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Turning Point

Transforming Everyday

Magazine

March Issue | 02

Spotlight
Women Changemakers
in Africa & Beyond

**Giving Back to the
Community**

Betty Adera

**From The End of the Road
to Reshaping Women's Futures**



+ My Natural Hair Journey, From Hate to Love

Turning Point Magazine



CELEBRATING
25 WOMEN IN
2025
INTERNATIONAL
WOMEN'S
DAY



#AccelerateActionKe #25WomenIn2025

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From The End of the Road to Reshaping Women's Futures

A social advocate for justice and peace with global accolades, Betty Adera has carved a trail for herself as the world grapples with embracing women's leadership. She is a global public health specialist in adolescent sexual reproductive health and rights.



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Editorial

As we celebrate International Women's Day in this special edition, I am reminded that true transformation often begins at the grassroots level, where ordinary women do extraordinary things daily. At Turning Point Magazine, we are committed to amplifying grassroots voices that might otherwise go unheard. Today, our mission aligns perfectly with this year's theme: Accelerating Action. This global call to action urges us to change tactics in addressing the barriers facing women and increasing momentum towards gender parity, because, according to the World Economic Forum, at the current rate, it will take until 2158 to attain gender parity.

Reflecting on my own journey, from a girl in Busia County to becoming Kenya's first female Assistant Minister, I am reminded of the power of education and opportunity. Through my advocacy efforts, I have been inspired by the wisdom and tenacity of grassroots women who continue to defy the odds to create better futures for their communities and countries.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) remains our roadmap, but its promise can only be fulfilled through community-driven change. We can celebrate the gains we have made so far, but it should not be lost on us that implementation of the Beijing Platform remains incomplete. Thus, the need to accelerate action is more pressing than ever.

Furthermore, when we established Kenya's one-third gender rule in our 2010 Constitution, it was not merely a policy victory – it represented countless conversations in villages, markets, and community halls where women dared to reimagine power.

This issue of Turning Point Magazine focuses on the gains that women have made and celebrates

their contributions. Within these pages, you will meet remarkable women from around the world, particularly from across Africa – professional women trailblazers, farmers revolutionizing food security, health workers improving the quality of life for many, entrepreneurs creating economic opportunities, and activists defending women's rights. Their stories embody both Beijing's vision and Turning Point's commitment to inclusive, transformative content.

Three decades after Beijing, we cannot afford incremental progress. Women in rural communities bear the brunt of climate change, economic inequality, and political marginalization. Their innovations and solutions must inform our path forward.

As we mark our first International Women's Day as Turning Point Magazine, I invite you to find inspiration in these stories and join us in accelerating action – community by community, voice by voice, brick by brick.

In solidarity,



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A portrait of Valentine Luhunzu, a young Black woman with her hair styled in braids, wearing a bright yellow top. She is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile, her hand resting near her chin. The background is dark and out of focus.

In a world dominated by lifestyle trends and fleeting fads, Valentine Luhunzu carves her path, redefining what it means to embrace science. As a young analytical chemist and host of the trailblazing podcast, Ai Chemisphere, she's making chemistry and artificial intelligence (AI) accessible and inspiring for the younger generation.

A VISION FOR TOMORROW

Valentine envisions a future where young people embrace technology's potential instead of fearing its challenges. "AI is transforming industries and creating new opportunities," she says. "We need to focus on innovation and the positive impacts of technology, not just the negatives like cyberbullying."

Valentine Luhunzu is paving the way for a new generation of thinkers and innovators through her podcast, mentorship, and unyielding passion. Her story is a powerful reminder that science is not just a subject it's a way of life, a tool for change, and a bridge to a better future.

Leadership in action

Valentine's leadership philosophy is both grounded and dynamic. "Leadership isn't just about titles," she notes, "it's about managing your time, resources, and relationships effectively." As the production supervisor of Ai Chemisphere, she balances creativity, logistics, and people management with finesse.

Her journey hasn't been without challenges. Gender segregation in the workplace evidenced by the absence of female facilities during her first internship has been a challenge. Additionally, chemistry graduates face limited job opportunities, and the field of science often struggles with resource constraints. Yet, her resilience shines through. "Focus on being excellent at what you do," she advises. "Let your work speak for itself."

A Spark Lit in Childhood

Valentine's fascination with science began in her childhood. She grew up in a family where discussions about life sciences were the norm. Her sister, a medic, and her brother, a veterinary doctor, shared their knowledge and experiences, fostering an environment of curiosity and learning. By the age of eight, she was already familiar with biology, chemistry, and physics—subjects most encounter much later in life. Originally aspiring to be a doctor specializing in pharmaceuticals, Valentine's path evolved as her interest in chemistry deepened. Today, she applies her expertise as a lab technician in the food industry, ensuring the quality of tomato sauce products that find their way to our tables.

