

Tribute

Dr Batwala: A life devoted to helping women conceive

Even after formal retirement, he remained active in private practice, driven by what colleagues and family describe as a deep sense of calling to serve women struggling with infertility.

BY STEPHEN OTAGE

Family and friends of one of Uganda's pioneering obstetricians and gynaecologists and a trailblazer in fertility medicine, Dr Ignatius James Batwala, have described him as a man of unwavering dedication, humility, and compassion.

Dr Batwala died on December 31, 2025 at the age of 89, ending a medical career that spanned more than six decades and touched the lives of thousands of families.

Unlike many civil servants who retire quietly after decades of service, Dr Batwala devoted virtually his entire adult life to medicine, continuing to attend to patients well into his advanced years.

Even after formal retirement, he remained active in private practice, driven by what colleagues and family describe as a deep sense of calling to serve women struggling with infertility.

Born on October 10, 1936, to Kosamu Tuliraba, a lay reader in the Anglican Church, and Akusa Kantono Namwambe, Dr Batwala trained as a medical doctor and graduated in 1965.

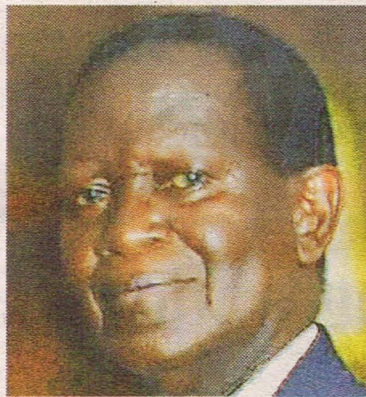
He later specialised in obstetrics and gynaecology and pursued further studies in the United Kingdom, where he earned a Master's degree and a fellowship of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists in Edinburgh, returning to Uganda as one of the country's earliest experts in fertility medicine.

He was posted to Mulago National Referral Hospital in the early 1970s, at a time when obstetrics and gynaecology were still evolving specialties in Uganda. Former students recall a strict but deeply committed teacher who emphasised professionalism, accountability, and patient-centred care.

Prof Florence Mirembe, one of his contemporaries, recalls meeting Dr Batwala in 1974 when she was an intern at Makerere University Medical School. She described him as punctual, meticulous, and unwavering in his expecta-



Ms Aidah Batwala, the widow of the late Dr Ignatius James Batwala, lays a wreath on the casket bearing his remains during the funeral service at St Luke's Church Ntinda at the weekend. PHOTO/STEPHEN OTAGE



The late Dr Ignatius James Batwala

tions of young doctors, often conducting night rounds himself and insisting that interns respond to emergency calls regardless of the hour, long before the era of mobile phones.

"He taught us how to be doctors," Prof Mirembe said, adding that he discouraged shortcuts and demanded responsibility to patients, families, and the wider community.

When a patient died, he would sit with the responsible doctor to review what went wrong, nurturing a culture of accountability.

Dr Batwala's influence extended far beyond Mulago. Prof Rev Dr Sam Luboga, one of his former students, said the gynaecologist "reproduced himself" by mentoring generations of doctors in Uganda, the region and beyond.

FAMILY

Dr Ignatius James Batwala is survived by his widow, Aidah Batwala, eight children, several grandchildren, and many dependents whose lives he supported.

He was widely respected for his depth of knowledge and his rare sensitivity to women's health issues, earning admiration from female colleagues for his understanding of reproductive medicine.

In 1970, driven by a desire to expand access to fertility care, Dr Batwala founded Fiona Clinic in Kampala, the first private fertility clinic in the city. Through the clinic, he helped countless couples conceive and popularised fertility medicine in Uganda. He worked there for 60 years, including 45 years as a senior consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist.

Beyond medicine, Dr Batwala was known for his humility, compassion, and strong Christian faith. A former schoolmate, Prof Perez Bukumunhe, described him as a disciplined student at Busoga College Mwiriri in the 1950s, quiet, confident and deeply committed to learning. He loved his Bible, sports, and music, and embodied the values of missionary education.

His compassion was particularly evident in his service to rural commu-

nities. His son, Moses Batwala, said the doctor regularly treated women for free during visits to his village in Muguluka, Jinja District, eventually inspiring the establishment of Nawansega Health Centre to support pregnant mothers and safe deliveries.

During the turbulent 1970s, when many doctors fled the country, Dr Batwala chose to remain in Uganda despite the risks, saying that leaving would mean abandoning "his women." His dedication never wavered, even in his final days, when patients continued to call seeking appointments.

Dr Batwala died on December 31 after suffering an aortic aneurysm. His family says he passed on peacefully, having lived 17 years beyond a triple heart surgery in 1996, far exceeding doctors' expectations at the time.

He is remembered not only for helping women conceive but also for his wider public service. He served on the boards of governors of several schools, including Gayaza High School and Wanyange Girls School, was a member of the Lions Club, played a key role in efforts to eradicate river blindness, and served as a deputy minister of health in Busoga Kingdom.

At his funeral service at St Luke's Church, Ntinda at the weekend, the family requested mourners to donate towards completing Nawansega Health Centre instead of buying wreaths, reflecting the values that defined his life.