

## MIFUMI RECOGNISED AT TASO FAIR



### THIS MONTH

MIFUMI recognised at TASO Fair.

Amuru women trained as solar engineers

Susan Oldham runs for MIFUMI

Anisha has every reason to smile again

In a recent fair organised by The Aids Support Organisation (TASO)-Tororo to commemorate her 15 years of quality service in the district, the Chair TASO, Keziah Nyaketcho Ochwo commended MIFUMI for her unwavering and influential partnership in addressing stigma associated with the marginalised in our society.

The guest of Honour Honourable Jacob Oulanya called upon other NGO's and institutions campaigning and advocating for the marginalised groups to emulate MIFUMI. He quickly recalled encounter with MIFUMI while he worked as a lawyer. MIFUMI approached him about their campaign to reform bride price. He said he was proud of what MIFUMI had become and of her impact in the lives of hundreds of women and children.

Honourable Oulanya added that every institution set up to support the marginalised should focus on their vision and not be corrupted by short lived gains. He pledged to support such institutions as deputy speaker of Parliament.

The Saturday 3rd September 2011 event that brought together over 500 guests basing on the theme "WE SHALL ALL WIN WHEN EVERYONE KNOWS ABOUT HIV" presented an opportunity for partners and friends of TASO Tororo to share experiences, brainstorm on strategies and identify areas of further collaborations.

Many of the speakers at the event encouraged the public to practice best preventive measures like positive living, use of condoms, faithfulness and abstinence.

A beneficiary noted that when one chooses to die

with a virus by not infecting others, the battle against the deadly HIV/AIDS will be won.

Rose-Marie Oryema a counsellor with MIFUMI in her address to the guests highlighted the relationship between violence and HIV/AIDS infection is evident in the areas of sexual abuse of children and sexual violence by partners.

*'When women reveal that they are HIV-positive they face the risk of abandonment by their partners, families, and friends as well as violence due to their HIV+ status.'*

RoseMarie said.

She also noted that cultural norms like Polygamy tolerate and condone multiple sexual Partners. Such practices, combined with resistance to adopting safe sex behaviours, have led to increased prevalence of HIV.

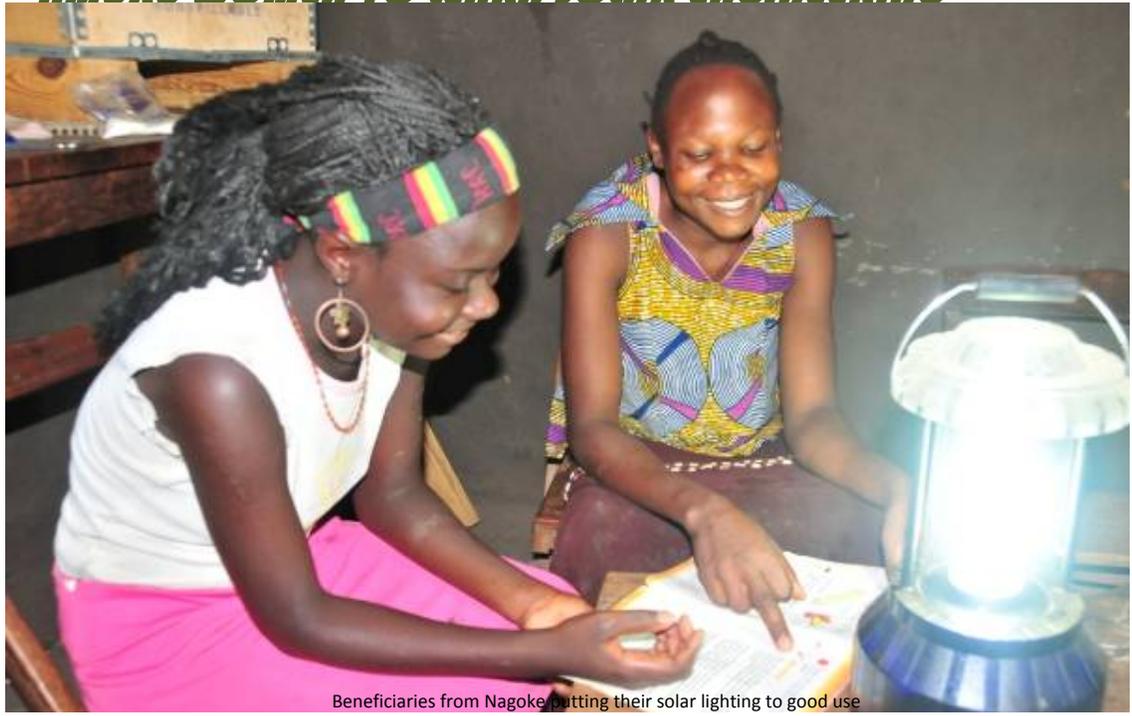
RoseMarie urged the public to desist from high risk behaviours that lead to violence and the contraction of HIV such as drug use, alcoholism, promiscuity and limited ability by women to negotiate safe sexual behaviours, such as condom use.

