

I pioneered testube babies

Publication date: Sunday, 2nd November, 2008



Dr. Tamale Sali is the director of the International Women's Hospital in Bukoto near Kampala. **Susan Muiyi** talked to the brains behind the first test tube baby in East and Central Africa

What do you remember most about your childhood?

I loved playing gogolo (a children's game where they slide downhill while sitting on the bark of a palm tree) so much that my mother had to replace my pants every two weeks.

We were very poor. My dad was a policeman and my mother a traditional midwife. My mother did all she could to pay my school fees from her meagre earnings.

I escorted her to the bananaplantation whenever she had to deliver babies. She would clear an area and place banana leaves on the ground before performing her midwife duties.

I helped with the basins and water. I was at her side when she gave birth to my younger sister. I was just five at the time. She asked me to wait nearby in case she needed me to call for help while she delivered her baby singlehandedly.

I grew to love what she did, especially the times when mothers returned to thank her.

When was your turning point?

The day I joined Lubiri Secondary School. It was an honour to attend a government- aided school. Before moving to Lubiri, I was one of the pioneers of a very bad private school in Masaka because I hadn't done well enough to join secondary school.

For two years I walked 20 miles a day to and from school to attend primary school. On getting home, I would have to fetch water half a mile away. I went to bed at 9:00pm and by 4:00am I would begin walking to school.

I always got there too exhausted to concentrate on my studies. By God's grace, I came 17th out of 40 students in the third term of S2.

At the time the Ministry of Education followed a very strict policy when it came to approving a school as an examination centre for students taking science students. Lubiri SS didn't meet all the requirements.

However, the headmaster presented our case before the education ministry, and thank God our centre was approved.

Despite the limited facilities at Lubiri SS, I excelled and was admitted on merit to Makerere College School. The British government granted me and a few others who had passed highly a medical scholarship at Oxford University.

However, it was cancelled due to the political instability during the Obote I regime.

Although, I had been admitted at Mulago Medical School, I reported four months late because of this delay. But, I was able to go to Oxford in fifth year to complete my medical studies.

My other defining moment was when I gave my life to Jesus when I was 15 years old.

Is it possible to determine the sex of the child you want?

Yes, the technology is available but quite expensive. We have plans to bring in the necessary equipment, so hopefully we will soon be able to offer that service.

Is there hope for men with infertility?

Before 1993 there was none. However, a technique through which the sperm is injected into a woman's egg was discovered. It is much easier to treat infertility in men (low sperm count or none at all) than in women.

Do you plan to retire soon?

Doctors don't retire, there is no such thing as retirement in my profession. I intend to work for as long as I can.

Do you double as a preacher of the gospel?

I got the conviction to start Faith and Science, a Christian programme on Light House Television to share the mystery of creation. It doesn't offend me that some people think that I am simply wasting time; I believe that I have a justifiable cause.

If a person can make noise in the park, why can't I inform people about God's salvation and his plan for their lives

5 things about Tamale Ssali

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

It is very important for people to get married when they are still young because they will then have ample time to love their wives and enjoy the company of their children as they grow up.

When you marry late, you may not be able to play football with them. I married late because at the time, marrying while still in school was unheard of.

Marriage takes away a lot of misery that is why; if a girl is 16 and wants to get married she should be allowed to do so whether she is in school or not.

However, people shouldn't be forced to marry for the sake of it. I don't think that building huge houses is wise, unless you live in the Middle East where your married children and their partners are culturally expected to live in the same house with you.

A time comes when the children leave home to find work or get married. What will you do with the house then? I stay in a two-bedroomed flat. My wife and I reserve another flat for any of our five kids when they visit.

HOBBIES I support Chelsea football club in the English Premier League because my son does. I also love playing the piano. I like our traditional music because it is very rich.

A MAN WITH MANY FACES I am amazed by the mystery of creation. Plants and human beings have many similarities. I grow spices on my farm. I am a pastor and I love designing buildings — I worked closely with the architect to draw a suitable plan for the hospital building.

In case I go back to school, I would love to study architecture. I have six degrees, including one in surgery.

JOURNEY TO THE TOP

I opted for gynaecology because there were fewer deaths compared to paediatrics and other areas of medicine. In a space of two years I had delivered 100 mothers.

After completing my first degree in the United Kingdom, I worked in Kuwait and in a time frame of three years we had sent many patients to the UK for In Vitro Fertilisation (IVF) treatment at a cost of almost \$2m. Our patients didn't want to travel and sometimes when they did there were no results to show.

In 1987 I asked the director of the hospital at which I was working to give me a chance to study IVF. Like they say the rest is history, for 10 years, I worked in that field.

By the grace of God, in 2004 I came back to Uganda to start the first facility to offer IVF treatment in East and Central Africa.

International Women's Hospital will provide some of the best maternity services in the country.

A FAMILY OF MEDICS

Two of my children will soon become doctors. All my sisters are midwives and nurses. My elder brother was a doctor and my sister's children are all doctors.

This article can be found on-line at: <http://www.newvision.co.ug/D/8/12/657640>

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