

Ms Mazzi recalls joining leadership when the government introduced affirmative action.

BY NOELINE NABUKENYA

For more than two decades, Ms Deborah Mazzi Nakayenga, the Wakiso District female councillor representing people living with disabilities (PWDs), has been a beacon of hope and transformation for thousands.

Beyond politics, she serves as the vice president of the Uganda Paralympic Committee, and is a passionate human rights defender, tirelessly advocating for inclusion and empowerment.

Her journey to leadership, however, was not without adversity. "I developed a visual impairment when I was in Senior Four during the war in the 1980s. I was living in Masuliita Town Council at the time. My parents suspect that shrapnel from a bomb hit my eyes and blinded me," she recounts.

The setback did not derail her education. Today, Ms Mazzi holds a Diploma in Public Administration and Management, along with certificates in Child Development and Community Development.

Becoming a leader

Ms Mazzi recalls joining leadership when the government introduced affirmative action, a move that opened doors for PWDs to participate in governance. By then, she had enrolled at the Blind But Able Institution to learn braille.

It was there that she met Ms Safia Nahule Jjirako, chairperson of the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC), who encouraged her to pursue leadership to serve the community.

"I started my journey as a councillor representing PWDs in Wakiso Sub-county before joining the town council. Now, I am in my fifth term, representing PWDs in the entire district," she says.

Ms Mazzi has lobbied for the rights of PWDs and organised seminars to empower them, urging individuals to believe in their potential. "Several PWDs believe that they cannot make

Visually impaired Mazzi's 20 years of inspiring PWDs



Wakiso District female Councillor for PWDs Deborah Mazzi Nakayenga (right), with Ms Rehema Nabunya, the councillor representing PWDs in Mende Sub-county, at the former's home in Wakiso last week. PHOTO/NOELINE NABUKENYA

it in life and end up begging on the streets. They need role models to show them that they have the potential of uplifting their communities," she explains.

Economic empowerment has also been central to her work. She has sensitised PWDs about government programmes, including the annual special grant, which provides Shs5 million per group of five to boost businesses and household

incomes. "One project I introduced trains women in chalk-making.

We meet every Saturday for training sessions," she says.

More than 200 women across the district have been trained, selling packets of chalk to schools in neighbouring communities. A packet goes for Shs4,000, while a carton of 20 packets sells for Shs80,000.

Other initiatives include piggery, poultry, mushroom growing, and

producing briquettes and liquid soap.

Traversing Wakiso District, Uganda's largest, to attend to PWDs is challenging due to limited budgets. The district is home to nearly 72,000 people living with disabilities, including those with physical impairments, visual disabilities, albinism, dwarfism, and spina bifida.

Affirmative action

Ms Mazzi commends the government for affirmative action but calls for wider inclusion in education and health services.

"We do not need specialists to teach

KEY INITIATIVES

- Training women in chalk-making (200+ women trained; packets sold to schools for Shs4,000 each)
- Piggery, poultry, mushroom growing, briquette and liquid soap production
- Sensitisation on government PWD grants (Shs5 million per group of five)
- Key focus areas: Economic empowerment, education inclusion, healthcare accessibility, women's empowerment

learners with disabilities. Let every teacher who graduates attain the basics in special needs education. Similarly, in health facilities, PWDs should not wait long hours in queues. They need special care," she urges.

Ms Rehema Nabunya, a councillor representing PWDs in Mende Sub-county, credits Ms Mazzi with inspiring her entrepreneurial initiatives. "She inspired me to open two boda boda stages along Hoima Road.

Together, the stages host 40 riders. Each rider pays me Shs10,000 per month," Nabunya says. She also chairs the Kalindi Disabled Women Network.

Mr Matia Lwanga Bwanika, the Wakiso District chairperson, lauds Ms Mazzi for promoting dignity among women PWDs. "She works without discrimination because her focus is on service delivery. I have never seen her involved in political scandals," he says.

Outside her leadership roles, Ms Mazzi is involved in real estate, demonstrating that disability has not limited her ambitions.

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NO OF PWDs
IN WAKISO