

Tororo Women- a force to be reckoned with

Women in Tororo are taking on the powers that be. In addressing the scourge of domestic violence, they are building communities that are just and peaceful and embracing MIFUMI's theory of change. The MIFUMI theory of change addresses domestic violence in four areas that include access to justice, Economic empowerment, Resettlement into a violent free life and Confidence building.

Even when the justice and cultural system may let down some of these women, their confidence can not be broken. Survivors of domestic Violence and abuse have mobilized themselves into women's groups across the 22 sub counties in Tororo District, committed to take forward the message of justice and peace to their communities.

The passion with which they are re-establishing themselves as community watch dogs has visibly increased indicated by the number of violence and abuse cases reported to MIFUMI advice centres, police, local councils and community leaders.

The neighbours are watching over their friends, the children are watching over their peers and siblings. The villages are becoming a safer place for children to be children and the women to access justice.

Women like Florence Abbo will testify any day to this.

To an onlooker, Florence Abbo is just an ordinary hard working village woman tilling her land and supporting her children. To the community women, she is a celebrity of some sort, famous for turning a life shattered by abuse and violence to a confident fulfilled life; supporting the women in her community to choose happiness over pain. Her survivor group has over 90 members.

These women are part of a bigger survivor's movement that comprises of about 759 women from 21 groups across the 22 sub- counties of Tororo districts, 6 of which are now registered Community based organisations.



Rubongi survivors group

The women are also acting as community watch dogs holding their stakeholders and duty bearers accountable for any form of human rights violations against them and their children.

When Jane Awori * was brutally abused by her husband and the community shunned her for seeking justice, 200 members of the survivors' movement raised the red flag. Together with the police and the Residential District Commissioner, they visited the home of Jane and demanded the community leaders and elders to discipline Jane's husband for his actions.

Grace Lwanga, the domestic violence services Officer conclusively put it,

'...Just seeing how confidently women are now taking on the lead role in addressing issues that affect them is one of the greatest achievements MIFUMI will always be proud of.'

*Not Real Name

This Month

- **Women Advocacy Groups**
- **Women Property Rights**
- **Stolen at birth.**
- **More.**

Paving the road to women property rights

MIFUMI Women's Property Rights Project's (generously funded by Ministry of foreign affairs, Netherlands) goal is to reduce the incidence of women property rights violations which now accounts for 34% of all domestic related incidents reported through MIFUMI advice centres.

In the past year, the project has successfully managed to address some of the needs locally and nationally to enable them realise their full potential.

MIFUMI women property rights has put in place a supportive framework which has helped women to access justice i.e. community volunteers, community safety forums, and women's forum. The project has also trained 150 community volunteers to help women in their communities access justice by offering legal advice and making referral to duty bearers and local leaders. We also offer legal advice and legal representation to the women whose property rights have been violated.

Through community sensitisations and education, the project has managed to increase on women property rights awareness.

In trying to reduce the incidence of women property rights violations, there was need to influence policies and traditions which violate women property rights through community advocacy and national advocacy. MIFUMI advocates for change and reform in the practice of cultures that violate women's rights. This led to the passing of the Tororo Bridal Gifts ordinance, the Domestic violence Act and drafting of the Marriage and Divorce bill and constitutional petitions on Bride Price and Polygamy.

Since duty bearers are the first justice contact point for many violations against women, the project has enhanced on their capacity in protecting women against the violation of property rights through training with the hope that they can be called upon to act and be gender sensitive on women's rights issues.

MIFUMI Women Property Right Project is also trying to address gender biases on land ownership emanating from the laws of Uganda and the customary norms. Some of these laws and norms dictate that women can only utilise land but not own it.

Pictorial of the month



Maaïke Platenburg MDG3 Netherlands and Atuki Turner of MIFUMI



Lennart Konijnenberg, Maaïke Platenburg and Herma Majoor at Chamwinula MIFUMI beneficiaries' Farm



Lennart sings with the women of Mollo

MIFUMI re-unites mother and son after a bizarre theft



Awor Nosiata with her son at her home



Nosiata with her mother



Obonyo Emmanuel, Awor Nosiata and their son

To MIFUMI, this was yet another life that depended on her to save and another woman to help; to Awor Nosiata and Obonyo Emmanuel, an incredible miracle was on its way.

The pangs started and I knew our long awaited baby was on its way. I put together a few things and started on the walk to hospital. This time the labour pains were so intense that I could not make it make it to the hospital in time. My baby was born in a nearby bush by the roadside with the help of good Samaritans.

I safely reached the hospital to have my baby immunised. My husband who was out of town heard the good news on phone. He immediately asked my brother-in-law and a helper to come to my aid. At the hospital the nurses were helpful. One woman in my ward was absolutely amazing and selfless. She introduced herself as Rose and stayed by my side as I waited for my family to arrive.

The next day I was told my baby boy was healthy and I could go home. I thanked Rose for her kindness and we bade farewell.

On my way home, I mentioned to my helper that this was an opportunity for us to shop for the baby as I will have to be a full time mom to my son for some time. We walked to the used clothes market and I handed over my baby to the helper as I sorted out the pile of clothes to find something nice for my son.

