

feature

BY

My desperate struggle to get a baby

DESPERATE LONGING: It is widely expected in Ugandan society that every adult woman will fulfill their God-given role to bear children. However, while some women long to become mothers to fulfill a personal desire or consummate a marriage, conceiving does not come easy. **Lydia Ainomugisha** spoke to two women who have spent a lot of money, lost peace of mind and relationships in the struggle to have a child.

When Catherine Ageno got married to her childhood sweetheart in 2002 in a traditional wedding, she envisaged paradise. It was all bliss until a year elapsed without her conceiving. "My husband became cold and cruel. We hardly spoke. At one time, we spent six months without talking to each other," she narrates.

The couple that lived with a relative used to go through the relative or write a note to communicate to one another.

The pressure from her in-laws was also intense. Her in-laws alleged that she was just a professional educated woman who did not want to ruin her career and figure with childbearing.

The pressure from relatives made

her husband's character worse. At one time, she returned from work at 10pm and found she had been locked out. "My sister in-law had visited and I suspect she had convinced him I was worthless. I knocked and nobody opened for me till 5am," she painfully recounts.

Since she suffers from sinusitis, the cold night on the verandah affected her and yet she had to go to work the following day.

Going for medical check-ups

Having waited for nature to take its course to no avail, the couple embarked on medical consultations. Medical tests revealed that they were both fine and indeed Ageno soon conceived her first baby but alas! She lost it towards the end

of the first trimester.

Unfortunately, her husband had sired a child from a previous relationship so it felt obvious that it was her problem that she was not having a baby.

Whereas the husband accompanied her to the initial medical visits, he soon got tired. "He went from accompanying me irregularly to staying outside the doctor's room and finally not accompanying me at all," she narrates.

This left Ageno footing the medical bills on her own. Her mid-level journalist's salary was never enough which left her broke most of the time yet it still did not cover the medical bills.

At one point, she recalls depositing all her salary with the doctor and promising to pay the balance at the end of the following month.

Confiding in her mother

When she could not take the frustration anymore, she confided in her mum. "I had lost so much weight that my mum suspected I was living positively (with HIV) and often begged me to open up," she narrates.

On why she did not confide in her mother or any other trusted friend or relative, she said she had been told that a woman is supposed to be strong and she presumed that perhaps this was her first test of the strength of a married woman.

The last stroke

As agreed, the next time she conceived, she told her mum and together they devised means to ensure the baby lives but she also lost it.

"The doctor who suspected that the cervix was weak had stitched it and indeed the baby stayed inside but for only four months," she recalls.

The miscarriage happened at work hence many of her workmates noticed. This was her fourth miscarriage and she could not take it anymore as she had tried everything possible.

Unlike the first three pregnancies where people hardly noticed, many had seen this and afterwards often asked after the baby. This reminder of her ordeal was painful to say the least.

The other sad part is that her

husband and some of the in-laws accused her of intentionally aborting the babies. "Even if we had not been talking, my husband told me that he thought I aborted it this time and I just did not want to give him a baby," she says.

Twice, she contemplated suicide because she felt worthless and her husband had made her believe that she was nothing without him.

After the fourth attempt, she lost hope and gave up trying. This was two years into marriage and the pressure to have a child had robbed her of her joy and money.

Meanwhile, the cold war between her and her husband continued. One day, he travelled for two days and on return asked her why she was still in his house as if she did not realise he could not stand her. She promised that when she deemed it right, she would leave and for good.

"Sometimes we force ourselves in places we do not belong and God disagrees but we insist," she states.

Separation

Indeed, one day, she packed and