Rose Marie added that TASO has supported MIFUMI with clients referred to them to access medication and further counselling. She said MIFUMI was pleased with the proposal from TASO to further train their advisors on HIV counselling.

In his closing remarks, Dr David Okumu, Director of Health, Tororo District called upon the public to take responsibility of their health which starts at their homes with choices they make. He said;

*'Health is made at home, all hospitals do is repair; but this is not guaranteed.'*

## AMURU WOMEN TO LEARN SOLAR ENGINEERING



Beneficiaries from Nagoke putting their solar lighting to good use

Sanjit "Bunker" Roy, founder Barefoot College in another collaboration with MIFUMI have identified 2 illiterate women from Amuru a district in northern Uganda to be trained as solar engineers in India.

Through a "Framework of Agreement for a Partnership in Solar Electrification of Villages with UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), GEF(Global Environment Facility) Small Grants Programme, Akot Jennifer and Aseng Julian will in their 6 months study period be trained on how to assemble and fabricate circuits, solar lanterns, solar lamps, charge controllers, choke coils and transformers and learn to connect modules, batteries, lamps and charge controllers. They will also be able to identify components and equipment.

After the training, Jennifer and Julian will be tasked with installing and maintaining solar light systems in their villages. A small agreed upon fee by community members for maintenance and spare parts would be paid to the women.

This initiative by Bunker Roy set up to empower rural women with knowledge and skills that are not culturally defined so they can generate themselves an income.

Overjoyed Jennifer was touched by the thoughtfulness of MIFUMI and Mr. Bunker in considering their community as one of the beneficiaries of the Rural Solar electrification. *'Our villages will look like the city.'*

A widow at 39 Jennifer never dreamt of a time where she; a woman, would be called upon by her community members to take on a journey to another country and return with knowledge that

would benefit them all.

I always wondered why it was getting hotter and why our crops yields worsened each season until a MIFUMI staff explained to me the truth behind this climate change. I was shocked.

Jennifer reveals that what particularly grabbed her attention was the fact that many of the reasons for the climate change were because of man's inability to take care of it. Climate friendly alternatives like solar electrification instead of poisonous ones like *Tadoobas* were a great option for many communities.

Julian says that solar lighting cannot be compared to any other lighting form in her village. The lighting is much cheaper than the Kerosene considering the fact that fuel prices keep increasing by the day and brighter than the *Tadoobas*.

*'I am particularly marveled by the fact that we can actually tap daylight sun and use it in the night without fear of house fires or health hazards, this is one of the best things to happen to the people of Amuru.'* ...In our communities, we women rarely get the opportunity to contribute and serve. Mr. Bunker and MIFUMI are really very considerate and we shall prove to our people that we have potential.' remarks a visibly excited Julian.

In 2009, Barefoot College trained four grandmothers from two remote villages in Tororo in Solar Engineering. Since their return, Margaret Opio, Loda Oketcho, Rose Othieno and Anna Odoi have solar electrified 200 households in their villages with solar equipment donated to Kirewa Women's forum by UNDP.

## ***RUNNING FOR GOOD CAUSE...***



Anna Oldham, David Williams and Susan Oldham at Cardiff

Susan Oldham, a MIFUMI Staff based in the UK last weekend challenged herself for a good cause by running 10 kilometre stretch in the HSBC Cardiff 10K 2011 that took place on the Sunday the 11<sup>th</sup> of September.

Together with team mates Anna Oldham, David Williams, Susan who is not much of a runner managed to raise Seven Hundred and Forty Five Pounds (UgShs: 3, 257, 140) for MIFUMI.

In her short and modest email, Susan revealed that she was motivated by desire to do something extra at a personal level to raise some much needed funds especially for the school and health centre.

