

## MIFUMI commemorates the 16 days of activism



Agnes Bukare, Senior Manager MIFUMI speaks to the community of Sop-Sop during the 16 days of activism

MIFUMI embarked on a massive sensitisation campaign to commemorate the 16 days of activism across Tororo district with a message to all to end violence against women and children in our communities.

The 16 days of activism Against Violence Against Women which ran from November 25, to December 10, are internationally recognised days of activism Against Gender Violence.

This campaign was started by the Centre for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL) in 1991 to emphasise that there is a link between violence against women and human rights and that such violence is a violation of human rights.

This year the message MIFUMI took to the people was focussed on increasing awareness of the magnitude of gender based violence and abuse in our communities which are often ignored or culturally

justified. The congregation also got to know of the types of violence and abuse perpetuated against women and children and how they manifest themselves in our communities. Perpetrators of these offences were challenged to change their behaviour and the community was asked not only to be their brothers' keepers but their sisters and children too and to actively engage men and boys in ending violence in our communities. MIFUMI is also working closely with government, the private sector, civil society, the faith based organisations and the media at both local and national levels to take responsibility in the fight to end violence against women and children in Uganda.

The community responded by attending in big numbers to the sensitisation campaign and even suggested ways of holding perpetrators accountable for their actions. Some said they should face the law and be justly punished for their actions towards God's

creation (women and children), while others suggested that they should be paraded before the rest of the community members and be put to shame because they realised that violence does not only affect the victim but every member of the community. According to Agnes Bukare who headed the MIFUMI campaign team; many people were beginning to relate violence against women with human rights abuse. She also sounded pretty sure that the people in attendance will never be the same again and foresaw two positive impacts manifesting in these communities; That the incidences of violence against women will reduce as many will desist from abusing their spouses.

That the cases of violence against women and children reported to duty bearers and the MIFUMI advice centres will increase as many will be aware of their rights and the available options in accessing justice.

## Men against violence



Kadokech Joseph addresses a gathering on gender based violence

Started 6 months ago, the impact of the vibrant men's movement of MIFUMI is being felt across rural eastern Uganda District of Tororo. Men flock the community meetings and testify of their transformed lives and relationships with their spouses.

MIFUMI Vibrant Men's Movement which also goes by the name Movement Building Men (MBM) has transformed hundreds of lives of men winning up to 240 committed members.

In a conversation with Paul\* a former perpetrator of domestic violence, he tried to place his reasons for abusing his wife and what it feels like to today;

*'It is like being born again, I do not know why I was beating my wife... probably because it felt good to show my superiority over her. I did not know that she would hurt and that she had real feelings.*

*I was raised to believe that if you showed a woman too much love and did not rebuke, scold and beat her regularly, she would stop respecting you...thinking back now, honestly...sometimes I beat her for nothing.'*

Speaking to Emmanuel Ochwo, field officer for the movement, he said

*'..Paul is one in the hundreds who are slowly getting on the road to reform.*

*When we go out to the field occasionally with Paul, his message on abuse has touched hundreds of men whose believes are still shaped around his. '*

There are men like Paul, who in the bigger picture feel they are not to blame for their actions which are most times shaped by our customs, beliefs and culture. But in this group, there are those who are willing to change.

According to Oguti Athanasius the head MBM, the impact of this project to the community has been double-fold.

Men are readily accessing the counselling services available to them and freely sharing their relationship challenges and fears.

He added that;

*'We have had a few men who have taken on the role of community watchdogs and contact us when they see violence and abuse of women and men in their communities.'*

Together with the local community leaders and duty bearers, the movement has been invited to attend many of the community conflict resolution meetings.

This is the first group of community gender sensitive men who in future we hope will become a stand alone community based organisation addressing all forms of human rights issues in their communities.

\*not real name

## Welcome to Mifumi Primary School Dr. John Maitland

On 17<sup>th</sup> November, MIFUMI Primary school was honoured to receive a long time friend of the school. Doctor John Maitland was received by enthusiastic and overjoyed pupils and teachers of MIFUMI who had for long hoped they would have a face to face meeting with him and thank him the African way for all the good things he has brought to their school.

