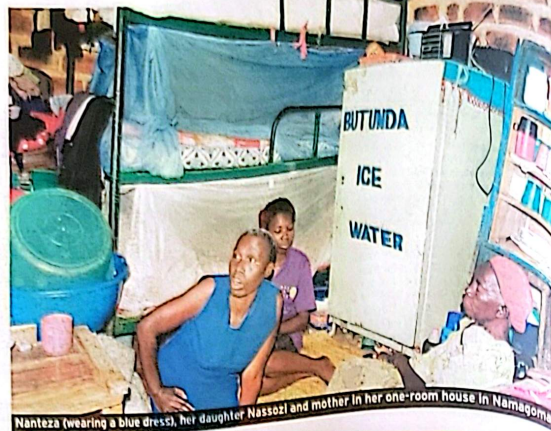


As Uganda prepares to commemorate the World AIDS Day on December 1, Vision Group is spearheading the drive to get everybody back and involved in the fight against HIV/AIDS. For the month of November, *Sunday Vision* will publish a series of stories to highlight key issues for action. Today **Jackie Nalubwama** tells of the woes of a widow living with HIV.



Nanteza (wearing a blue dress), her daughter Nassozi and mother in her one-room house in Namagoma

A BLIND HIV-POSITIVE WIDOW'S WOES

The sun was high and hot when *Sunday Vision* made its way to Namagoma, Nsangi sub-county on Masaka Road to visit a widow that has been

handed by life. On a dusty road, about 2.5km off the main road, Edita Nanteza's house is perched (almost precariously) on the edge of a steep hill whose gradient can make a boda boda passenger wish he or she had walked instead of straddling a bike.

The place Nanteza calls home since December 2014 is a one-room, unplastered brick house with a perforated iron sheet roof. Her furniture is a three-decker bed, a single bed that doubles as a couch for visitors and an assortment of cluttered utensils, plates, cups and basins. Adding to the clutter is a number of big bulging bags full of clothes that act as the wardrobe in Nanteza's tiny abode, which she shares with her mother, Beatrice Nansamba and daughter, Hasa Nassozi.

While she clears her lunch plates of posho and tomatoes, Nassozi welcomes *Sunday Vision* into the room.

HER STORY

Nanteza narrates her story in a voice humbled by circumstance, but with a tinge of resilience. *“I do not do much since I became*

“My husband would tell me that women had dropped children at his mother's home, so he would bring them for me to look after, yet they were fruits of unfaithfulness.

blind in 2013,” she says. “Before that, I was married and used to work from home; planting hair. I also used to sell passion fruit and pineapple juice, as well as water.”

At 47, Nanteza says she sometimes gets confused because a part of her wishes she had never met her husband, Yasin Kikomeko and another part castigates her because she loves her children.

With short grey hair, wearing a blue sleeveless dress, Nanteza says she met Kikomeko in 1985, when she was a small-time dealer in produce.

“I used to sell fried cassava and beans and that is when I met my husband, who was a businessman. He used to buy beans in the village and later sell them in Owino market,” she says.

BED OF THORNS

Like the saying, marriage is not a bed of roses, Nanteza found more than her tinge of resilience. *“I do not do much since I became*

under Sharia Law.

“We were married (*kuzawozwa*) by an Imam at home in Mutundwe and my brother was part of the ceremony. We also got a marriage certificate,” Nanteza says.

Trouble started brewing when Kikomeko became unfaithful. “I met him when he had four children, but he later had more with other women,” she says.

Nanteza says she chose to “hang in there since I had children”, but Kikomeko started bringing home his other children.

“My husband started bringing children that his other women had dropped at his mother's home. That was after he realised that I was patient with him and would remain faithful,” she says.

Worse, when she encouraged Kikomeko to remain faithful, he would shout at her and continue his philandering ways. He would also spend nights away from home, leaving Nanteza to cater for the children,



Nanteza needs shim to enable her complete her one-room rental

Helping hands

In the midst of her trying times, Nanteza received help from Missionaries of the Poor in Mutundwe, who gave her money for school fees and food.

However, the tide changed when the older friars were replaced by new ones, who were not as sympathetic to Nanteza's plight.

“Missionaries of the Poor helped me with my children's school fees, but the old brothers left and the new ones chased us. They were strict and restricted our access to the grounds by introducing cards,” says Nanteza.

