Anne, she gathered all the support to save the one baby, weighing 1.01kgs at that time.

On 5th May, at the International Day of the Midwives commemorated in Kabale district, Sister Anne had a powerful testimony to tell. The baby, who was named Constance Kyalimpa, had pulled through the danger zone. A few days before the commemoration, baby Constance had been discharged from hospital, weighing 3.5kgs.

“I told her I am just 14-years-old and so young to get married. I didn’t want to get married nor pregnant and risk suffering complications of teenage pregnancies like fistula. Besides, I needed to continue with my education.”

Sharing her testimony with the Chief Guest, the Rt. Hon. Justine Kasule Lumumba, Minister of General Duties at the Office of the Prime Minister, and other guests who attended the commemoration ceremony, under the theme, “100 Years of Progress”, Sister Anne was eager to tell the world that midwives do much more than helping mothers deliver safely. They do everything possible to save the lives of mothers and their babies.

“We had the challenge of feeding the baby because the mother was dead, thanks to “Good Girls,” a non-government organization in Kabale district, they supported us with NAN Formula 1 milk,” said Sister Anne.

“So we embarked on hygiene and keeping the baby warm. We even trained the father on the Kangaroo care,” she added. Kangaroo mother care is a World Health Organization (WHO) recommended method of care for preterm infants that involves infants being carried, usually by the mother, with skin-to-skin contact.

### **Scaling up and strengthening the capacity of midwives**

Speaking at the ceremony, Hon. Dr. Kamara Nicolas Theodeus, the Kabale Municipality Member of Parliament, commended the great work of the midwives, working under difficult conditions to save the lives of mothers and their babies, pledging that the Government of Uganda will invest more to ensure a skilled and well equipped workforce.





Checking on baby Constance – Sister Anne Tushemereirwe, the In-Charge of Neonatal Care at Kabale Referral Hospital supported the baby's father to ensure hygiene, good feeding and warmth. © UNFPA Uganda/Prossy Jonker Nakanjako

"Every midwife should have the skills they need to detect the things that affect the mother," Hon. Kamara said.

The Chief Guest, Rt. Hon. Lumumba said that Uganda is proud to stand with midwives in commemoration of 100 years of progress: "My government is committed to ensuring that the midwives are supported to provide quality midwifery services to all Ugandans by encouraging the enhancement of quality training of midwives, as well as adopting innovative technology."

The State of the World's Midwifery Report 2021 found that investing in universal access to quality midwifery care could save 4.3 million lives annually in the prevention of maternal and neonatal deaths and stillbirths.

In his remarks, Mr. Danel Alemu, the UNFPA Deputy Representative in Uganda noted that midwifery is increasingly recognized and valued as a health-care profession providing services that are core to primary health care.

"Midwives are skilled to provide up to 90% of the sexual and reproductive health care needed, making them the ideal health professionals to support women and families through this continuum of care," Mr. Alemu noted.

Thus, in addition to supporting the Government of Uganda to train over 600 midwives between 2010 and 2020 and equipping 20 Midwifery Training Schools, UNFPA with funding from the Government of Sweden supported midwives to integrate into associations that will help strengthen the midwifery programme as well as improve the overall image of the profession.

In a statement delivered by Sister Sylvia Takali, on behalf of Sister Annet Kanyunyuzi, the President of the National Midwives Association of Uganda, the midwives pledged to raise the banner to even greater heights.

"We have registered achievement in capacity building of midwives towards respectful maternity care, we have initiated innovative and transformational strategies to mitigate hardships encountered towards progress, we have demonstrated integrity and accountability. We are optimistic that even greater accomplishments will come," the statement read.

Celebrating 100 Years of Progress: The Rt. Hon. Justine Kasule Lumumba, Minister of General Duties at the Office of the Prime Minister (4th on front row), UNFPA Deputy Representative, Mr. Daniel Alemu (2nd on back row), and other dignitaries joined midwives across Uganda to commemorate International Day of the Midwife in Kabale district, Western Uganda.



