

# Midwife fighting for lives of Mbale mothers

At Mbale Regional Referral Hospital, Proscovia Auma has spent decades on the frontlines of maternal care, saving lives with skill, compassion, and unshakable determination. From overcoming her own hardships as an orphan to mentoring the next generation of midwives, Auma refuses to give up on mothers, even in the face of loss, long hours, and limited resources.

BY BEATRICE NAKIBUUKA

At the busy maternity ward of Mbale Regional Referral Hospital, where the cries of newborns signal both relief and new beginnings, Proscovia Auma stands as a quiet but powerful force.

At 41, she is a nursing officer in midwifery, a mentor, a mother figure, and a symbol of resilience shaped by hardship, determination, and compassion. For Auma, midwifery is not just a profession; it is a deeply personal mission rooted in her own life experiences.

Auma's journey began with loss. She lost her father at the age of five and was raised by relatives and well-wishers. Resources were limited, and like many orphaned children in Uganda, she relied on the goodwill of extended family to stay in school. One teenage incident left a lasting mark; when her cousin became a teenage mother, instead of support, she faced harsh criticism from relatives.

"I saw how she was treated, and I promised myself that I would be different. I focused on my education because I knew it was my only way out," she recalls. That promise became the foundation of her life's journey.

## Education, professional journey

Although she was offered an Arts combination at A-Level, Auma's heart was set on science. Determined to pursue her dream, she used her O-Level results to enrol in nursing school after completing Senior Six.

She graduated in 2007 with a certificate in midwifery from Kamuli School of Nursing and Midwifery, often struggling to pay school fees and relying on well-wishers. Despite setbacks, includ-

## Tragedy.

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- Proscovia Auma, midwife



## LIFE LESSONS FROM AUMA FOR WOMEN IN HEALTHCARE

- Persistence pays off: Even when the world says no, keep going.
- Leadership is service: Guide and mentor others to multiply impact.
- Motherhood is beyond biology: Love, care, and compassion define motherhood.
- Embrace lifelong learning: Never stop upgrading your skills.
- Celebrate every success: Every safe delivery is a victory worth cherishing.

**Beyond patient care.** Auma has taken on mentorship and leadership roles, helping improve maternal health outcomes at Mbale Regional Referral Hospital. PHOTO/COURTESY.

ing having to retake exams and face criticism from relatives who wanted her to become a teacher, she pressed on, determined to prove her worth.

Her career took her from Kamuli to Mbale Regional Referral Hospital in 2011. While working, she continued upgrading her qualifications under challenging circumstances, earning a diploma in midwifery (2017), an advanced diploma in Health Services Management from Islamic University in Uganda (2019), a Bachelor's degree in Midwifery (2023), and a post-graduate qualification in medical ed-

ucation (2024).

"I studied a lot even when I was not being promoted," she says. "There was a time a caretaker insulted me after we lost a mother. They said I was incompetent. That pushed me even more. I wanted to prove that I was capable."

## The highs and lows of midwifery

Midwifery brings both joy and heartbreak. Auma has witnessed the full spectrum of life, from the excitement of safe deliveries to the sorrow of maternal deaths.

"One case I will never forget involved a mother with a dead baby in her womb due to high blood pressure. We stabilised her and induced labour. She delivered, but developed complications and started bleeding heavily. We tried everything, but we lost her," she recalls, her voice heavy with emotion. "I remember holding her body and crying. I could not continue working that night. My colleagues had to step in."

Yet, it is the successes that keep her going.

"Whenever I see a mother leaving the hospital with her baby, I feel so good," she says, smiling.

## Leadership and mentorship

Beyond patient care, Auma has taken on mentorship and leadership roles, helping improve maternal health outcomes at Mbale Regional Referral Hospital. With support from Seed Global Health, the hospital's maternal mortality ratio dropped from 1,117 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2024 to 594 in 2025, a 47 percent reduction, translating into five more mothers' lives saved per 1,000 births.

These improvements were driven by mentorship programmes, bedside teaching for medical and nursing students from Busitema University, continuous professional support for midwives and doctors, improved referral systems, and innovations like better blood distribution and specialist outreach services. Regular maternal and newborn mortality reviews ensure accountability and continuous learning.

"These changes mean fewer preventable deaths and more families going home complete," Auma says.

## Motherhood beyond biology

Her compassion extends beyond the hospital walls. In December 2017, a teenage mother abandoned a newborn at the hospital. With no facility to care for the child, authorities turned to Auma. She adopted the baby, and later adopted another abandoned child, raising both as her own.

"You do not have to carry a baby in your womb to be a mother," she says.

## A typical day

A typical day begins at home, preparing her children, and continues at the hospital, where she reviews reports, checks supplies, assigns roles, supervises patient care, and ensures the ward runs smoothly. The maternity ward handles between 24 and 30 deliveries daily (about 700 births each month), including both normal and caesarean sections.

"It is a busy ward. You have to be alert all the time," she says.

Challenges remain; staffing shortages, long hours, and the emotional strain of unpredictable medical emergencies make midwifery demanding. Yet Auma continues to show up day after day, a true example of resilience and dedication.