

Wakumire's 30 years of uplifting women

The retired teacher founded the Uganda Women Concern Ministry in 1991 after resigning from her position at Nyondo Primary Teachers College.

BY DAVID WANDEKA

At 75, Ms Edith Wakumire Muduwa reflects on a lifetime dedicated to uplifting women across the Elgon Sub-region, a journey that began more than three decades ago.

A retired teacher from Bungokho Sub-county in Mbale District, Ms Wakumire founded the Uganda Women Concern Ministry in 1991 after resigning from her position at Nyondo Primary Teachers College.

Since then, she has supported thousands of women to start income-generating activities such as piggyery, tree planting, organic coffee and banana farming, dairy production, and the making of energy-saving stoves. These initiatives have helped many households improve incomes and educate their children.

"My passion to uplift women began in my childhood; our neighbours undermined my father because he had only female children. There were five of us, and the community said he was useless because none of us would inherit his property," she says.

In a move that defied cultural norms of the 1960s, her father wrote a will directing that his daughters would inherit his coffee plantation.

"That decision enabled us to continue with our education after his death. The community had wanted to grab the plantation," she recalls. "From that experience, I always looked out for needy girls at school."

Responding to crisis

By the time Ms Wakumire left formal employment, Uganda was grappling with the peak of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Widows were being evicted from their homes by in-laws, while stigma and discrimination were widespread.

"I wanted to help these women," she says. "Through Mbale Diocese, we began reaching out to communities and churches, sensitising people about HIV and how to prevent it. We also trained families in home-based care."

As awareness grew, more people began to embrace HIV testing. To support affected families, the ministry distributed piglets and animal feed as startup capital.



Ms Edith Wakumire Muduwa in her poultry farm in Bungokho Sub-county, Mbale District. PHOTO/DAVID WANDEKA

"The piglets encouraged even those who feared testing to come forward," she explains.

The organisation also sponsored vulnerable children with school fees and scholastic materials, with support from donors.

"Many of those children have since graduated from university and are now contributing to their communities," she says.

Tree planting projects introduced in the early years continue to generate income for beneficiaries

through the sale of timber and firewood.

Ms Margaret Katongole, a resident of Nakaloke Ward in Mbale City, is among the many beneficiaries of the initiative.

"My husband died in 1990, leaving me with seven children. I faced stigma and discrimination from relatives and the community," she says. "Even fellow women avoided sitting near me in church."

At one point, she contemplated

taking her own life together with her children.

"Feeding them was difficult because I was too sick to farm," she recalls. "But when Wakumire and her team found me, they counselled me and encouraged me to join other women living with HIV."

Through the programme, Ms Katongole received food support, access to oxen for ploughing, and school fees for two of her children. She later started a tree planting project that enabled her to educate the rest of her children up to university.

The ministry also trained her in HIV counselling, which later earned

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represented older persons on the district council for 10 years. Her academic background includes a Bachelor's degree in Social Work and Social Administration and a Master's degree in Organisational Leadership and Management from Uganda Christian University.

Despite her age, Ms Wakumire remains passionate about women's empowerment and community development.

Looking back, she says her journey has been driven by a desire to challenge inequality and create opportunities for women.

"I have seen women rise from nothing to becoming self-reliant; that is what keeps me going," she adds.

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