



# Giving birth made easier for Bukedea

By Daniel Edyequ

She sat quietly on a leather mattress atop a metallic bed. To her left, a loose ball of fairly clean sheets.

The ball suddenly makes feeble movements. Then a characteristic shrill cry. The mother, Mary Naisiga, 23, scoops the ball, paves the sheets a little to reveal a pale newborn baby.

"He is a baby boy. My second born. He has not been named yet. We will decide the name with my husband at an appropriate time. He is barely five hours old. I was the first mother to deliver in the new maternity ward," Naisiga says.

Naisiga, who hails from Ongonga village, Kachumbala sub-county, also delivered her first born at Kachumbala Health Centre III in Bukedea district.

There is a lot peculiar about this particular delivery. First, it was in a new £110,000 (about sh528m) state-of-the-art maternity unit.

Besides, she was the pioneer mother to 'taste' the fresh ambience of the new facility.

"The old maternity is congested. There are only three beds for the mothers and one delivery bed. The new ward, where I delivered from today, is spacious. The beds and the general facility are clean. The air is fresh," Naisiga stresses.

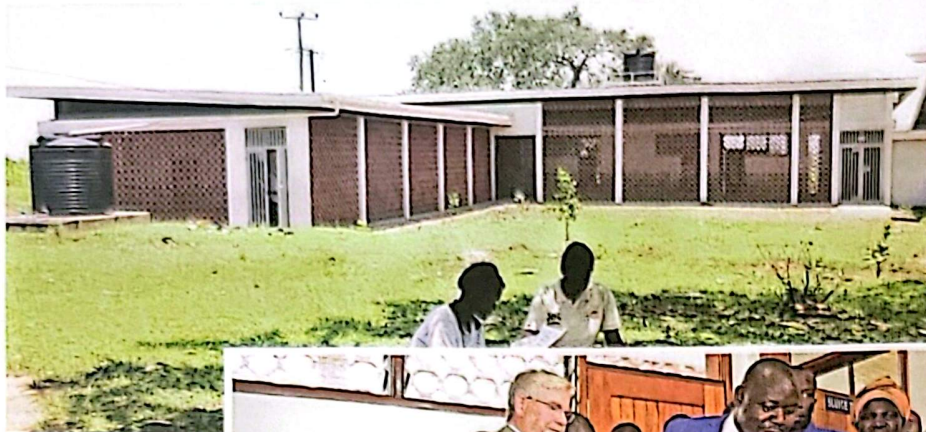
Florence Akurut, a midwife at the health unit, explains that the new maternity ward will ease the delivery of mothers.

With a single delivery bed and three resting beds at the old unit, Akurut says they had many constraints both in delivering babies and providing sufficient post-natal care to mothers.

Post-natal care involves providing both mother and child with relevant medical attention after childbirth. Akurut says due to inadequate space in the old unit, they were discharging mothers who have delivered before the appropriate time.

"On a single day, we receive about eight mothers. For better post-natal care, we are used to observe a mother who has delivered for a day or two. This is supposed to aid us to identify and provide immediate redress to any complications that may arise after child delivery."

"However, at times the situation is overwhelming. You can get, for instance,



The new ward at Kachumbala Health Centre III. Photos by Daniel Edyequ

## FUNDING THE WARD

The new maternity unit is the fruit of concerted effort by the Engineers

for Overseas Development (EFOD), HKS Architects, the government of Wales in the UK, Cyfle Building Skills and the local community in Bukedea.

Ian Flower, the managing director EFOD, a charity in Wales, says the project required a blend of tact and perseverance.

But the visit of Carwyn Jones, the First Minister of Wales to the health unit in January 2014, struck a new cord in the plan of things.

"We had already consulted with the communities and they told us they needed a maternity ward. Our first projected cost for the facility was £100,000 (about sh480m). The question was where to get the initial funds. After the return of Carwyn, the minister, through the Welsh government provided us with £20,000 (sh96m). It seemed little money, but was enough to set us on track," Flower

explains.

HKS Architects, a company where Flower's son, Dan Flowers works, designed the new block complete with two delivery suites and a ward that accommodates 10 beds. "Construction of the new facility started in January 2015. The Unit was built by local workers, supervised by apprentices from the Cyfle Shared Apprenticeship Scheme in South West Wales in the UK. A total of 22 engineers and construction worker volunteers made 32 trips in pairs, each lasting two weeks, to work alongside local workers and pass on the skills they have learned on their apprenticeship courses," Flower explains.

The new facility has 10 beds plus two delivery beds, a pharmacy and the sluice room.

"This is a first-world maternity ward with almost every required component. After delivery, the mothers can access the prescribed medicines from the pharmacy. The sluice room is where all the dirty laundry is supposed to be collected and cleaned," Flower explains.



Flower (left) showing Moses Olemukan, the Bukedea district LC 5 chairperson how a delivery beds operates



A mother breastfeeding at the old maternity ward in Kachumbala Health Centre III

Akurut adds.

Akurut says the peak season for delivery of mothers at the health unit stretches from June to December.

To determine whether a mother delivers from the health unit or gets a referral elsewhere is dependent on the ascertained level of risk a mother is exposed to during the post-natal period.

High-risk mothers, Akurut explains, are those who are

at a higher risk of suffering from complications after child delivery.

"A mother who has had five children and above is a classic example of a high-risk mother. This is because their uterus has developed scars after repeated child delivery. The uterus relaxes during pregnancy and contracts after childbirth. For a mother who has had many children, the uterus cannot easily contract

## The Population

According to the 2014 census report, Bukedea district has a total population of 203,600 people. Out of these, Kachumbala, with a population of 55,422 people, is the most populated sub-county in the district.

Michael Okwi, the district secretary for health, explains that whereas each sub-county is supposed to have a health centre III, only four out of six old sub-counties have such facilities.

With the creation of 10 new sub-counties, Okwi observes that Kachumbala Health Centre III will be better equipped to serve the new sub-counties without health centre three units.

*The old maternity is congested. There are only three beds for the mothers and one delivery bed*

eight mothers delivering in a single day! We only have three beds for mothers to rest

after childbirth. So, we had to discharge the current lot to be able to attend to emergencies."

and retract after childbirth. This makes such a mother prone to excessive bleeding after birth. So, we always make referrals to Aturur Hospital in Kumi or Mbale Hospital," Akurut explains.

For Grace Amutosa, a mother of six from Kachumbala village feel the new maternity unit is reason enough for her to encourage more mothers in her community to seek ante-natal care and delivery.