

A mother singly fends for multiple twins and triplets

BY JOHN MASABA

"my friends are always asking me what they can do to become special like me. They think I am lucky because of my abundant brood of twins. It makes me proud, but in private, I am sad. Why of all people did God choose to give me all these children whom I cannot look after?"

Those were the words of Sylvia Nabirye, who turned up at *New Vision* offices in Kampala, having travelled all the way from Iganga, to share her tale of raising multiple twins.

"I heard that you (*New Vision*) can help highlight my situation so that Good Samaritans can come to my rescue," Nabirye, 29, said, her voice almost drowned out by her hungry crying 11-month-old triplets, who she travelled with for the interview.

Her left arm is steadying up her triplet daughter, Nabirya, while at the same time, the other arm is making sure Marion, her other daughter, is having enough grip of the breast.

Meanwhile, Namukoma, the other daughter, kicks about furiously. She too wants to feed. That has been Nabirye's routine over the last 11 months. Although caring for three seems harder, Nabirya is no stranger to looking after multiple children.

Since becoming a mother with her first children in 2004, she has been having twins. Her triplet daughters — her forth birth in 13 years — increased the number of children to nine. Nabirya, herself a twin, says she wants to stop, but doctors tell her it is impossible.

"After having my triplet daughters, I wanted the doctor to cut my tubes, but she refused. She said I have a lot of eggs on my cervix and stopping

“My brother-in-law used to buy us some food, but that stopped because his wife thought he was trying to win me over to become his second wife

me would be a big mistake that would put my life in danger," she said. As a child, Nabirye, the girl who grew up at Nakalama in Iganga district, says her mother commanded a lot of respect as she was the only one in the village to have the coveted 'Nalongo' title.

"It was respectable, but I felt at the time that I did not want to become one when I grew up," she said.

That wish seemed to have gone her way when, on her first pregnancy, a test indicated she was carrying one child. "I did two scans and all showed I was going to have one child," Nabirye said.

But then something was not adding up. Her belly was bigger and she used to feel strange kicks in the left side of her abdomen and then in her right side almost at the same time after meals.

Nabirye's fears were to be proved true for she went on to give birth to twins, despite the scans indicating she was expecting one child.

That maiden birth seemed to open



Nabirye and her triplets during the interview. She seeks help from Good Samaritans

the flood gates, for she went on to give birth to two more sets of twins, before being blessed with triplets in September last year.

Despite her lack of interest in twins, Nabirye learnt to love them with time because her husband was supportive. "Even when his job as a bodaboda rider did not earn him much, we did not go hungry," she says.

TOUGH JOURNEY

But then one day something strange happened.

"I was making the children a meal when they told me my husband had been rushed to hospital," she remembers, her eyes glistening with

tears. It was later to occur to Nabirye that he had been involved in an accident and had died, crushed by a trailer.

From that day, Nabirye's fortunes were reversed since her husband was the sole breadwinner.

"Sometimes, my children survive on cassava flour porridge. I add a little salt to give it taste since sugar is expensive these days," she said.

"My father used to help, but he is now bedridden after being diagnosed with diabetes. He is half-blind and unable to work," she said.

Asked why she cannot fall back on her other relatives, Nabirye, whose sets of children are aged 13, four, three and 11 months, replied:

"When everybody around you is poor, people get tired of you quickly. My brother-in-law used to buy us some food, but that stopped, because his wife thought he was trying to win me over to become his second wife," she says. With almost all taps blocked, the mother of nine has resorted to doing odd jobs, although she says even opportunities are few to help her raise enough money. As life swings from one difficult patch to another, Nabirye, who barely went beyond P4 because of lack of tuition, hopes fate will be kinder to her.

"My elder sister wants me to get another man to look after me. But which man can accept a woman with all these children?" she says.