

HOPE FOR WOMEN WITH MENTAL HEALTH

By Joseph Bahingwire

After undertaking a number of rehabilitating homeless people with disabilities on the streets of Kampala, Mental Health Uganda (MHU) realised that even when the needs of people living with mental health issues are similar, they are not quite the same since women have more challenges than their male counterparts.

HOPE MHU has therefore introduced a project that aims at providing hope to the mentally ill women on the streets. Barbara Lamara, the project leader at Mental Health Uganda, says in 2010 they conducted a one-year pilot project to rehabilitate homeless people living with mental health challenges



Christine Kayesu a client who was Rehabilitated from the streets and now has a liquid soap business

on the streets of Kampala by providing them with the first line treatment, counselling, and referral to psychiatric hospitals for further management and rehabilitation. She says during the project implementation, MHU learnt that even

when the needs of people living with mental health challenges are similar, they are not the same since homeless women with mental health challenges have a wider range of needs as they can hardly bathe, they do not have access to sanitary pads and if they

SINCE JUNE 2020, 521 HOMELESS WOMEN WITH MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES HAVE BEEN OBSERVED BY THE PROJECT TEAM.

get pregnant, they are unable to take good care of themselves and their children as well as access to reproductive health services. "In 2018 we decided to focus on women and their children through the project: ACCESS TO HEALTH IS MY RIGHT". Since June 2020, 521 homeless women with mental health challenges have been observed by the project team. This Project has brought a new dawn with a sharp ray of hope to these women," Lamara said. The project follows a

Reunion model that entails reaching out to homeless women with mental health challenges on the streets of Kampala. The women are given psychosocial support, rehabilitated and referred for specialised care where necessary. They are then finally reunited with their families and communities. Lamara said the women are also attached to peer support groups in their communities to provide them with emotional support and foster friendships which facilitates social interactions among

the women so that they can assume responsibility and have a sense of belonging.

DROP-IN CENTRES

UMH has first drop-in centres for these women with one at Rubaga hosted at the main centre. In order to bring services closer to women in the different divisions of Kampala, MHU, in partnership with KCCA, established two transit centres at Komamboga and Kiswa Health Centres to serve women from Kawempe and Nakawa divisions respectively with psychosocial support.

The project has a legal aid desk that handles cases of abuse of the women. The common offences reported by the women are sexual abuse, assault and trespass to land. The project staff offer tele counselling to women and online follow up on the phone number **0778 035128/0701 748185**.