While at it, I heard Rose's voice. I looked up with a smile, amazed at the coincidence that we were meeting again. We engage in conversation like friends. Because I was engrossed with the shopping, Rose continued to chat with my helper. Finally when I was contented with my selections, I made the payments.

I turned around to the helper and gestured we should leave. There she was, standing with her arms to her sides. The words shot from my mouth like bullets; *'where in heaven's name have you put my new born baby?'*

She smiled and answered reluctantly, *'He is with aunt Rose seated over thee...rrreee...'*

Where her index finger was pointing was an empty seat with no sign of Rose!

Then it hit me, Rose was a child thief and she had just stolen my baby, my son!

I started to scream and people came to my aid. Thousands of self blame questions raced through my head; *how had I been so naive to notice that she was extraordinarily kind? How had I failed to notice that she had followed me from the hospital? Why did I choose today to shop of all days? Why did I not carry the baby myself? What will my husband say?*

My screams had gathered a good number of people who swung into action; some searched the market, others consoled me and one woman offered her phone to contact MIFUMI. A MIFUMI advisor on the line told us to come to the Police station where they will be waiting for us. She also sought my permission to make immediate radio announcements to improve my chances of getting my baby back, alive and safe.

I was inconsolable. That day seemed like years. At home I sat up all night believing it was a dream and I would wake up to an earlier or new day.

The police and a MIFUMI advisor kept in touch with me.

On Saturday when I had lost hope of recovering my son, the phone rang. My husband answered it, I was afraid of what the voice on the phone would reveal. My heart was throbbing, everything in me was praying for good news.

Yes, it was good news! Rose had been arrested in another district, about 200km out of Tororo and my baby was in the safe hands of MIFUMI and the Police. MIFUMI would be reuniting me with my son that very day.

Only heaven can tell the joy of a mother who had just brought a life into the world and had almost lost it in a blink of an eye. My eternal gratitude goes to MIFUMI, Tororo Police Station CFPU and CID officers and all the true honest people who helped me recover my son. Thank you.

Where Have All the Girls Gone?

By Laura "Akoth" Leach, US Peace Corps Volunteer from Owensboro, KY, USA

When I arrived at Mifumi Village, like all new volunteers, I was excited to reach my site, and like most new volunteers, I was overwhelmed when I reached there. I visited the Mifumi Advice Centre, attended a board meeting at Mifumi Primary School, and toured the Mifumi Health Centre. It was during this period of settling in that fellow volunteer Gregory Okech came to me with an opportunity to teach maths and physics at James Ochola Memorial Secondary School, Siwa. It turned out the school needed an English teacher as well.

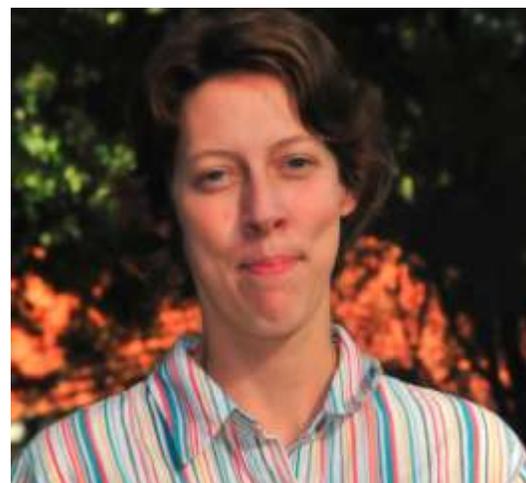
I leapt at the opportunity to go teach, and the next day I went to visit the school. I met Mr. Owere who is the biology teacher at James Ochola and sat in on his class. I remember being very impressed with Mr. Owere and how he engaged his students, but I also remember wondering, "Where have all the girls gone?" There were very few girls in the class, and those who were present were reluctant to participate.

During my time at James Ochola, I started noticing things about the girl students besides the fact that they were few in number.

One of the first things I noticed with the girls is that they were coming to school tired. I don't know if this is because the girl students were doing more chores around the house in the morning before coming to school, or if they weren't getting any food before coming to school, but they were definitely tired and resting more throughout the day.

Another thing I noticed about the girl students is that they were more reluctant to participate in class. There were some exceptions of girl students who were very enthusiastic and willing, but when girls did participate they were often harassed or ridiculed by the boys, so it isn't any wonder that other girls didn't want to stand up to read or answer questions.

Something else I learned about girl students at James Ochola is that they are misinformed about issues that impact them directly. When I taught my S3 students about writing an argument for or against something, I gave them topics to choose from including family planning and bride price. It was after I read the essays students wrote on these topics, that I started thinking about forming a girls club at James Ochola. I'm hoping this club will give girls an opportunity to develop confidence, leadership, and decision making skills, learn about different topics that affect them such as family, career, and financial planning, and provide them an opportunity to socialize and have fun.



Laura 'Akoth' Leach

MIFUMI's mission is to Promote protection of women and children from domestic violence and abuse and secure for them basic rights through education, Health Care and economic self sufficiency.

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Senior Three students of James Ochola Memorial Secondary school

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