cover story by Angela Nampewo

I tried everything for a chil

INFERTILITY. When *Full Woman* ran the story of Dembe FM's Bina Babe and her struggle with childlessness, it drew various reactions, most of them sympathetic. Among the people who responded to the story was Lilliana Namuddu, a marketer who was inspired to tell her own story of searching desperately and endlessly for a child. She spoke to **Angela Nampewo** about the nine-year journey through medical and herbal clinics as well as shrines in order to find maternal joy.

LESSONS

1. Women should seek medical attention before they jump to conclusions on why they are childless
2. Pray and make sure your relationship with God is good.



"I am not officially married but I spent nine years with my partner without conceiving. I was not even using any contraceptives. My partner and I met when I was 23. We stayed together and at first, I did not focus on childbearing. It was not my priority in the first years. After about three or four years, (my man is a Muslim and had a wife already), I noticed the relationship had become serious and I decided to try having a baby.

When I focused on this, I did not get any results. My partner had a child from a previous relationship but his first wife did not have children then. However, in the fourth year of our relationship, I heard that my partner's first wife was pregnant. I began to panic. The birth of her child marked the beginning of my problems. She used to call and insult me, saying I would never give birth. My partner was also excited at the birth of their child. His behaviour towards me changed for the first time in the four years we had been together," narrates Namuddu.

Long search begins

Namuddu confided in a friend who then directed her to an old woman in Kasubi (a suburb of Kampala). She urged me to visit the old woman because, she said, the old woman had helped some women to get babies. I took my partner's car. I did not tell him where I was going. Afterwards, when I told him about the trip to see the old woman, he scolded me for being very impatient and getting desperate," she recalls.

At the old woman's compound, There were other women sitting outside, waiting for their turn. First, the elderly medicine woman commented on her tight jeans, saying that was part of the reason she had not conceived. The old woman pressed her abdomen and massaged her back. In the meantime, the patient surveyed the environment, which led her to question out loud whether the person treating her was an herbalist or a witchdoctor, to which she only received a rebuke. She quickly swallowed her misgivings about the treatment.

"She (the old woman) picked up an oddly-shaped stone and a stick, which she asked me to take home, boil and bathe with the resulting solution, drink some and rub on my stomach. A few things did not add up but I told myself that I needed to keep trying. Worse still, on boiling the items as directed, they produced a very bad odour. When my partner stumbled on part of the mixture in the fridge, he was horrified and wanted to throw everything out but I would not let him. I told him to leave me alone. This had turned into a battle and it was my battle to fight," explains Namuddu.

However, in spite of the old woman's treatment (for which Namuddu paid Shs150, 000), she still got her periods that month and the next. She listened to various radio and TV messages on fertility but she did not discuss her problems with anyone. She prayed and prayed but with no visible results.

She then spoke to a friend who advised her to visit a medical doctor. "I used to have such painful periods that I could not leave home for two days and I often required strong painkillers to manage it," she explains. Another friend directed Namuddu to a herbalist in Namasuba on Entebbe Road.

On the appointed day, I arrived at 6am to see Senga Byewuunyo. I cannot forget her. In fact, I remember all the names of people and places I went in search of a child. In spite of the early hour, I found at least 30 women waiting for treatment. I was heartened to discover that I was not the only one dealing with these difficulties," she

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nd then lost him at birth

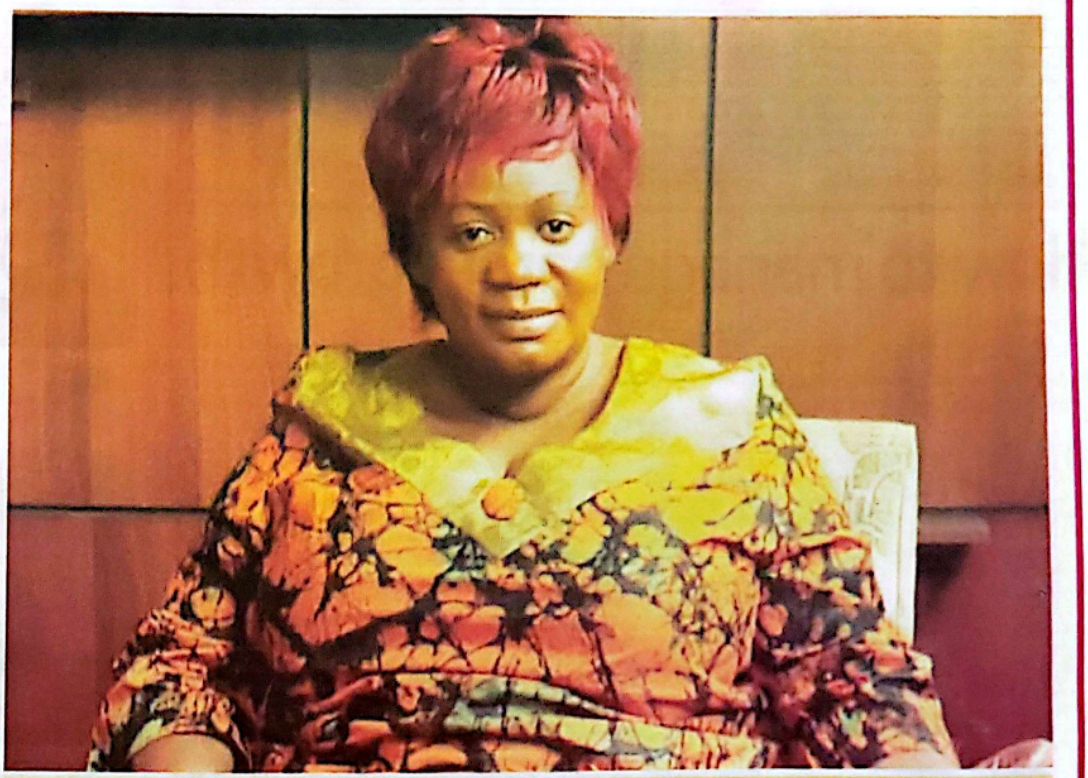
e saw the Senga at about 8am. First, must pay consultation fee before ng the herbalist. She remembers how erbalist did everything; collected own money, made diagnosis and dispensed the drugs. She can afford ugh now at the memory but back she was focused on the business of eiving.

