Damari Namdori Kangalu Sefue (1913–1976)

HUDSON MNGUMI

Hudson Mngumi
Damari Namdori Kangalu Sefue was the first native Tanzanian woman to obtain a teaching certificate. Damari inspired young women to go to school, demonstrating that women can excel if given an opportunity.

Sefue was raised in a polygamous family of four wives. She was the sole daughter of the fourth wife, Nacharo. Her parents practiced an African traditional religion, worshiping ancestors. In the early 1920s, she and her brothers Samiji, Mtango, and Seware went to Suji Mission School, where they converted to Adventism.1

The school assigned Sefue to live with the family of Yosefu Mhero and Kajiru as her guardians. Being in the highlands, the weather at Suji can be cold. Though she had to wear a light uniform with bare feet, she did not consider it to be a problem, since she considered herself blessed because she only needed to walk half a kilometer to school, compared to her classmates who walked up to three. She had to fetch firewood for cooking meals, and in the night there were no lanterns for studying. Despite these challenges, she was keen to learn. Her hard work made her excel in her academic performance.2

Though numerous females had attended Suji since it opened in 1906, in 1924 Spencer George Maxwell began a special emphasis to eradicate illiteracy. In 1927 it became mandatory that female students receive home economic studies, and a boarding school for girls was established at the prompting of Winnifrida Clifford, a British headmistress. Sefue joined Suji Teachers Training College, and in 1931 she became the first indigenous Tanzanian to receive a teacher’s certificate. A. A. M. Isherwood, then colonial Director of Education, wrote a letter stating, “Damari Kangalu is indeed the first girl in obtaining the Grade II Teaching Certificate, and I have to offer you on behalf of the Department my sincere congratulations. Your Mission may be justly proud of having established such an important landmark in the progress of female education.”3

Sefue’s passion for study led her to be an icon of what Adventist education has contributed to Tanzania. She became famous across the country, to the extent that a girl’s school in Tabora wanted to hire her since she was the only female African teacher in the whole country. She couldn’t go because, as a young woman, she could not travel so far for fear for her safety, but she taught at Suji Mission for four years.5

In 1936 she married Yohana Mpeho Sefue, a widower who was a sub-chief. Though she was young compared to her husband, they were blessed with seven children. Their children grew up to become a pastor, a chief secretary of the state, three teachers, a nurse, and an entrepreneur.6

Due to the demands of raising a sub-chief’s family, Sefue left active teaching ministry and concentrated on her domestic responsibilities. She educated her children not only in school subjects, but also religious lessons which was important for their development. She assisted her husband in documenting, preserving and maintaining official records, and attended to official visitors.7

Even though she left active teaching, Sefue taught the community how they could improve their standard of living and better care for their children. Damari was even more active in her church, serving as the Dorcas Society leader, leading other women in helping the needy in their village. She died in July 1976, at the age of 63.8

**SOURCES**


**NOTES**

2. Ibid., 85.
4. Ibid.
6. Ibid., 87.
7. Ibid., 88.
8. Ibid., 88-89.