



# Save the Mothers International

Dr Jean Chamberlain  
Froese

Founding Director—Save the Mothers  
(Uganda)

Associate Professor—McMaster  
University

What's going on?

# Save the Mothers East Africa -Board -East African Director







Over 400 professionals have been trained under the MPHIL programme. Dr Chamberlain (right), says the programme has groomed leaders who are taking over

## Chamberlain hands over baton

Dr Jean Chamberlain Froese is the founding director of Save The Mothers East Africa, a non-government organisation under Uganda Christian University. The doctor, who has trained 440 professionals in public health leadership, recently handed over the office to return to Canada. She shared her story with John Semakula



Dr Chamberlain after she symbolically wrapped with Dr Mutabazi with a shawl to signify handover of leadership. This was at the handover ceremony recently

At exactly 2:45pm, Dr Jean Chamberlain Froese stood up from her metal seat in a lecture room on Mirembe Block at Uganda Christian University (UCU) and peeped through the window. When she noticed a familiar face standing outside, she packed her belongings and walked out. "Sorry gentlemen if I kept you waiting," she said politely.

I had made an appointment with her between 2:30pm and 2:45pm at UCU, where the obstetrician/gynaecologist has worked for the last 12 years.

Chamberlain is the founding director of Save The Mothers (STM) East Africa, a non-government organisation under UCU. The organisation promotes safe motherhood.

She led me to the venue of the interview on the same block constructed 10 years ago and named after one of Uganda's top obstetrician/gynaecologists, Dr Florence Mirembe, in recognition of her work in fighting maternal deaths.

Thom Froese, Chamberlain's husband, a Canadian journalist who has worked with a number of newspapers, including the *Hamilton Spectator* in Ontario Canada, joined us and I learnt that the couple is returning to Canada.

Chamberlain has already handed over the office to Dr Miriam Mutabazi, an obstetrician/gynaecologist with over 17 years of experience, working Uganda's public health sector, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and with Management Health Services.

Chamberlain, together with Dr

Mirembe, Dr Pius Okong and Dr Olive Sentunwe-Mugisa, all obstetricians and gynaecologists, were central to the setting up of Save The Mothers East Africa that runs a master's programme in public health leadership at UCU.

In the context of the high rate of women dying due to pregnancy and childbirth complications, the course was established to empower non-medical professionals to advocate for women's health, cognisant of the fact that saving mothers requires a multi-Sectoral approach.

This is what Chamberlain and

several members of the Association of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Uganda have been nurturing for 12 years.

### Fruits of labour

"We have done a lot," she said. "STM has contributed to the decline in the maternal mortality ratio from 438 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2011 to 336 per 100,000 live births today," she said. Chamberlain is happy that she has trained 440 professionals in public health leadership at UCU under the STM programme.

"Our students who graduate with a master's degree in public health leadership have promoted safe motherhood not only in Uganda, but also in the other East African countries," she said. For her work, Chamberlain has received several awards. In 2009, she received the prestigious Teasdale-Corti Humanitarian Award from the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada.

The STM programme has also received awards, including the Jill Mac Award from the Rockefeller Foundation.

**Graduates helping communities**  
Some of the graduates Chamberlain trained are working in communities to resolve women health challenges.

For instance, Joan Kabayambi started an NGO called Hope Against Fistula, which helps women with fistula in Uganda.

In Budondo sub-county, Jinja district, women have also benefited from the STM graduates. "One of the STM graduates in Budondo led his colleagues in demanding that a construction company that was building a dam construct a safe motherhood unit at a local hospital," Chamberlain said.

She noted that without a single coin from STM, the unit was constructed and is in place. Chamberlain is thus

proud that she is leaving such a team of dedicated professionals to continue with the campaign.

Today, STM has injected \$200,000 to improve labour units in 10 hospitals across the country in Mbale, Nakaseke and Mitanga districts, among others. Chamberlain said the funds have been invested in training health workers to use sophisticated gadgets and procuring equipment for labour wards. Another achievement that Chamberlain celebrates is the \$350,000 Mirembe Block, the STM home at UCU.

### Her Ugandan debut

Looking at 50-year-old Chamberlain, now with a few lines etched in her face, it is hard to fathom the 24-year-old medical doctor, whose work in several developing countries in the late 1990s, exposed her to the reality of women dying in labour.

"A woman was brought in an ambulance after she had delivered twins and as soon as the doctors picked and rushed the babies into the clinic with a ketone lamp to take care of them, they forgot that there was a mother in the ambulance and she bled to death," narrated Chamberlain of her first

**The public health leadership course was established to empower non-medical professionals to advocate women's health**

### IN FIGURES

**6,000**

The number of women who die every year during childbirth in Uganda

**440**

The number of professionals Dr Chamberlain has trained in public health leadership at UCU under the Save The Mothers programme

**336**

Save The Mothers programme has contributed to the decline in the maternal mortality ratio from 438 deaths per 100,000 live births registered in 2011 to 336 per 100,000 live births today

## of maternal health advocacy

### Graduate testimony

Among the first graduates she trained is Sylvia Namabide, the former Woman MP for Mitanga.

