

## Wiping Away Tears of Women Living with Albinism in Western Uganda

By WUFBON TEAM



*An albino woman speaks at a WUFBON forum*

### Introduction

People living with albinism in western Uganda face multiple physical, psychological, and social challenges, similar to those experienced in other parts of the world. These challenges are even more severe for women with albinism, who must navigate both oppressive gender norms and practices inherent in their cultural context and the challenges associated with their physical appearances. This brief summarises the impact of the Western Uganda FBOs Network (WUFBON) in its efforts to address the plight of women with albinism. WUFBON implemented its interventions in Bundibujjo district from 2021 to 2023.

### Albinism in Western Uganda

In western Uganda, individuals with albinism encounter various forms of oppressive practices. They face discrimination, segregation, abuse, humiliation (both overt and covert), limited educational opportunities, and violations of their sexual and reproductive health rights. These

practices stem from negative myths, outdated religious beliefs, and a lack of understanding about albinism. Consequently, families hold deeply negative beliefs about children born with albinism, viewing them as abnormal, excluding them from family relationships, undermining their self-confidence, instilling feelings of guilt and shame, and, in the worst cases, considering them a curse from ancestors or God. The situation is particularly dire for women with albinism, as they must also contend with the challenges of their physical appearance and visual impairment, in addition to the marginalisation they face as women. WUFBON aimed to address this pain, as well as the resulting sorrow and tears, when implementing interventions for people with albinism in Bundibujjo district.

### Wiping Away Tears: WUFBON's Impacts

WUFBON implemented various activities to empower women living with albinism, alleviate their pain and sorrow, and wipe away their tears.

These activities included regular counselling sessions, group meetings where women living with albinism shared their stories, support groups, and training in various livelihood skills. Other interventions involved including them in all other WUFBON activities such as edutainment forums, SRHR trainings, community outreaches, and interfaith prayer sessions. These activities achieved various outcomes and impacts, as testified by participants. For example, one woman explained, "I believe that I wasn't a welcome addition to the family because my parents regarded me negatively and treated me differently from the other children.

However, participating in WUFBON's activities has given me self-confidence. Now I believe I am a normal human being like everybody else and I live my life." Another woman expressed similar sentiments: "My parents found me and my sister, who is also an albino, as an embarrassment to the family. One time, a pastor informed me that someone in our family had placed a death curse on us because we shamed the family. Meeting women with a similar problem in WUFBON meetings has assured us that we are normal and albinism is not a curse."

A third woman had a much worse experience when her grandmother humiliated her in public. "One day, Mom took us for an outing. We saw our grandmother on the same bus. We kept calling out to her, 'Grandma! Grandma!', but she moved away from us quickly.

She refused to accept us as her grandchildren in public because we were albinos," she narrated. However, she has changed her attitude and forgiven everybody who rejected her after attending WUFBON's support group and interfaith forums. "WUFBON helped me accept myself as I was born. I have forgiven my grandmother. I now believe that God created me differently for a purpose. I am a normal woman and live my life to its full."

There is also the case of the woman whose parents attempted to throw her away as a child. "They dropped me at someone's home and didn't come back for me," she explained, wiping her tears. Such rejection by her parents was extremely painful and sorrowful. She avoided mirrors and would cry every time she thought about her physical appearance.

However, she started changing after attending WUFBON's activities. "I thank WUFBON for making me accept myself and for wiping away my tears. I now know I am a normal woman like everybody else. I have forgiven my parents for rejecting me." Such incidents extended from home to schools, where girls living with albinism could not join their peers in group work or sports.

In the worst cases, others experienced physical assault by their peers because they were physically different. However, WUFBON changed the way women and girls living with albinism viewed themselves, regarded albinism, and their attitudes towards their families and other members of society who had rejected them.

### **Conclusion**

Evidence from the valleys of western Uganda shows that WUFBON achieved positive impacts through its projects and activities that addressed the plight of women and girls living with albinism in the region. These women and girls experienced the debilitating double effects of living with albinism and being women in a cultural context characterised by negative gender norms. Among others, WUFBON's interventions positively changed the way these women viewed themselves as women and members of their families and societies, as well as their attitudes and views towards others who had rejected them.

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