

# CONNECT

has travelled in 50 countries with five albums on the market.

**2** If you were an animal, what would you be?  
I would be a lion. It is a determined animal.

**4** What do you think about when you are alone?  
My daughters given the fact they are



**6** What is your favourite dish?  
Yes, I'm a great cook and my favourite dish is beef stew, fish stew and vegetable rice.

**7** What dish would you die for?  
Sushi. It is

It is quick and my busy saves time.

**10** Your advice to young people? Think like there is no box. Grab any opportunity that comes by. It will help to change your life.

## Muhindo's eyes on battling stigma

**DETERMINED.** While looking for materials to make a broom, Nuria Muhindo fell off a palm tree. On moving to her aunt's home she was raped and impregnated. With the help of good samaritans, she is focused on a brighter future, writes **EPHRAIM KASOZI**.

**A**t 17, any child would be in A-Level by Ugandan education standards. However, it is not the case with one of the Primary Six pupils at Kinyamaseke Primary School, Mukunyu Sub County in Kasese District. Nuria Muhindo says she spent six years battling a double tragedy of injuries that she sustained from an accident and a pregnancy that resulted from rape.

Muhindo recalls how her life changed in 2010. "I was born normal until Primary Three at Mudongo Primary School. Teachers used to send us to collect materials for handicrafts. In the process of gathering materials to make a broom, I climbed a palm tree to pick the materials. I slipped and fell on my spine which got broken," says Muhindo who uses crutches to walk.

The injury she sustained resulted in paralysis of her legs. "I could neither sit nor do anything by myself because of the disability. My parents took me to different hospitals for treatment to no recovery. I could only crawl and I stayed home for a long time," she recalls.

### Leaving home

Muhindo says her father accused her mother of witchcraft. "My family and peers abandoned me because of my disability. I cried day and night because I felt mistreated. This compelled me to ask my parents to take me to my aunt and they obliged," she narrates.

One hot afternoon in her aunt's house, a boy from the neighbourhood came by and raped her. After medical tests, they discovered that she was pregnant.

"Locals mocked me. The boy escaped from his home. My aunt kept me and I gave birth by Caesarean section because my body was weak," says a tearful Muhindo, adding that her child, now two and half years old lives with her mother.

### Going back to school

She recalls the numerous visits by pupils who used to come and encourage her to join them at school Kinyamaseke

Primary School. The pupils were under the child rights club, a platform initiated by a local organisation, Karambi Action for Life Improvement (KALI) in partnership with the school.

"Some children would not sit with me because they feared the responsibility of helping me out when I needed to stand up or walk home. I felt isolated," she narrates.

### Gaining ground

The pupils introduced Muhindo to the special needs section and sought her parents' permission to allow her join her peers at the school.

"Finally, I found a loving family headed by our head teacher who introduced me to the Muslim community and explained my problem. They bought me crutches to ease my movements and I have continued to get a lot of support," she says. The school has 192 children with disabilities.

"I have actively participated in school activities organised by KALI together with the school child rights club such as

### HOW SHE BECAME DISABLED

Nuria Muhindo became disabled in 2010.

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debate, music and drama, and outreaches to seek out other children in the same state. This has given me a sense of responsibility," she says. She is aspiring to become a medical worker to help many girls suffering in her area.

### Headteacher quips

Anna Nyanjura Bwambale, the head teacher, explains that the school supports Muhindo under the government policy of go back to school.

"She is doing well but regrets that her child does not have support. The father of the child disappeared and given what she went through, we are encouraged to do a lot of counselling," she says.

Bwambale says as a result of counselling, Muhindo freely speaks about her situation to change other children's attitude towards education especially for the girl child.

### OTHERS SAY

"I was abandoned by my parents in Mukunyu Trading Centre and Police picked me up and linked me to well-wishers who brought me to school. I have no home that is why I stay at the disabled centre."  
SAID KYAMBADDE, 13, PRIMARY FOUR.

"I was part of the team that visited Muhindo at her home and advised her to come back to school. I'm happy that now we are in school together."  
JOSEPH MUHINDO, P7A, MEMBER OF CHILD RIGHTS CLUB.

"Special needs children are neglected because they are considered as curses. Some parents abandon their children at school and change contacts but they forget that it psychologically tortures the children and worsens their condition."  
JOHN KULA MUKONZO, HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST

"The community has poor attitude towards children with disabilities. As a result we have cases where parents send their children and return to pick them up at the end of term without talking to their teachers," says Bwambale. Others do not provide for their children which has forced many to drop out of school.

According to Bwambale, failure of the parents to provide basic necessities of life has led to increased cases of rape and defilement in their area which sometimes culminates in forced marriages.

Joviah Kabughu, a human rights activist attached to KALI, attributes the violations against the girl child to myths and cultural practices coupled

with domestic violence.

"We have followed up cases including Muhindo's but most of the violations are a result of drug abuse and poverty," says Kabughu. Rights clubs in schools are meant to help children and their parents respect each others' rights.

"In this project, we are targeting five sub counties in Kasese District where defilement cases are rampant. These result from absenteeism during market days, also, most girls are made to stay home to take care of the household," she explains. Although Muhindo did not get justice, we intervened to help her go back to school. She is an encouragement in the community.



Raped and impregnated, Muhindo has made it back to school and is exemplary. PHOTO BY EPHRAIM KASOZI.