

MUJUBU'S SPIRITED HIV FIGHT HELPS OVER 1,800

The HIV prevalence in Busoga is higher than the national rate. It is against this background that volunteers such as Peter Mujubu are working to change the status quo. Mujubu has so far helped over 1,800 in 15 years, writes **George Bita**

In Busoga sub-region, where HIV prevalence is higher than the national rate, community volunteers are a vital link in bridging gaps between health facilities and people living with HIV. Among them is Peter Mujubu, who offering a lifeline for hundreds across Iganga and neighbouring districts. He is an expert client, one of the strategies employed in delivering community-based HIV care.

Mujubu's commitment is rooted in his own journey with HIV, when the 64-year-old was diagnosed with full-blown Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS).

A former primary school teacher, Mujubu recalls that his HIV-positive status felt like a death sentence, attracting stigma.

"In the 1990s, many of us living with HIV were emaciated, with Kaposi sarcoma sores all over our bodies. I spent six months bedridden," he says.

Mujubu's fortunes changed in 1998, when he was taken on by The AIDS Support Organisation (TASO) Jinja branch.

"I was supported until 2004, when my CD4 count dropped to 180 and I was put on antiretroviral (ARV) care. I got a new lease on life. I resolved to spend the rest of my life helping others fight HIV and AIDS," he says.

Mujubu trained as a peer educator in palliative care under TASO. More training with Women Alliance And Child Affairs, and the International HIV/AIDS Alliance in 2010 propelled him into voluntary community work. He is facilitated by TASO, which provides allowances for volunteers.

IMPRESSIVE IMPACT

Dr David Muwanguzi, a health consultant in Iganga, says: "He was among the pioneers of the Elimination of Mother-to-Child Transmission programme. In 2013, Mujubu became a proud father of an HIV-free baby girl."

Building on that milestone, Mujubu has continued to dedicate



Serema (right) during a voluntary counselling visit at Nambaale Health Centre III in Iganga district. It took Mujubu's intervention to have him go for this care. Mujubu also delivers ARVs to clients

THE HIV BURDEN

The 2025 National HIV Estimates Report indicates that Uganda's HIV prevalence is 4.9% (December 2024). In Iganga, the prevalence rate is higher than the national one at 6.7%, Dr Patrick Kitimbo, Iganga's district health officer, says.

In 2024, the country recorded a total of 37,000 new HIV infections, while 20,000 Ugandans succumbed to AIDS-related conditions.

As of December 2024, the number of people living with HIV in Uganda was 1.5 million.



Mujubu

Matege

Nakanjako

himself to offering community support, anchoring his efforts at Nambaale Health Centre III. He is an expert client, volunteer and counsellor.

The health centre's catchment area comprises three community drug distribution points that include Kidago, Nabukone and Ilenzi trading centres.

"This ensures that the total population of 385 people living with HIV access ARVs," Mujubu says.

Muwanguzi says Mujubu also serves people living with HIV in the adjacent districts of Kaliro, Namutumba and Luuka.

The health centre records show 53 new members enrolled this year, all initiated on ART.

Beyond distributing ARVs, Mujubu follows up clients to ensure adherence to treatment. He also submits monthly reports about new clients, ART adherence and outreach activities to TASO.

PHOTOS BY GEORGE BITA

CHALLENGES

Despite his milestones, Mujubu encounters challenges, with the greatest being when a person living with HIV rejects treatment out of frustration.

Funding cuts such as the withdrawal of USAID support in January, have halted sensitisation campaigns. Traditional beliefs also undermine progress.

"Some still say *silimu asiima mubiiri* (loosely translated as AIDS chooses whom to infect)," Muwanguzi laments.

Musana adds that some religious leaders mislead people living with HIV that prayers can heal them of HIV and AIDS.

"The end result is some clients stop using ARVs," Mujubu says.

PLANS

Mujubu hopes for an HIV-free generation.

"I envision a community where the youth stick to the abstinence, be faithful and condom use. Since they comprise the majority of our population, they can make the free society dream turn a reality sooner," he says.

HOW EXPERT CLIENTS STRENGTHEN SERVICES

Under Uganda's revised National HIV Testing Services policy and implementation guidelines (June 2022), expert clients are formally recognised under section 6.4.2 (a) as part of community-based delivery models.

Dr Henry Mwebasa, the director general of health services, said the update followed a review of the 2016 HIV Testing Services policy.

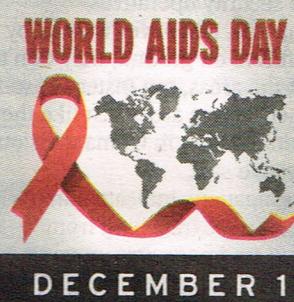
Under the policy, peer leaders — drawn from targeted populations — will be identified and trained in HIV self-testing and basic counselling. They will receive kits and data collection tools weekly and be attached to health facilities or drop-in-centres for supervision. Peer leaders must also report back to their supervising facility on a weekly basis.

WHAT OTHERS SAY

Joyce Nangobi, Serema's grandmother: "He saved my grandson and linked us to support for nutrition."

Sadik Matege, a person living with HIV, says: "He advised me to test eight years ago and still delivers my ARVs."

Gloria Nakanjako, also living with HIV, says: "He encouraged me to test and now ensures I get my medication."



He estimates that his work may have helped over 1,800 people living with HIV over 15 years.

For 19-year-old Sowedi Serema, Mujubu's intervention was lifesaving.

"I started falling sick in 2018, but my grandmother only bought drugs from the village shop. Mujubu spotted me and advised me to test for HIV and I was diagnosed positive," Serema says.

Mujubu keeps in touch with Serema's grandmother and aunt to ensure strict adherence to ARVs.

Similarly, Lydia Naigaga, who discovered her HIV status during antenatal care, found refuge in Mujubu's outreach.

"I fled to the village after my husband refused to go for an HIV test. Mujubu's visits encouraged me to open up, and he linked me to Nambaale Health Centre, where I now attend voluntary counselling and testing every week," she says.

Stephen Musana, the officer in charge at the health centre, praises Mujubu's efforts. "His selfless approach has encouraged even sex workers to seek care."