John in his speech said he was overwhelmed to be in Mifumi Primary School and he was impressed with what he saw. He congratulated the school team for the great change the school has achieved over the years, lively pupils, and better classrooms. He was amazed when the girls carried out a karate demonstration and their confidence level.

Dr. John also praised MIFUMI for starting up developmental projects in rural areas and her support to the rural school. 'The setting in the rural area is impressive. You are the pioneers of the area.'

He wished MIFUMI well as the good work continues.

Atuki Turner, Executive Director of MIFUMI, in her conclusive speech declared Dr. John Maitland as an honorary member of Mifumi Primary School. She further thanked him for his generous contribution to the school and for introducing Mifumi Primary School to John Carnegie who has never tired of donating to the School to ensure every child has a good starting point in life with a good education.



Dr. John Maitland at Mifumi Primary School



Children of MIFUMI Primary School do the Adhola Traditional dance



L-R: H/M Bernard Onyango, Atuki Turner and John Maitland

# LEARNING THE HARD WAY

Jenny is the first and elder wife to Frank. Julia is the second and younger wife.

Jenny says though she was open to a polygamous relationship, she was not prepared for what it meant to be in one. She said when her husband Frank married his second wife Julia, she was a little jealous that she (Julia) looked much younger and beautiful. However it felt good to be the first wife. She would command and demand respect from everyone including Julia, who is supposed to respect the first wife. Jenny further says 'No decision would be made without consulting me. I would get the family home and Julia would get a smaller hut. In the village, everyone respected me as the first wife.'

While Julia says being married as the second wife made her feel young, full of life, desirable and better than Jenny who was old and not as beautiful as she was and Frank would definitely treat her better than Jenny. He was already showering her with many gifts and favours.

For Frank, marrying a second wife would make him feel like 'a real man' ... like his father.

In less than a year into the polygamous relationship, reality started to hit.

It all started with the small rivalries between Jenny and Julia all revolving around their husband and who he loved most. The small rivalries turned into tongue lashes on whose house he spent a longer time and later into physical fights affecting their children and neighbours.

Jenny's perception of what it meant to be a first wife in a polygamous relationship was shattered. She was no longer happy; all she thought about was what she would do to make Frank love her and her children better than Julia and hers. She struggled to make herself better than Julia.

Julia wanted Frank to abandon Jenny and 'be her man' so she worked so hard towards this. She went out of her way to make Jenny look bad and ugly before Frank. Julia soon realized that she was not happy in this relationship as the only thing that she passionately worked at was the downfall of Jenny.

For Frank, at first it felt good to see the women fight over him as they each went out of their way to please him. However when the fights turned to physical, his woes started. He was not only having to solve cases without sounding like he is favouring any of them, but slowly he was burdened with providing for a much larger and expensive family.

He was also struggling with re-assuring them that he loved them 'equally'.

At one of the community reconciliation meetings after a grievous fight between Jenny and Julia, Frank revealed that he was grateful for MIFUMI's intervention and regrets his decision in marrying two women. It had not made him 'a real man' but a man with many woes. Now that he already had children with both of them, he would ensure that he does not show favouritism to either of his wives or children. He apologised to his wives for his selfishness and for causing them all that pain.

Jenny and Julia on the hand were reconciled and the issues affecting their marriages highlighted. They both would either have to learn to live alongside each other or make decisions on what they wanted for themselves. They were both offered counselling by MIFUMI and they each promised to bring up their children not to make the mistakes they had of getting into polygamous relationships.

## GREETINGS FROM MIFUMI

The holidays are here and in that spirit let us all reflect on our inner strengths that can make the world a better place for women and children and to realise their full potential.

We can start by taking a stand as leaders in our various capacities to say no to violence against women.

This festive season, share the joy of peace, belonging and love.

Everyone deserves to live a life of security and dignity. Let us nurture the culture of human rights, to promote freedom, equality and peace for all. Like the MDG3 Call to Action conclusively puts it, DO SOMETHING EXTRA FOR WOMEN EVERYDAY in the next year.

Happy holidays!

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