

Rotary intervention transforms newborn care

By Richard Ategeka

Mothers of critically ill newborns at China-Uganda Friendship Hospital, Naguru, are experiencing renewed dignity and comfort following a modest, but high-impact intervention that has transformed their caregiving environment.

For years, mothers with babies admitted to the neonatal unit endured harsh conditions, sleeping on benches or in tents, often far from their infants.

But a newly refurbished space, created through a partnership with the Rotary Club of Muyenga (Kikubamutwe Buddy Group), is changing that reality.

Dr Albert Kamugisha, the hospital's head of paediatrics, said the improvement directly enhances both maternal well-being and newborn care outcomes.

"Previously, mothers would be seated in a tent outside or on benches, and we had to keep calling them from a distance. But now they are much closer to

From left: Balaka, Felix Osike, the Vision Group deputy editor-in-chief, Lule, Jane Kabbale and Kamugisha during the handover of a newly refurbished space occupied by mothers with babies admitted to the neonatal unit



PHOTO BY PONSIANO NSIMBI

their babies, more comfortable and that makes them better partners in care," he explained.

The hospital admits approximately 250 children each month, with nearly half being newborns under one month old. Many are born prematurely with complications or referred from lower-level

health facilities across the region. On any given day, the neonatal unit handles between 15 and 20 babies, underscoring the intense demand for services.

At the same time, the hospital operates beyond capacity, handling about 150 admitted patients daily, despite being designed for only 100.

Annually, the China-Uganda Friendship Hospital attends to nearly 180,000 outpatients, reflecting a significant healthcare burden. It is within this context that Rotarians stepped in. David Balaka, a member of the Rotary Club of Muyenga, said the initiative aligns with Rotary's focus on

BENEFICIARIES SPEAK OUT

For mothers like Miriam Ndyaguma from Luzira, the change is deeply personal. "After giving birth, we would have nowhere to sleep. It was congested and hard. Now we can rest and the doctors can easily find us when our babies need breastfeeding."

The hospital leadership emphasised that such improvements go beyond comfort and are central to what is known as family-centred newborn care, where parents actively participate in treatment.

"When the mother is comfortable and happy, she becomes a better treatment supporter for the child," Kamugisha noted.

Despite the progress, the hospital continues to face critical challenges, including under-staffing, limited equipment and inadequate infrastructure.

"We need more hands, more equipment and expanded space," he said, adding that partnerships like the one with Rotary were essential in helping them bridge those gaps.

As patient numbers continue to rise, the China-Uganda Friendship Hospital experience highlights how even small, targeted interventions can deliver powerful results, thereby restoring dignity to mothers and improving survival chances for vulnerable patients.

maternal and child health.

"We found mothers struggling outside in tents, yet they are critical in feeding and caring for these babies," he said, adding: "We created a dedicated space close to the ward where they can rest, sleep and safely keep their belongings."

The intervention involved converting a hospital corridor

into a functional resting area complete with mosquito nets and secure storage.

According to Rotarian Mathew Lule, the impact was immediate. "The success is already visible. Mothers are using the space; they are more comfortable and they can easily attend to their babies," he noted.