

Business of Babies

COST **Shs30m** Total expenditure. The amount that the couple would part with by the time the surrogate would give birth to their baby.

From normal birth to IVF and surrogate to make a family

Series. More than 30 years after the birth of their first child, Florence Nakintu and her husband relentlessly searched for more children. In her 50s, Florence was blessed with fraternal twins after numerous hospital visits. There was a lot of family pressure on her husband to find another woman but he stood by her. In our third installment of the series Business of Babies, Nakintu narrates her experience to **Henry Lubega**

I first had a normal birth in 1983 and I breastfed for three years. I got concerned when my child turned six years. That's when I thought something might be wrong. I went to Nambya Hospital for a checkup and after investigation they found I had fibroids. In 1992, I underwent an operation to remove them.

With the fibroids removed I was assured of conceiving again. I religiously waited for that day in vain. The wait was so long and tormenting that at some point I sought prayers.

During the process I got my first grandchild

and I thought that would fill the void and the yearning for a baby. But when I got the second grandchild I felt I needed my own baby, the biological clock was ticking and I needed to do

1983

Delivery. The year in which Florence and her husband had their first child although it would take them more than 30 years to have more children

something pretty quick. Much as my son had got his own children, he was still lonely. He called his first child his daughter and sister, which showed he was lonely.

The waiting went on for some years but then I got inspired by my lecturer who conceived at 57 and gave birth when she was 58 years. She gave me hope, and when I asked her how it happened she told me she had been helped by doctors from the International Women's Hospital and Fertility Centre. I had once visited the hospital and made inquiries. I was discouraged by the charges. However, with the assurance from my lecturer, I decided to give it another try.

As I planned to go back to the women's hospital, I was lucky to have accessed my NSSF savings. It was substantial and we had to top it up with my husband. I started the process with a group of six other women; we were seven in total in our cycle (group). The other six women were much younger than me.

After the transplant we were given a date to return for tests. I was delayed and got to the hospital in the afternoon for the tests. I found the six women in tears; their results had turned out negative. They told me to go and receive my

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Handling the crisis. "The waiting went on for some years but then I got inspired by my lecturer who conceived at 57 and gave birth when she was 58 years. She gave me hope, and when I asked her how it happened she told me she had been helped by doctors from the International Women's Hospital and Fertility Centre. **FLORENCE NAKINTU**

bad news. In the test room the nurse didn't tell me the results but whisked me away to the theater where I was told that I was pregnant. I was so excited I hugged everybody almost throwing a nurse down out of excitement.

When I called my husband and told him the news he just said "mumuna kanzu" (the news let me come). When he reached the hospital we were so excited and went in to the compound and started dancing. It was a scene to behold, but at the same time I was sorry for the other young girls; some I had tried more than thrice and failed yet it was my first trial and it was a success.

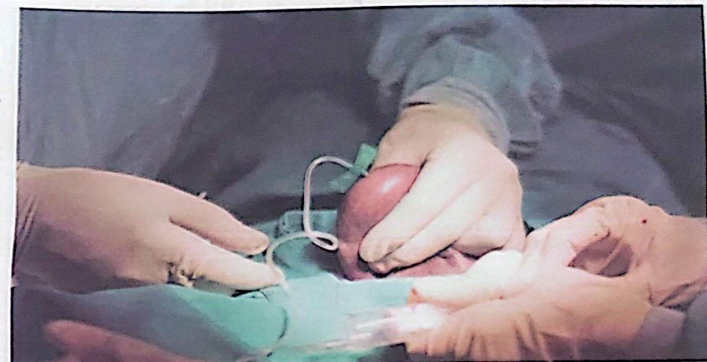
It was a complicated pregnancy that kept me in and out of the hospital. Besides my husband, the rest of the family didn't know I was pregnant. I decided to keep it away from them, telling them it's diabetes that is keeping me going to the hospital, though I was keeping it to myself.

I gave birth through a caesarian operation. It was a complicated operation and I got PPH but the doctors did their best. In the process they had to remove my uterus to save my life as I was bleeding too much.

Change There are no words to describe the feeling when I got my babies. It was not only the feeling but there was unexplainable change in our lives. My husband and I became younger, our lives drastically changed for the better. It was not just the excitement of having a baby; I got the title of a *Nalongo*. In Buganda the title of being a *Nalongo* elevated my status not only in my family but also at the place of work.

Getting a surrogate During the IVF process all the eggs removed were not put back as developed embryos to implant. I don't recall how many eggs had been removed but I know some were kept in case the first trial failed. A year after delivering the doctors contacted me about the embryos and I contacted my husband that those are already formed children and we decided to get a surrogate mother to have more babies.

The first surrogate was not a success; fortunately all the eight embryos that had been left during the IVF had not been used - the first surrogate. With the reminder



Procedure. A doctor draws sperm from a male specimen. COURTESY PHOTO

we gave it another trial which was a success and got another pair of twins.

I left the selection of a surrogate carrier to the doctors considering that they know better having taken me through the IVF. I'm not interested in knowing who the surrogate is because I will feel sorry for her knowing what I went through with the twins.

[Surrogacy is also costly]; by the time the babies are born it will have cost me slightly more than Shs30 million.

This covers maintenance of the surrogate mother, medical bills plus a total of about \$2,000 or its equivalent is paid to the surrogate after delivery. But this final payment is determined by the number of kids she is carrying.

Also, there are other fees paid by the biological mother initially to prepare the surrogate before the implantation is done. The good thing with the women's hospital is that we are allowed to visit in

installments. That way you don't feel the financial [strain] compared to paying everything at once.

Advice Young mothers to be who are having problems conceiving should not waste time and money touring hospitals, visiting so many gynecologists. The gynecologists may be good but they are not infertility specialists. My advice to such women is to visit a doctor who specialises in handling infertility cases. The money spent consulting the different gynecologists will be enough to pay for one fertility specialist.

Women should also let their husbands know that they could be the cause of the couple failing to have babies. The common African belief that a man is never infertile is misleading and leaving women to bear the burden alone. Women should encourage their husbands to do checkup

if they are failing to have children.



CAUSE FOR ALARM

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