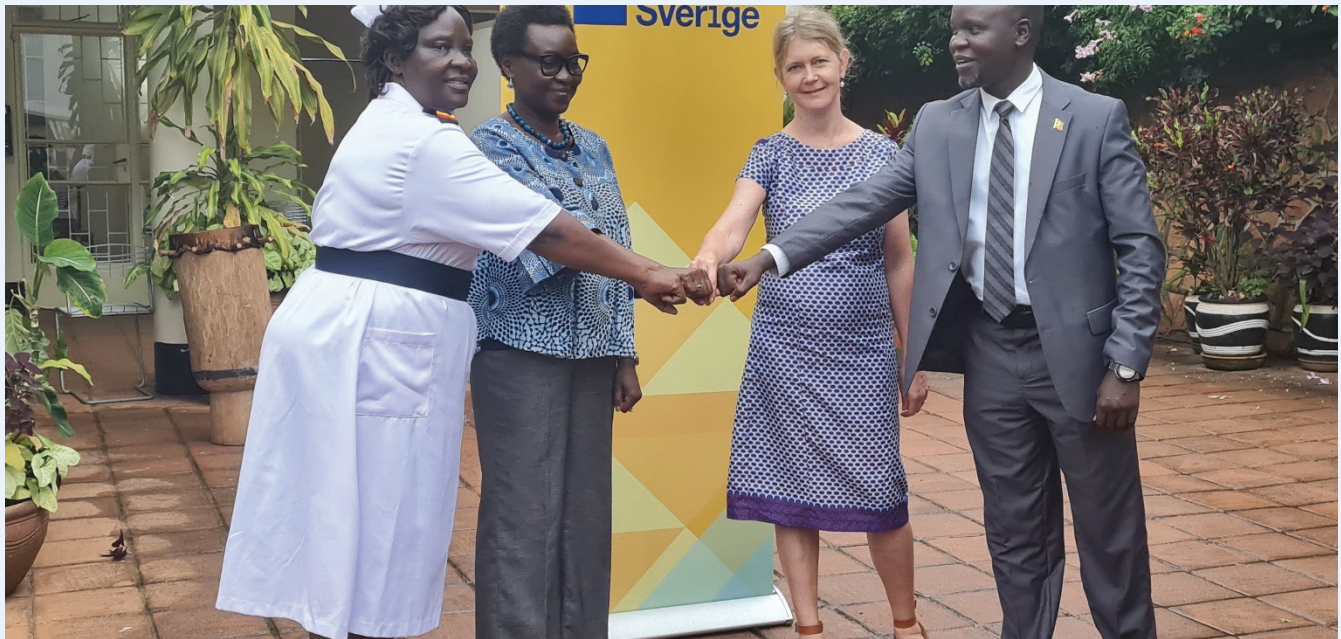
Sister Anne Tushemereirwe received a scholarship from Rt. Hon. Justine Kasule Lumumba to pursue further studies to strengthen her skills. © UNFPA Uganda/Prossy Jonker Nakanjako

In a statement issued by UNFPA to mark the International Day of the Midwife and 100 years of progress for midwives on 5th May, the UNFPA Executive Director noted that: "Not only do their capable hands bring new life into the world, they [midwives] are champions of sexual and reproductive health and rights, providing voluntary contraception and other essential services, while supporting childbearing women emotionally."

On the journey towards the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030, UNFPA is striving to support governments to make midwifery an autonomous, well-respected, fully supported profession that is fully integrated within health systems.

**Compiled by Prossy Jonker Nakanjako/UNFPA Uganda**





**In solidarity with Midwives:** L-R: Commissioner for Health Services (Nursing), Beatrice Amuge, UNFPA Representative Dr. Mary Otieno, the Ambassador of Sweden to Uganda, H.E. Maria Hankansson, and Member of Parliament Hon. Ojara Martin Mapenduzi at the Award ceremony for Midwives that was organised by the Embassy of Sweden in Uganda. © UNFPA Uganda/Prossy Jonker Nakanjako

## Embassy of Sweden in Uganda recognizes outstanding midwives

**Kampala, Uganda** - At a momentous event hosted by Her Excellency Maria Hankansson, the Ambassador of Sweden to Uganda, fifteen midwives from various regions of Uganda were recognized and awarded for excellence in midwifery service.

Representing the Speaker of Parliament, Bardege-Layibi Member of Parliament Hon. Ojara Martin Mapenduzi, the Chairperson of the Uganda Women's Parliamentary Association (UWOPA) Hon. Sarah Opendi, and UNFPA Representative Dr. Mary Otieno, joined Her Excellency Hankansson to hand over the Awards.

Organized as a pre- international day of the midwife event in partnership with UNFPA and the Ministry of Health, the Midwifery Awards highlight the significant role that midwives play in maternal health. The Awards are open to all midwives who are registered and enrolled, and licensed to practice in Uganda by the Uganda Nurses or Midwives Council; and the recipients were selected following a nationwide nomination process at district, regional and national levels.

