**In Her Words: Stephanie Kaloto**

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**Summary:** Local photographer Daniel Msirikale shares the story of Tanzanian farmer Stephanie Kaloto from a recent outreach hosted at the Chunya Regional Hospital and in partnership with Helen Keller International in Mbeye.

In her words, Stephanie Kaloto:   
  
“At 65 years old, life in Mbeya Region has always been about the land and the rhythms of farming. My husband and I tended our fields together, until he left and the shadows began creeping into my world.

It started with a slight blurring of my vision, almost like looking through fog. At first, I thought it was a joke—a temporary nuisance that would fade with time. But days turned into weeks, and soon I could barely see the crops I once nurtured. It was then that those around me said I have cataracts.

Farming alone became a daunting task. The vibrant greens and golden hues of the fields faded into indistinct shapes, and every step felt uncertain. I couldn't deny it any longer—I needed help.

I called my brother, hoping he could shed some light on my darkening world. Together, we journeyed to the hospital in Mbeya town, where doctors diagnosed me with "pressure" and prescribed medication. They promised improvement if I returned in a month, but when that time came, my brother confessed he had no more funds to spare.

Months passed in a blur of desperation. I returned to the hospital when I could scrape together enough money, but progress was fleeting. My children, burdened with their own struggles, reassured me that one day, they would find a way to heal my eyes.

Two long years came and went and my situation remained the same. Then, by the Grace of God, my children heard of a surgical outreach program in Chunya, offering free surgeries for people like me. Hope flickered in my heart once more.

Anxiety tangled with hope as I prepared for the operation. The doctors, with their reassuring smiles, explained every step of the procedure, calming my fears. I spent a restless night in the hospital, my thoughts swirling with anticipation and prayers.

Morning came, and as the bandages fell away, I dared to open my eyes. Light flooded in, revealing colors I thought lost forever. Tears streamed down my cheeks as I beheld the faces of my doctors and my fellow patients who like me were having their bandages removed and given a new hope in life.

The joy was overwhelming. Not just because I could see again, but because I knew I wouldn't be a burden to my children anymore. Their sacrifices and unwavering support had brought me back into the light.

I may be older now, my energy waning, but every moment is a gift I embrace with newfound appreciation. I feel like a child again, discovering the world afresh.

I owe my gratitude to my family, whose love sustained me through the darkest times. To the skilled surgeons who gifted me with sight once more. And to God, whose guiding hand led me to this miraculous opportunity.

If there's one thing I would urge others with cataracts to do, it's this—seize the chance for treatment when it comes. Don't wait in darkness. Reach out for the light, for there is hope waiting, even in the most unexpected places.”



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