She set out on her initial plans by opening an account with Just Giving website and created a personal fundraising page. [www.justgiving.com](http://www.justgiving.com) is designed to help fundraisers raise money for charities. My friends and family were motivated to sponsor and support me as my reputation as a runner was close to a joke.

During the training, I kept telling myself that all the pain and sweat would be worth it.

My sister agreed to join me. I was also lucky to have a good friend who helped with my training.

We went out twice a week and I also went to a gym once or twice a week. My boyfriend only decided to join us a week before the race so he didn't have much time to train but still managed to get a very good time.

I am eternal grateful to my family, friends and well wishers who generously contributed to this cause. In many ways you may never know you have touched a life.

MIFUMI Primary School and Health centre are located about 40 kilometres away from Tororo District both trying to secure quality services for members of these rural communities who may not be able to access these services in the town.

## ***SURELY THERE WAS SOME GOOD IN THIS WORLD FOR ME***

In many places in and around Uganda, the community always has a fall back plan for teenage girls who due to circumstances beyond their control need support, love and guidance; get married!

I was told marriage would give me a name, family, provide for my basic needs like shelter, food and clothing. I got to learn the hard way; and too late. My name is Anisha\*, at 16, I was not only pregnant with twins but also widowed and homeless.

My husband's relatives did not see any use for me after their son's death. They threw me out. When my twins came, I had to do odd jobs to sustain and feed them. Some days we went without food. In the evenings on my way home, I stopped at the Mosque to pray Allah; that in his great might and kindness would take away my suffering.

The Imam soon noticed me. He took keen interest in my case and provided for me, soon we were in love. He said I did not have to continue suffering like that, Allah answers prayers in many ways. He said if I became his wife, I would never want. He would give me a house of my own and provide for my every need.

I needed a place to stay and he had been good to me; providing for me and the twins. So I accepted his proposal and I became his fourth and youngest wife.

I conceived and delivered our first child with him. He named him Ahmed\*. Because of the age difference, my new found family still disregarded me. My relationship with my husband one sided. He gave the orders and I obeyed. A few months into this marriage and motherhood, my husband started to act around me like I had become an extra burden for him. He blamed me for having children that were not his. I felt guilty for having the twins. His visits soon became numbered and very irregular. He stopped providing for his child. I was afraid to ask lest he took it as a complaint; He was a whole Imam, a man of Allah.

I soon realized that he had neglected us; he skipped payment of rent that was now in arrears. I went back to doing odd jobs again to provide for the children; this time with 3 extra mouths to feed.

A concerned friend advised that my husband be tasked with supporting me to raise his child. She escorted me to police to lodge a case of neglect. My husband defied all summons sent to him by Police. He would boast to friends saying policemen were his friends; they feared and respected him and would never arrest him. On Realising their summons were not being adhered to, the police was forced to forward the case to court. For nine months he defied the court summons. I felt helpless and dropped the case. My younger sister who had a little hut to accommodated us during the nights.

My friend told me not to give up soon. She advised me to visit MIFUMI advice centre. At MIFUMI, my case was prioritised. My children and I were immediately moved to the Women and Children's shelter. My case was reopened both at Police and Courts of law.

The day my husband received this new court summon, he was actually wedding a new wife who he later took to the house he once rented for me. He ignored the court summon once again. This time the Police swung into action and visited him at the mosque informing him that the magistrate expects him in court.

The Magistrate who was waiting in court for him made a quick ruling; two hundred thousand shillings arrears and forty thousand shillings each month for maintenance of his child Muhammad, stern warning for adamantly refusing to respect the Ugandan court and justice systems.

From this experience and counselling sessions I learned so many things;

- That children have rights too and raising children is the responsibility of both parents
- That communities should take on the responsibility of supporting their members to access justice without fear of persons and powers just like my friend, police, the magistrate and MIFUMI did
- That mistakes made in my childhood or norms shaped by communities should not hold individuals from realizing their full potential.
- That my marriages had been for convenience. I had been brainwashed to believe that I could not amount to anything. I realised had so much potential.

MIFUMI has resettled me at a second phase resettlement home. I was allocated land where I have planted maize and potatoes and by October this year I hope to yield harvest 5 bags of maize and 4 of potatoes. From the sales, I will be holding my first money which I will put back in my produce and support of my children.

My case worker is also organizing a farming training session for all the women at the resettlement to enable us farm and yield better crops. I am happy, very happy. This I believe is the answer to my many prayers at the Mosque.

\* not real names

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