

# A Fistula Survivor's Message

“My name is Sifa. I got married when I was 16. At the time, I was working in Kampala as a housekeeper, and one year later I got pregnant. During this time, my husband and I disagreed on how I should deliver the baby. I went to the doctor for regular check-ups and was told I should go to the hospital when I was due, but my husband didn't agree and sent me back to our village for the delivery.

The day I started having labor pains, I told my sister I wanted to go to the hospital. I had given her money for the transportation expenses earlier, but she had spent it on other things. So, instead, she walked me to the home of a traditional birth attendant. There, I spent five days in labor, in pain. I was told to push, but the baby died while I was pushing. The birth attendant became afraid, because she thought she might be arrested for harming me. Finally, she got a car to take me to the hospital.

When I got to the hospital, I received surgery, where the baby was removed. But my troubles did not end there. I started leaking urine like tap water after that. I suffered a lot. My husband left me. My mother didn't help me. And I couldn't fit in with people.

I had no money, and my mother refused to give me any. For 11 years I suffered like this, with no options. But then I heard on the radio that doctors could treat women with fistula at the Kitovu Mission Hospital. I had few possessions, but finally, I sold my goat and had enough money to get to the hospital. There, the doctors and nurses counseled me and told me I'd be okay. I got an operation, and thankfully, they were right.

I have a message for others: I want to tell pregnant women who hear my story that they must always go to the hospital, instead of delivering in villages. I'm so happy now; I've remarried, and I hope to have another child soon.”



For more than a decade, Sifa suffered from fistula, alone and in despair. But after receiving repair surgery, she has been able to start a new life. Sifa and other fistula clients, including Jane, Mastula, and Federesi (pictured below), have shared their stories through digital videos, which can be viewed online at [www.engenderhealth.org/fistula-ds/](http://www.engenderhealth.org/fistula-ds/).



*The digital stories were produced by the ACQUIRE Project, led by EngenderHealth, and the Center for Digital Storytelling.*

Millions of women and girls suffer from obstetric fistula, a condition caused by obstructed labor that results in incontinence and severe social stigma. Fistula can be prevented through emergency obstetric care and repaired through surgery, and at hospitals like Kitovu Mission Hospital in Uganda, EngenderHealth is training doctors to perform

the procedure. Engenderhealth meets the comprehensive needs of women with fistula by training doctors and raising awareness in communities about how to prevent fistula and where to access treatment. In addition, we provide counseling and support to women as they reenter family and community life after repair. Our fistula program, spanning more

than 10 countries, is an important part of our overall goal to make motherhood safer. We work to ensure health care providers are better equipped to provide women with high-quality obstetric care, can prevent and repair fistula, offer critical postabortion care, and prevent postpartum hemorrhage and mother-to-child transmission of HIV.