

## NATURE WALK

### Leaders promote tourism

Bunyaruguru County MP John Twesigye Ntamuhira (centre with a hat) and other officials jubilate after reaching the top of a hill Kicwamba Sub-county, Rubirizi District during the Pearl of Africa awareness walk recently.

PHOTO BY FELIX AMEDYODNA



# More than 200 Kibaale residents battling elephantiasis disease

**Issue.** Patients say their medication is very expensive as they have to part with Shs5,000 daily to buy ointment.

BY ALEX TUMUHIMBISE  
editorial@ug.nationmedia.com

**KIBAALÉ.** More than 200 people in Kibaale District are struggling with podoconiosis also known as nonfilarial elephantiasis which has left them in abject poverty and misery as they are stigmatised.

Podoconiosis is a disease of the lymph vessels of the lower extremities that is caused by chronic exposure to irritant red clay soils of volcanic origin. The disease causes blockage of lymph vessels triggering swelling of the limbs and other parts of the body.

Ms Njerica Mukazaana, 70, a resident of Kiyanja village in Kyebando Sub-county, Kibaale District has been struggling with this infection for the last 15 years.

Ms Mukazaana says while growing up in her home district of Kibale, all her legs were in good health condition. However, she migrated to Kibaale District in 2002 with her family in search of bigger land for cultivation.

In 2005, Ms Mukazaana says, one of her legs developed a strange small swelling. "I just saw a small swelling on my leg and I thought an insect had bitten me while in the garden. I took it lightly because it was not so painful," Ms Mukazaana narrates.

What started as a small swelling on her body, Ms Mukazaana says, escalated to the extent of affecting the second leg propelling her to get medication.

The 70-year-old got incapacitated because of the condition, she stopped engaging in productive activities.

"I had so much pain and the medicines could not work. I started staying home because my condition could not allow me to work. Some people started telling me that I had

been bewitched," Ms Mukazaana narrates.

She now depends on handouts from well-wishers and neighbours to buy some of the medicines and soap to apply on her legs as well as feed her family. "I am only waiting for death because there is no medicine which can restore my legs to normal shape," she says.

Ms Mukazaana's story of misery is equally being faced by dozens of podoconiosis patients who are left to rot away in the villages as government continues to pay less attention.

Mr Joseph Luboyera, a resident of Mituju in Nyamarwa Sub-county, who is also battling the same disease calls it a curse from God.

"I have been suffering with this infection for 10 years with no help. I only wake up every day to soak the legs in salted water to relieve myself of the pain," Mr Luboyera narrates.

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## ILLNESS



**Signs.** Podoconiosis is characterised by prominent swelling of the lower extremities, which leads to disfigurement and disability.

## briefly

### Govt to control flooding

**KASESE.** The Minister of Water and Environment, Mr Sam Cheptoris, has said the government plans to build a perimeter wall at River Nyamwamba to control flooding. Mr Cheptoris, who visited Kasese Municipality recently, said a power dam will be constructed to reduce on the speed of running water, adding that there is a need to establish an irrigation scheme near River Nyamwamba to boost agriculture. The Kasese Town Mayor, Mr Godfrey Kabbyanga, asked government to construct more health units in the area. [Moris Mumbere]

### Woman held over murder

**KAKUMIRO.** Police in Kakumiro District are holding a woman for allegedly stabbing her pregnant co-wife to death using a knife on Tuesday. Kakumiro District police commander Hassan Mugerwa Katumba said the suspect was arrested for allegedly killing Prudence Kemigisha, a resident of Gumisiriza village in Kakindo Sub-county, Kakumiro District. It is said the deceased had gone to check on her husband who had slept at the home of the suspect. [Alex Tumuhimbise]

## More than 200 battling elephantiasis disease

### Voices

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RESIDENT KIBAALLE  
DISTRICT

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JOSEPH LUBOYERA,  
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MICHAEL KIZITO,  
OFFICER IN CHARGE OF  
NEGLECTED TROPICAL  
DISEASES

The Kibaale District officer in charge of the neglected tropical diseases and vector control, Mr Michael Kizito, says the disease affects both male and females mostly of ages of 10 and above.

He says subsistence peasants, brick makers, herdsmen and school going children without shoes who make constant contact with irritant red clay soil are at risk of acquiring podoconiosis.

The disease according to Mr Kizito, is contributing to morbidity, disability, loss of productivity and poverty in the district. "Children are dropping out school, families have broken up and people are dying of poverty because of this disease," Mr Kizito reveals.

He says that about 187 podoconiosis cases were registered in the five sub-counties of Kyebando, Bwamiramira, Nyamarwa, Mugara and Mataale between September 2016 and March 2017. Out of which only 125 of the registered patients have been able to access basic medical care in health facilities.

### Treatment and prevention

According to medical workers, Podoconiosis can be prevented by avoiding any exposure to irritant soils and wearing shoes.

Infected people can treat themselves by ensuring rigorous foot hygiene that includes daily washing of feet with soap and water, application of an emollient.

Patients who interacted with this newspaper said the drugs are very expensive.

*Daily Monitor* established that a single white fluid tube which is supposed to be applied by smearing on the infected parts and only last a day costs Shs5,000.

This implies that a patient has to dig deeper into their pockets for Shs150,000 per month and Shs1.8m per year.

In October 2015, the Ministry of Health in partnership with an Ethiopian non-governmental organisation and several organisations launched an experience sharing advocacy and awareness campaign for treatment, prevention and control of Podoconiosis in Uganda but little has been done to handle the disease in Kibaale.