

HER Vision

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23 YEARS IN THE LABOUR WARD

49-YEAR-OLD ALICE CANDIRU HAS DEDICATED HER LIFE TO DELIVERING BABIES AND IS NOT YET ABOUT TO GIVE UP HER PASSION, UMAR NSUBUGA WRITES



CANDIRU SETTING UP EQUIPMENT READY FOR WORK

Standing at the entrance of the labour ward at Oluvu Health Centre III in Maracha district is a nurse in a uniform and white shoes.

"It is almost 25 years since I started practising midwifery, but I am not about to retire, as my passion for my profession grows by the day. I have dedicated my life to delivering babies," says Alice Candiru, the nursing officer in charge of the maternity section at Oluvu Health Centre.

The 49-year-old midwife has been serving at Oluvu for four years.

"It is my duty to ensure that a mother gives birth safely. When a mother walks into the labour ward, I put everything aside and attend to her because if something goes wrong, I am accountable," Candiru says.

Her role does not only stop at the labour ward. Candiru also writes messages in Lugbara and puts them on walls to help parents raise healthy children. "I feel bad when I hear that a baby I delivered has died. However, when mothers read the messages, they learn the best practices," Candiru explains.

Monitoring new mothers

Candiru introduced a policy at Oluvu, where new mothers are monitored for at least 24 hours before they are discharged. This has reduced cases of mothers and newborn babies dying from treatable conditions.

Candiru's passion has not gone unnoticed. Oluvu centre was voted the best facility in Maracha last year and she was recognised for her outstanding contribution towards safe motherhood, maternal and child health.

In December last year, Candiru was awarded by the Ministry of Health for being among the

best 60 midwives in the country.

"Your contribution shall always be remembered with praise," reads Candiru's certificate, signed by the First Lady, Janet Museveni.

In a day, the health centre receives 10 to 12 expectant women seeking either antenatal care or to give birth.

Of these, Candiru delivers between 40 and 60 mothers in a month. She feels there is a lot more to be done to improve the odds of mothers and babies in Maracha.

Meanwhile, she is bitter with men for abandoning their responsibilities.

According to Candiru, many men do not provide transport fare, so mothers walk long distances when going to deliver.

Despite such shortcomings, she remains passionate about her work, even if it requires delivering using a torch.

Mothers appreciate Candiru's services by sending her gifts in the form of foodstuff from their harvests.

Candiru's inspiration

My dream was to become a nurse. I developed interest in nursing when I was 10 years old because my father was a health worker. However, now that I am a health worker, I understand the hardships and challenges of the profession. Much as there are cases of negligence, health workers dedicate a lot of time and energy to their work.

Every morning, Candiru prays that God helps her save more lives.

Challenges

"When I was starting out, it was difficult to juggle work and family. This is because I

DID YOU KNOW?
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would go to work very early in the morning, so I would not have enough time for my family.

However, I thank God for giving me a husband who is supportive," she says.

Candiru is also weary of the blame when anything goes wrong during childbirth.

"Even when mothers are to blame for seeking help when it is too late, somehow the hospital staff is blamed. Such conditions make health workers to consider quitting the profession," she says.

Statistics

According to a report by Save the Children, titled *Missing Midwives*, the global shortage of 358,000 midwives means that many women and babies die from complications that could have been handled by a health worker with

the right skills, equipment and support. A total of 158,000 mothers and 800,000 babies die annually during childbirth, the report adds.

In addition, millions of newborns die in the first month of life. If births were routinely attended by midwives, the lives of 1.3 million newborns could be saved every year, the report says.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends one midwife or skilled birth attendant for every 175 pregnant women, but this standard is far from being achieved. Uganda has about 15,000 trained midwives for about 1.5 million pregnant women every year.

Health workers with midwifery training can identify complications early and handle them.

HER DAY

I wake up at 5:00am

I wake up at 5:00am so that by the time I leave for work at 6:30am, I have attended to matters at home. I work from 8:00am to 5:30pm, seven days a week and at times all night depending on the number of mothers giving birth.

Worst and best moments

Candiru says her worst moment was when a

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