The international day of midwives is commemorated on May 5. This day is observed to honour midwives' work and promote awareness about their importance in providing crucial care to mothers and their newborns.

Speaking at the event, Dr. Mary Otieno the UNFPA Representative commended the Embassy of Sweden and the Swedish Midwives Association, who since 2015 have been convening such important events to recognize Uganda's midwives for their commitment.

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“With the current pandemic resulting in an increasing number of teenage pregnancies, child marriages, and gender-based violence, it is important, more than ever before, that we all continue and strengthen our collaboration and commitment to address gender-based violence in Uganda.”

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She also commended the Government of Uganda under their leadership of Ministry of Health for the efforts towards improving midwifery services in Uganda, noting that currently seven out of ten mothers in Uganda, are able to deliver with assistance from a skilled birth attendant.

“UNFPA stands in solidarity with midwives in recognition of the life-saving work they do every day, often in difficult conditions. Evidence shows in such circumstances; the midwives are able to provide 87% of the care needed,” she noted.

### **UNFPA's support to Uganda to address the midwifery deficit**

Dr. Otieno said that midwives, when properly trained and supported, offer one of the most cost-effective and culturally-sensitive paths to achieving universal health care.

“With funding from the Embassy of Sweden, a total of over 600 midwives have been trained under a bonding scheme and have been deployed in health facilities across the country to address the midwifery deficit, especially in hard-to-reach areas like the Karamoja region in Northern Uganda,” she added.





Sr. Sarah Adiaka of Nadunget Health Centre III in Moroto district, Karamoja region receives a certificate of recognition from the Ambassador of Sweden to Uganda, H.E. Maria Hankansson and UNFPA Representative, Dr. Mary Otieno. © Prossy Jonker Nakanjako

### **Midwives make a difference between life and death**

H.E. Håkansson, said that the fifteen midwives represent the tremendous efforts made by thousands of midwives every day across the country often under challenging circumstances.

“Midwives play a key role in maternal and newborn health, and their presence often make the difference between life and death for newborn babies and their mothers. For this, they deserve our respect and recognition!” she commented.

“Midwives are also central to women’s empowerment. Midwifery is crucial in ensuring sexual, reproductive, health and rights as well as maternal and new born health care,” said H.E. Håkansson. “Through Sweden’s Feminist Foreign Policy, the Swedish government aims to ensure that women and men have the same power to shape society and their own lives.”

“It is our hope that all awarded midwives will continue to find motivation to carry out the very important work that they do and be role models for other midwives and students in their districts, regions and in Uganda as a whole.”

Prior to the Award ceremony, the best performing midwives held a dialogue with Members of Parliament to share their experiences. Representing all the regions across Uganda, they highlighted critical issues such as inadequate human resources, infrastructure, equipment and supplies among others.

Sr. Anena Ketty from Bugiri Hospital in Eastern Uganda shared her experience, acknowledging that midwives are sometimes overwhelmed by the amount of work they have to do.

“As a District Emergency Coordinator, I execute work beyond my portfolio to ensure that we do not lose any mothers nor babies. Sometimes I support delivery of over 50 babies a month.”

Ninety-one-year-old Aidah Ssemukuti from Kugumikiriza Patience private health clinic in Wakiso district, Central Uganda narrated her inspirational decades of service as a midwife highlighting her sustainable efforts in training and empowering younger midwives to devote their services to saving lives of mothers and babies.

### **Issues of women and the girls top the agenda of Uganda’s Parliament**

Hon. Martin Ojara Mapenduzi representing the Speaker of Parliament said: “since our election to office, we have made it clear that one of the issues that will top our agenda is addressing the matters that affect women and girls. Every day, we are reminded about the realities that face the [health] sector, the statistics that define our maternal mortality ratio, and the challenges that our midwives face in their day-to-day work,” read the statement.

Hon. Mapenduzi highlighted the need to tackle gender inequality and lack of male involvement in maternal health. “We must challenge the traditional gender norms and we must engage men in maternal health by mobilizing fathers, husbands and brothers to support and encourage women to go for antenatal care and give birth in a health facility,” he said.

The chairperson of the Uganda Women’s Parliamentary Association (UWOPA) and Tororo Woman MP, Hon. Sarah Opendi commended the Swedish Embassy for the initiative of recognizing the midwives since 2015.

**Compiled by Josephine Zhane, UNFPA Uganda.**