

Mitandi Dispensary

MUTWANGA EZEKIEL

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Overview

Mitandi Dispensary is an Adventist health facility located at Mitandi Hill, which is one of the spurs surrounding the giant Rwenzori Mountain in western Uganda.¹ The natural climate is semi-alpine. The dispensary has served the people of the local area as long as the Adventist faith has been present. Until its founding, there was no health facility that could provide modern health care among the mountain people and the surrounding plains. Its presence has been of great value to the people for over seventy years. By January 2021, it was served approximately 12,660 people annually.²

Background

In 1948, Pastor Magdalon Lind and his wife, Kezia, were pioneer missionaries to the primitive community of Rwenzori Mountain. Before that time, the remote Bakonzo community was isolated from Christianity, formal education, and health care. Their cultural practice and traditional religion were based on the deities of the mountain and the rivers. They had medicine men who practiced sorcery, witchcraft, and traditional medicine with herbs. People suffered from many traditional diseases and ailments, which weakened their health and checked their population growth. Such diseases included, measles, yaws, whooping cough, worms, dysentery, scabies, elephantiasis and leprosy. In addition, the hygienic conditions were poor both in and around homesteads.³ Mitandi Dispensary, the first of its kind in the area, attracted many people who also listened to the gospel and from whom the first converts came, especially women, children, and youth.⁴

Founding

Pastor Lind began a mission school and dispensary at Mitandi in 1948. The dispensary operated in a grass thatched house. Kezia Lind served as the first nurse. She also provided midwifery services. The ailments treated at this dispensary were yaws, body wounds (cuts), scabies, eye infections, and common colds.⁵

In 1950, Lind arranged for the production of bricks with which to construct the dispensary and the primary school. In 1951, the dispensary was built with permanent materials. In that same year, the dispensary was officially opened by the Rt. Honorable Nkoojo Hosea, prime minister (*omuhikirwa*) of Tooro Kingdom. The

dispensary building had two wings with two beds each for male and female patients.⁶ Lind was replaced in 1952 by Pastor H. E Cortz, whose wife served as the nurse at the dispensary from 1952-1960. Pastor Robert Daniel Pifer, replaced Cortz, and his wife, Gerd Lind Pifer, was nurse until 1963.⁷

Between 1964 and 1967, the Mitandi area was hit by an insurgency caused by the Rwenzururu movement. Consequently, the dispensary was closed and after 1967 had no medical worker to run it.⁸ There was a resumption of health services in 1984 as a level II health center.⁹ In its resumption, common ailments were treated until 1988 when Pastor Pedersen, started sending financial aid to upgrade this facility. By 1990, Pedersen had funded the construction of a ward to accommodate both in-patients and out-patients.¹⁰ He also donated beds and other medical equipment to enable the management of problems at in-patient level. The health issues which were handled included malaria, typhoid, amoebic, respiratory, and maternity related issues ¹¹.

The history of Mitandi Dispensary has been eventful. Between 1984 and 2002, Mitandi Dispensary almost closed twice because of the political and military upheavals which occurred in Uganda. In 1985, Yoweri Kaguta Museveni of the National Resistance Army/Movement led a guerrilla war. From 1996 to 2002, the Allied Democratic Forces conducted further guerrilla warfare. Both of these wars affected the dispensary adversely.¹² On June 1, 1998, workers at the dispensary were sent home on an indefinite unpaid leave due to lack of money, an effect of the war in the area.¹³

Shortly after the end of Allied Democratic Forces' war, Vigdis and Tore Oldebraten from Norway came to reside in Mitandi where they began helping the facility with funds in 2002. Steady progress has been realized since then.

Mitandi Dispensary has changed shape in terms of infrastructure and staff. Its present configuration includes five staff houses, wards for male and female in-patients, a maternity ward and labor room, an art clinic, administration block, and kitchen.¹⁴ Services offered at the facility now which include radiology, laboratory, dental, HIV counselling and testing, immunization, comprehensive HIV care, family planning, minor surgery, counseling and guidance, environmental health services, and health education, school health and integrated outreach service.¹⁵

Impact of Mitandi Dispensary

The impact of the dispensary on the community both in its first and second phases, has been remarkable. Skin diseases like yaws and wounds have been eradicated. The surrounding communities have adopted the recommended personal and domestic hygiene. Obstetrical services are accessed with ease, and HIV conditions are being treated both medically and psychologically.¹⁶ The dispensary is also a center of spiritual healing through the chaplaincy office. Immunizations against the killer tropical diseases like measles, tuberculosis, polio,

whooping cough, tetanus, hepatitis, and many others provided both at the facility and in the community through outreach programs.

Dispensary Directors

Keziah Lind (1948-1952), Mrs. H. E. Cortz (1952-1960), Gerd Pifer (1960-1963), Ogwal Patrick (1964-67), Muhindo Franco (1984-1987 and 1991-1994). Others included; Mukundi James (1987-1991), Kamwite Bajos (1992-1996), Kasasya Hezron (1996-2004), Mibiri James (2005-2007), Musumba Moris (2008-2009), and Norah Kibwana (2010-2011), Bwambale Anderson (2012-2015), Muhindo Hagai (2016), and Bwambale Martin (2017-present)!¹⁷

SOURCES

Minutes file about Mitandi dispensary, Rwenzori Field Archive, Kasese, Uganda.

Report to Board of Governors, January 27, 2021. Rwenzori Field Archive, Kasese, Uganda.

Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook. Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2018,

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1. "Western Uganda Field," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2018), 64.
2. Report to Board of Governors, January 27, 2021.
3. Masereka Paul Kibwana, telephone interview by author, March 20, 2021.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Muhindo Franco, dispensary director 1984-1994, interview by author, March 28, 2021.
10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. Minutes file about Mitandi dispensary, Rwenzori Field Archive.

14. Report to Board of Governors, January 27, 2021.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. Minutes file about Mitandi dispensary, Rwenzori Field Archive.

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