

Priscillar Nyamahunge

Mustard Seed Babies' Home, a Church of Uganda-founded institution, opened in 1993 with five children in Hoima town. Joy Katwesige is one of the many people who have gone through the hands of the home. "My mother was a pauper. When

## Background story: Mother abandons Katwesige

she came to Masindi district after leaving Arua district, life became very difficult. She dumped me on the streets," Katwesige says.

Her mother was seen by another woman abandoning the toddler. "After being picked up, I was brought here at Mustard Seed Babies'

Home," she says.

About five years later, Katwesige's mother visited the babies' home. "One day, when I returned from

school, I was told that my mother had come to visit me. I told them I was already staying with my mother at the home and did not know the person who had come to visit me," Katwesige says.

"She, however, did not give up visiting. I later got accustomed to her visits," Katwesige says with a smile.

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Joy Katwesige, 21, was two weeks old when she was adopted by Mustard Seed Babies' Home, a place she now calls home.

A short and small-bodied jolly young woman, clad in black trousers and black sleeveless blouse, Katwesige is a person one would never tell was abandoned by her mother.

Singing and dancing to the music playing in the school compound, she joins other girls and women to arrange the tables and chairs, doing so neatly with the swiftness and expertise of one who has been raised by responsible parents.

With plaited hair falling onto her back, Katwesige smiles, jumps and shakes her waist when a new song plays and sings her heart out.

Once in a while, she pokes the younger children and teases them to do what she has advised and before rewarding them later with sweets. With a smile, she says 'hello' and rushes off.

Katwesige, whose parents lived in Arua district, separated a few days after she was born.

Her mother moved to Masindi district when she was a week old.

While in Arua, Katwesige's mother had been working as a helper in a home, whose family offered to take custody of the older girl.

### Tragedy strikes

When Katwesige grew fond of her biological mother, tragedy struck and she was involved in a motor accident.

"Mother came to visit while still nursing injuries from an accident. She had some documents which she said she wanted to hand over to the warden. Unfortunately, the warden was not around and mother went back with them. Later, I was told that they were legal documents regarding some property. The most unfortunate part is that I never saw her again because I was told she had passed on," Katwesige says with tears welling in her eyes and her voice quivering.

"I do not know any relative. Not even my sister who was adopted. This is my home," Katwesige says.

**Katwesige was raised by Mustard Seed Babies Home**

# Mustard Seed: A children's SANCTUARY



Hameiri (left), the operations manager of SBC (Uganda) Limited, handing over some of the gifts to the children at Mustard Seed Babies' Home last week. Photos by Priscillar Nyamahunge

### Education

Coping with a loss of her mother was not easy because they had bonded.

She, however, says she did not give up and focused on her education.

Katwesige went to Sunshine Nursery School, Hoima Parents' Nursery and

Primary

School, Trinity Primary School, St Jude Primary school and later Canon Njangala Secondary School for her O'level.

"After Senior Four, I went to Millennium Business School and did a certificate in hotel management and catering. I later went to Reproductive Health Uganda and enrolled for a course in guidance and counselling," Katwesige says.

She is now guiding and counselling youth in the Bunyoro sub-region through health education and leadership skills.

"The Management of the babies' home located my brother in Masindi, but he never turned up to meet them, she says.

"I am happy that I have people who love and care for me at the home, but I miss the children I grew up with, who have been taken away by their relatives. It is hard seeing them leave," Katwesige adds.

### Background

According to the Rev. James Mbabazi, the warden of the babies' home, Mustard Seed, which is under the stewardship of the Church

of Uganda, was founded in 1993 with five children and was located in Hoima town.

"We now have 86 children. Thirty-five have been resettled, while 51 are residents of the home. Of the resettled, 17 are female. And of the residents, 18 are female," he says.

The home, which is located in Isaka Kijungu village in Hoima municipality, sits on five acres. It has a banana and sugarcane farm in Bulera and Butema villages in Hoima district.

The home is funded by the Mustard Seed Project, based in the UK, but also gets donations from Good Samaritans.

Last week, SBC (Uganda) Limited constructed washrooms and donated an assortment of items, including toys, towels, blankets, handbags, shoes, a swing and a bouncy castle to the home.

According to SBC (Uganda) operations manager, Dotan Hameiri, the donation was worth sh45m.

"It is our role as stakeholders to work together and ensure that we improve the livelihoods of the vulnerable children in the district. Organisations should also put aside part of

their budgets to help needy children," Hameiri says.

Bishop Samuel Kahuma of Bunyoro-Kitara Diocese said the home was established partially to address the issue of orphans.

"Many have found it a sanctuary and we give glory to God," Kahuma says.

### Challenges

The Rev. Mbabazi said the home needs a spacious health facility.

"The sick bay can only accommodate three children. We need a bigger one," he says.

Mbabazi adds that the facility lacks enough reading material and that the reading room is also small.

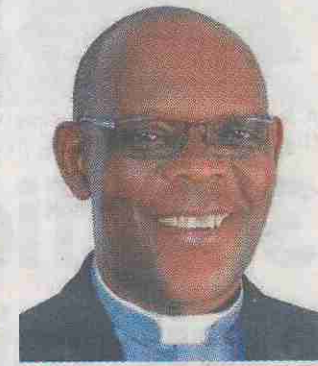
Mbabazi says they are looking for funding to set up a kindergarten for toddlers in the home, instead of enrolling them in other schools.

About 50% of the children at the home are below 10.

### Adoption fears

Mbabazi says two people have approached him seeking to adopt children from the home, but he was not keen on accepting the offers.

## What they say



**BISHOP**

Bishop Samuel Kahuma of Bunyoro-Kitara Diocese: Some of the children who have grown up from Mustard Seed have graduated, but are not yet employed.



**MAYOR**

Mary Grace Mugasa, mayor Hoima municipality: Children in orphanage centres need love and care. Whoever can afford to spare time and money, should always visit such centres because it makes the children realise that they are loved by the community.

"We want to ascertain the wellbeing of our children before giving them out. One of the issues we are to consider is the financial stability of the person. Besides, there are many child traffickers. Before handing over the children, the home shall consult the children's rights' organs," Mbabazi says.

He, however, says if people adopted some children, it would create room for others in the home.

"For those who are brought after losing their mother at birth or at a tender age, we trace their relatives. We resettle the children when we are sure that they are out of danger," Mbabazi says.