



**Inspired.** The 42-year-old primary school teacher says she developed a passion for helping the children when she was living in an orphanage.

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**KAMULI.** Although teachers complain of a meagre pay that hardly meets their needs, 42-year-old Elizabeth Babirye is using the same salary to change lives of 30 children with hearing impairment in Kamuli District.

Ms Babirye, a mother of two, says growing up in an orphanage for the deaf after the death of her father when she was 14 years, increased her passion for children with disabilities, especially those with hearing impairment.

"When an idea of starting up a school and an orphanage for deaf children came into my mind, I traversed Kamuli looking for children who are deaf and registered 165 children," she says.

#### Struggles

"But I was unable to take care of all of them because I am financially incapacitated. Thirty children are in my care but the remaining 135 are not in school because their parents neglected them," she adds.

Ms Babirye, who has a certificate in sign language, said she was allowed to build a small temporary structure at Kamuli Baptist Church where she has been conducting lessons for the children since 2016.

"I started a primary school for the deaf dubbed Kamuli Christian Centre for the deaf [KCC] which currently stops at Primary Four. One class that can accommodate 30 normal children is being shared by three classes because the rooms are not enough for every class to have its own classroom. Luckily, since it is a sign language class, pupils are not interrupted as much as the case with normal classes," she says.

Ms Babirye uses her Shs470,000 monthly salary as a teacher at Bulugo Primary School in Kamuli to pay salaries of some of her workers, buy food and other basic needs for the children.

"I get Shs530,000 every month but my net pay is Shs470,000 which I use to pay for the matron, warden,

# Teacher spends own salary on deaf pupils



**Compassion.** Ms Elizabeth Babirye (wearing red dress) with some of the deaf children at her school in Kamuli District.

PHOTO BY TAUSI NAKATO

gatekeeper and cook. I use the balance for children's basic needs like food and my personal needs. Pastor Herbert Kabululuku of Kamuli Baptist Church volunteers to pay for me Shs100,000 for each eight teaching staff, including the head teacher," she adds.

**"All the children feel okay when they are at school because teachers and their colleagues can easily communicate to them using sign language unlike at home; so I end up staying with most of them even during holiday. Other parents do not bother visiting them while others have abandoned them,"** ELIZABETH BABIRYE, DIRECTOR OF KAMULI CHRISTIAN CENTRE FOR THE DEAF

Ms Babirye says some parents are impoverished and can only support the school by providing firewood.

Ms Babirye, who graduated with a Diploma in Education from Uganda

Christian University, says before she started the school, she realised that the children had no one to interpret for them while at church and home; so, she decided to come in to change their lives.

Out of the 30 pupils, Ms Babirye says eight cannot trace their families while some that have refused to return home during holidays say they feel isolated and lack sign language interpreters.

A visit to the dormitories reveals that most of the children are from very poor families who cannot afford mattresses and blankets and sleep on mats.

Only five pupils have mattresses which they spread out on the floor and share with some colleagues.

The school has two dormitories which she rents from the neighbourhood to accommodate the 30 children.

Ms Babirye also says police have started giving her children with hearing impairment.

Some of the challenges she faces in raising the children is when they

#### NGO APPEALS

**Ms Katia Akarire Mugenzi, the executive director of Taasa Foundation Uganda, an organisation that fights for the rights of the deaf, urges government to establish schools for children with disabilities so that teachers can take on sign language courses well assured of jobs. Ms Mugenzi says the deaf community finds it difficult to access social services in places such as hospitals and government offices because of the absence of sign language teachers. Ms Mugenzi says since schools for people with disabilities are very few, parents are forced to take their children in an all-inclusive setting where they study with others.**

reach their menstruation periods and chose to remain quiet.

Ms Babirye said she is partnering with Trail Blazers Mentoring Foundation, a Busoga-based NGO that trains girls to make reusable pads, to teach these children how to make pads.

She adds that her main aim is to see the children attain education like any other child so that they can be independent in future.

"I want them to join secondary or vocational schools so that they can earn a living. We are currently equipping them with skills of making baskets, ropes, and bags," Ms Babirye adds.

Ms Ruth Babirye, a sign language teacher at the school, says teaching has given her experience because she is pursuing a sign language course at Bishops Willis Primary Teachers' College.