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Nalubinga taking fight for albinos' rights by the horns



Inspiring. Shamirah Nalubinga. PHOTO BY CHRISPUS MUKE

In Summary

- She is also a motivational speaker and an active member of several associations at the

By Fred Wambede & Chrispus Muke

when Shamirah Nalubinga, a student

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strength throughout her life.

- She says they need also to create awareness for the need to strengthen our legal and institutional framework for the protection and promotion of the rights of people with albinism.

of nothing else but the struggle and difficulties she has gone through to fit in society due to her skin condition.

Nalubinga is a passionate defender of the rights of people with albinism, especially on her radio programme, Campus Explosion, which is aired on IUIU FM every Sunday. She is also a motivational speaker

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and an active member of several associations at the university. "Sometimes, I hate associating with albinos because they remind me of what I am and what I have been going through all my life. It actually scares me and I feel uncomfortable but when I gain strength, I tell myself the truth, which is that I am one of them and I must do something for

the unborn so that they find a better world," Nalubinga says with a smile.

In her early 20s, Nalubinga, a second year student of Mass Communication, says while growing up, she used to fear to go to the nearby trading centres because she could not go through without people pointing fingers at her.

"I could see rejection in the people's faces but that did not stop me from hoping for a better future. I was only loved and cherished by my mother," she says.

Background

Nalubinga is the daughter of Ismaili Katamba and Jannat Nakazinga, both residents of Nakinyugui village, Makindye Division in Kampala. She was brought up in a polygamous family with 20 siblings where she was the 11th born.

She went to Luwafu Primary School in Kampala and after completing Primary Seven, she joined Mbogo Senior Secondary School, where she got 17 points in Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education (UACE).

"People need to appreciate and know us as human beings because isolating us and calling us names like Namagoya (albino), hurt us," she says.

She adds that faith in God has been her strength throughout her life.

Nalubinga, who says she has survived two kidnap attempts, started her campaign of fighting for the rights of people with albinism while at high school.

"The children born with albinism are just like other children, only that they have a skin condition," he says, adding that they are brilliant and talented as well.

She says due to her strong criticism against discrimination at her school, teachers and students started changing their perception against students with albinism.

Initial successes

"I became talkative about what I believed in and this also helped me to fight stigma because students could then convene near us and we discuss various issues," she says.

When they broke off for holidays, she would carry the same message to the community members, including religious leaders.

"I started lecturing people at home and at the mosque that albinos have a normal lifespan and can do what other people can do in life," Nalubinga says.

However, she says at one point after prayers at the mosque, one of the women insulted her, insinuating that albinos are born as a result of women having sexual intercourse with ghosts.

"The woman pointed at me and said producing children like me is as a result of my mother sleeping with ghosts. It broke me down for a while but I gained more confidence and I confronted her in public," she says.

At this point, Nalubinga realised that the journey for the people living with albinism was not easy.

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“I knew the stigma, prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination against people living with albinism, cannot be won easily but through collective and massive sensitisation, especially in rural communities,” she says.

The activist says she has written a script to start a programme on Salam Television and Pearl FM in Kampala to fight for the rights of persons with disabilities and other minority groups.

“I am going to use my background of journalism to fight for our rights and the misfits in our communities against us,” Nalubinga says.

Efforts

She has formed an activist group, which is recording cases of persecution and mistreatment of albinos in the country.

“If we cannot fight for our own rights, then no one will. That is why we want to start and others will find us on the way. We want to champion the issues of people with albinism at a national level,” she says.

She adds that even the government has not done much in providing albinos with a conducive environment to freely express themselves as part of the society.

“We need umbrellas, caps, sunglasses and sun – protection creams, which should be distributed to us free of charge like the government is doing with HIV/Aids patients who are provided with ARVs, but it not being done (for albinos) for reasons we do not know,” she says.

She says the government should also support organisations fighting for rights of people living with albinism with funds to start upcountry offices for easy advocacy against the wrong public perceptions, including the myth that albinos' body parts are potent recipes in traditional medicine and other issues.

She says they need also to create awareness for the need to strengthen our legal and institutional framework for the protection and promotion of the rights of people with albinism.

“Our legal and institutional framework is still weak and there is need to strengthen it,” she says.

HER VIEW

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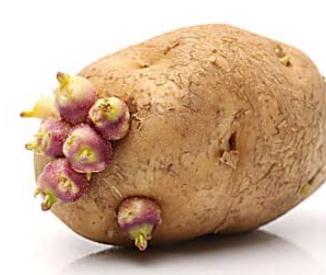
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