Namabide told New Vision that she took the safe motherhood skills outside class to her constituency.

"When I graduated, I led the campaign to persuade the Government to build a hospital in Mitanga district with a decent labour ward on it. Today, Mitanga has got a new hospital with a modern labour ward. I used the skills I acquired in class to advocate for the hospital," she said.

Namabide described Chamberlain as an amazing woman and a servant leader. "I will forever be indebted to her even long after she has returned to Canada," she said, vowing to keep in touch with her.

maternal death experience. She said this made her consider working in developing countries.

"It was that experience of focusing on saving the twins at the expense of their mother that later crystallised what I needed to do," she said.

Sadly, Chamberlain was yet to see more mothers die in labour between 1998 and 2000 in Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Pakistan.

"I saw women isolated in villages without transportation and how, even if they had cars, they had to ask for permission from their husbands to use them," she said.

Chamberlain zeroed in on Uganda because she said it is where she was needed most. In contrast to Canada, which has the same population as Uganda, 6,000 women die every year during childbirth in Uganda. In comparison, Canada has 10 maternal



Dr Chamberlain with her husband Thom Froese and their children. The couple has been in Uganda for 12 years



Looking up to Chamberlain as her mentor, Namabide said she was inspired to serve mothers so as to emulate her.

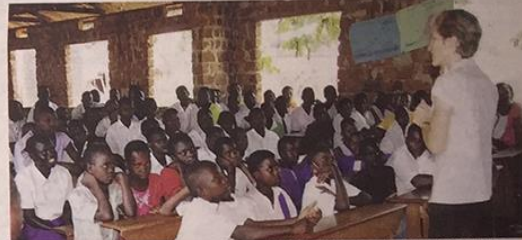
"It is on that basis that I feel obligated to serve mothers. I have chosen to educate orphans in Musokola in Canada, where her mother worked as a nurse."

She confessed that she loved the smell of antiseptic back then. It is little wonder that she would later graduate with a medical degree from the University of Toronto.

Away from work, Jean extended her care and love to children so much so that the couple adopted a Ugandan baby girl from an orphanage in Jinja. They named her Hannah Laura (after Thom's mother).

Consequently, they were dying in the communities in their thousands. "It was clear to us that the challenge was not about the hospital, but in the community," she said.

Chamberlain was so moved by Uganda's maternity crisis that upon her return to Canada, she organised a group of dedicated Canadians to discuss partnering with local doctors. The discussion gave birth to STM with Dr Mirembe as one of her



Dr Chamberlain teaching in a rural school Bulikwe district in 2006. She arrived in Uganda in 2005

### Ugandan partners

From a young age, Chamberlain was destined to be a doctor. When she was only six, she used to tag onto her mother at a Christian camp in Musokola in Canada, where her mother worked as a nurse.

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couple in a compound at UCU, which kept traumatising me, fearing that the disease that killed the little soul could strike any time. But, we had steadfast confidence that kept us going. We said this is what God wanted us to do," she recalled.

Thom also had tough days in his first week in Uganda when thugs broke into his parked car in Kampala and stole his expensive camera.

Yet when he ran to the Police for help, he was asked to pay the investigating officers' transport, and he gave up on the case. It also took a long time for results of STM to be visible, which concerned Chamberlain and her team.

"But results of social programmes take time to be seen. The general social foundation of basic human rights in Uganda, where women have no right to own property, partly delayed the results," she said.

**Marriage life**  
By the time Chamberlain and Thom came to Uganda in 2005, they had been married for four years. They got engaged on February 14, 2001

and married on July 29. Chamberlain said if she had not married Thom, she would not have found it easy to stay and work in Uganda.

Asked what keeps them going, Thom said living in a different country strengthens relationships. "Distance from home gives you distance from destructions of family members," he explained.

She said they feel more like Ugandans and would wish to stay longer. Nevertheless, she said they are leaving because the programme has matured and given birth to leaders, who she said can take over from her.

Chamberlain also feels that her daughter is of age to join the Canadian education system as she has been studying in Uganda since kindergarten.

"Ugandans have no idea how fantastic their country is. They are also friendly. We have had a deep relation with them and even at the school where our children go, they had wonderful friends," Chamberlain said.

She added that they will keep coming to Uganda.



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M&OTHERS.org

Tanzania



Mama na Mtoto  
Project

# STM USA – Dr Shaun Gillis (past chair Dr Stephen Noll)





## STM Canada (intl) Board – Mary Harvey (Chair)



# New Executive Director Deborah Mensah













Future directions:

**GHANA**

Future directions:

**YOU!**





*Thank you for being  
committed to  
mothers and their  
babies*

Dr Jean Chamberlain  
Froese

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