Together with the money Nassanga used to make and from the older friars, Nanteza was able to relocate to Namagoma and build her one-roomed house. She also built another room for rent, but needs shim to complete it because her daughter lost her job. It is unplastered, needs a door and a roof.

After shifting to Namagoma because life in Mutundwe had become untenable without the friars' help, Nanteza's one-roomed home lacked one basic: a toilet.

Nassozi used to guide her mother to the neighbours' toilet, which they sometimes found locked. She then resorted to using a bucket that Nassozi would later empty.

A kind man, Pastor Patrick Kizito, who lives in the neighbourhood, was told by Nassanga about her mother's toilet troubles.

“I visited her mother who told me that she uses a bucket. I was touched and gave them bricks and cement to build a toilet,” he says.

Kizito, who is also blind, says he knows what it means to be blind because he, too, suffered and stayed on the streets until he started singing in church. He says he is attached to Dr Abed Bwanika's church, but sings in any church he goes to and gets money from the congregation.

He appeals to those who can to help Nanteza live a decent life and get her daughters back in school.

Nanteza is grateful to Kizito for having helped them with food for the festive season: “He gave us sh20,000 and we bought meat, posho and charcoal,” she says.

“The ARVs are strong and the doctors recommended a balanced diet, yet we sometimes go without food.

including those from other women.

“I endured and looked after his children, hoping that one day, they will take care of me, but I have not seen them since I got sick,” says Nanteza, who hustled by digging as a casual labourer, selling cold drinks, groundnuts and fried cassava.

MONEY MATTERS

Nanteza says at the beginning of their marriage, the couple worked well together, saved money and bought a piece of land in Mutundwe.

However, Kikomeko made attempts to sell the land clandestinely, which saw Nanteza running to The Uganda Association of Women Lawyers (FIDA) for redress.

“He was clever with FIDA; he would get there before me and pretend to be contrite so that by the time I arrive, FIDA would think we could work it out,” says Nanteza.

Kikomeko would also beat the children and threaten Nanteza with knives and spears so that she gives up her right to the property.

Nanteza says she managed to build a house using savings and a loan from microfinance institution.

Fed up of the tension and threats in her home, Nanteza left. Unfortunately, she fell ill and was admitted to Namirembe Hospital, where she was diagnosed with meningitis.

Kikomeko, who had been waiting for an opportune moment, sold off the land on which their six-room house sat when Nanteza fell sick. He did not have her consent.

“I do not even know the amount he sold it,” says Nanteza. “He sold and moved to Kamukuma near Kyazanga. He died in 2010, but I did not bury him because I was sick.”

POSITIVE LIVING

From Namirembe Hospital, Nanteza was referred to Mulago Hospital, from where she was told she was HIV-positive.

“I had meningitis, which would stiffen me,” she says. “I got well but lost my sight. I am glad my mother was with me through it all.”

Nanteza now lives on antiretrovirals (ARVs) that she gets from Mulago, but sometimes she finds some drugs missing.

“The drugs are so strong and the doctors recommend that I eat a balanced diet. We are alive because of God's mercy; some days, we go without food, yet I have to take my medication,” Nanteza says.

THE EDUCATION CYCLE

Nanteza says her fate was probably sealed in 1982 when she dropped out of school in S1 to look after her niece, whose mother had left with her father, Nanteza's brother. “I left school to help my brother because he would not have managed to look after his daughter,” she says.

For her primary education, Nanteza attended Maapeera School in Kasubi, Nabulagala.

She is concerned that her two daughters may also fail to complete school, unless divine providence comes their way.

Her daughter, Nassozi, 18, got Aggregate 53 in O'level in 2014 from Royal College, Namugongo, but has since not gone back to school due to lack of tuition.

“I wish I could pursue a course, because I am too old to be in A'level,” Nassozi says.

Nanteza's other daughter, Hamida Nassanga, completed A'level at Good Shepherd SS in Nansana, but did not have funds to join a tertiary institution.

“She got a bursary at Buganda Royal Institute of Business and Technical Education in Mengo, but we did not have money for requirements,” says Nanteza of the circumstance that made Nassanga miss her bursary.

Nassanga then got a job at Shirji Factory in Kabusu, but she later lost it. Nanteza says Nassanga was transferred to work in town, but she could not afford the fare to commute every day and thus lost her job.