e gave me *emumbwa* (medicinal clay) hat shocked me was the rat's fur n she asked me to enclose and sew, her with a small stone in a piece of torn off my husband's boxers/pants rt. I was to soak this (rat pack) in my water and to soak it in my drinking before having sex," says Namuddu.

rip to the herbalist cost Shs250,000 gave her pause about the extents she repared to go in search of a child. e I questioned my intelligence in for these bogus remedies, another f me insisted I should try everything n case)," she recalls.

uddu took part of the medicine she ven but she drew the line at rat's fur. he refused to drink. One night, she ıp to a greenish discharge. However, d just had her period and initially ought the herbalist's drugs were cleansing her. Months passed and nothing happened. She took a break from it all until she stumbled on a discussion about fertility on television. I enrolled in a fertility programme which required me to do scans before treatment. The scans showed that there was nothing wrong with me, which left me even more confused. The fertility experts then suggested that perhaps it was my husband who had a problem but he already had an older child and my co-wife's newborn baby. I kept seeing the specialists and at every visit, I would spend at least Shs400,000. When this became too costly for me, I abandoned that approach," explains Namuddu.

Two years elapsed and in spite of her efforts, Namuddu was no closer to getting a child.



HAPPINESS SHORT LIVED

At five months pregnant, I suffered high blood pressure. I lost my sight temporarily and my feet were so swollen I could not walk. Three weeks before my due date, I got a running stomach and started throwing up. At 6am, the next morning, I reported to Medic hospital and the doctor decided to carry out an emergency caesarian section to save my life and that of the baby. I had lost amniotic fluid. The operation was long. Fortunately, both the baby and I came out of it but the baby was transferred to the "nursery" (special care unit). After a while, I noticed the baby was swollen. They say he had oedema. An accident while the baby was turning one night caused the feeding cannula to loosen and the vein could not be traced to replace the cannula. A decision was made to transfer the baby to Mulago Hospital.

Unfortunately, the baby did not make it out of Mulago hospital. "When I got the news of my baby's death, I ran up five floors to the 5th Floor of Mulago Hospital. This, in spite of the fact that I had just had a C-section. On arrival, I saw the nurse taking away my dead child. I collapsed to the ground, drained of energy. I could not believe that after all I had been through, I had lost the child. My doctor was very supportive and everybody was sympathetic because they knew what I had been through but I was devastated.



Lilliana Namuddu is a mother one but she spent nine years in a painful, traumatic and fruitless search for a child. PHOTOS BY ABUBAKER LUBOWA

Living dangerously

When one of Namuddu's friends suggested she visit a native doctor, she did not talk to the said friend for days but an encounter with her co-wife changed her mind and she travelled to the shrine in Mubende. The doctor told her that her co-wife was responsible for all her woes.

"In the shrine, there was a deep (grave-like) hole with utensils and banana leaves in which the doctor would undress and bathe his patients. The experience was so traumatic that I told my partner when I got back. He criticised me for going, reasoning that I could have died in such a place. But I wanted to demonstrate to him that I was trying. I had started running out of patience and options," she says.

In a chance meeting with an old friend Namuddu was advised to see a doctor at a hospital in Kawempe, a suburb of Kampala. This was her eighth year of trying. She did not go to the recommended medical facility initially.

Later, on the advice of an acquaintance, she did a scan at the hospital in Kawempe. The scan results showed that Namuddu had multiple fibroids; so many that her stomach had begun to swell as if she was pregnant.

The doctor recommended an operation, explaining that the fibroids were preventing her from conceiving since some of them were at the entrance to the uterus and there were others inside the womb.

Afraid to go for an operation, Namuddu resorted to the advice of friends who told her that there was a woman in Iganga who could get rid of the fibroids for good.

Like many places she had been, the treatment centre in Iganga had a long queue. She was told that every fibroid would be removed at a cost of Shs50, 000 and one needed to carry their scan results. "The woman asks you to lie on polyethene and then inserts her fingers as if to extract the fibroids. I returned at least once to Iganga to remove the remaining fibroids but after five months, there was no change," she remembers.

Good News at last

Out of options, Namuddu returned to the hospital for fertility treatment.

"After about seven months of treatment, I felt a sharp pain in my stomach. I was also urinating frequently and thought I had caught an infection. My partner urged me to go to hospital and get tested before taking any drugs. When I was given my results, I was shocked. When the doctor told me I was pregnant, I first asked him if he was mad. I was overjoyed and hugged him. I was so excited," recalls Namuddu. However, her happiness was not to last. She lost the baby at birth.

As she narrates the ordeal of losing her child, Namuddu breaks down and cries. She recalls how she was taunted mercilessly by the other woman. She stopped eating and even attempted suicide. Her only consolation is that she conceived after one year and had another child, now aged three years and 10 months.

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