AI Chemosphere: Science Comes Alive

Valentine's passion for chemistry and technology culminated in Ai Chemosphere, a podcast dedicated to exploring the intersection of chemistry and AI. Unlike typical science shows, her podcast caters to everyone, from teens to older tech enthusiasts, offering engaging stories and practical insights.

"Science is an art," Valentine explains. "I wanted to create a space where scientists could share their voices and where young people could see the beauty and relevance of science in everyday life." Through interviews and sto-

ry-telling, Ai Chemosphere demystifies complex topics, making them relatable and exciting.

The podcast was born from a desire to break the monotony of daily life and create a positive impact. Valentine recognized the potential of her social media platforms to spark meaningful conversations around science and technology, especially AI. "AI is life," she says, emphasizing its growing role in different industries.

Mentorship: A Journey of Growth

For Valentine, mentorship has been a cornerstone of her personal and professional development. She credits her first mentor, Gabriel Atayo, whom she met through the African Youth Leadership Program, with helping her uncover her purpose. The program introduced her to leadership principles and ignited her drive to inspire others.

Her second mentor, Dr. Martin Magu, left an indelible mark on her during her time as a research assistant. Together, they explored the medicinal uses of indigenous herbs in Kenyan communities, highlighting the country's rich natural resources. "That experience taught me the value of our heritage and the importance of resource utilization," she reflects.

Another pivotal figure in her life is Dennis Okuwa, who guided her transition from academia to the workforce. His advice on professional presentation and career planning was instrumental in shaping her early career. "Mentorship is the bridge to a better self," Valentine asserts.

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN Science and AI

Finding Freedom

Sharda's Journey From Apartheid to Global Impact

I grew up in apartheid South Africa," Sharda Naidoo begins. While her community faced isolation, her family made deliberate choices to expose them to other groups through religion and education.

Educated by Holy Family Sisters from Ireland at a Catholic school that subtly defied apartheid norms, young Sharda experienced glimpses of what an integrated society might look like. "We were given a more rounded education with tennis, drama, and ballet lessons, which was not available at government schools," she explains. These schools created rare opportunities for children of different races to interact during concerts and plays.

At home, her father's involvement with an international spiritual organisation meant people of various races occasionally stayed with them.

By the time Sharda reached university, where she studied drama and philosophy, many political parties had been banned, and voices of opposition had been silenced. She found her calling in protest theatre at the Market Theatre, one of the few remaining spaces where dissent could be expressed.

"I chose to work in theatre as it was one of the few spaces open to voices of protest," she says. At the Market Theatre, housed in Johannesburg's old fruit and vegetable market building, people



"Growing up during apartheid, I was inspired by novel characters who moved to different cities to start a new life."

of all races collaborated creatively to expose injustices under apartheid.

"The magic of theatre is about the coordination as well as silent, verbal, and non-verbal communication that makes it happen," she reflects. "We didn't have huge budgets, so we painted, decorated, made costumes, and reused stage pieces refashioned in different ways."

Living under apartheid meant personal challenges too.

"Segregation affected me as far as living illegally in areas that were designated for 'white' people," she recalls. "That was tough, and I had to move a few times when neighbours reported my presence

to the police."

Breaking Boundaries

A pivotal moment came when Sharda decided to travel outside South Africa. "Having grown up with political and cultural oppression, I developed an active imagination," she says. Inspired by characters in novels who moved to different cities to start new lives, she yearned for independence, something uncommon in her family and community.

Working extra hours in restaurants and later in film and TV, she saved enough for what would become a two-year journey that changed everything. "My years of travelling were very

empowering. I experienced freedom that I did not know was possible," she explains. "I relished the thought that I could just go where I pleased and be a 'world' citizen."

Her travels took her to London, where she explored freely without itineraries; to a kibbutz in Israel, where she experienced communal living and used her voice training skills to help the Kibbutz Secretary with vocal problems; and eventually to the Himalayas in India, where a chance encounter with a development worker on a bus journey planted the seeds for her future career.

Transformation Through Learning

While in Asia, Sharda met a woman who had taught English in Japan and learnt Shiatsu. Intrigued, she travelled to Japan herself, where she studied this healing art when unable to secure a teaching visa.

"Shiatsu is a form of physical therapy that works on meridians that run through the body," she explains. "When tonifying and sedating energy flow along the meridians, the flow of energy is balanced, releasing the body's self-healing power." Her interest was partly motivated by her father's rheumatoid arthritis and her desire to support his healing.

The experience taught her an invaluable lesson: "One has to be aware of and control one's thoughts when treating someone. This is because thoughts are energy, and the quality and emotions in one's mind are transferred in the healing process."

Finding Purpose in Development

After her travels, Sharda knew development was the career for her. With no programs available in South Africa, she applied to study at the University of Sussex in the UK. The transition from drama and philosophy to economics proved challenging. "It took all that I had to hang in there and get to where I wanted to go," she admits.

Returning to South Africa in late 1992 as the country began transitioning toward democracy, she had three job offers by the following Monday. Four years later, she was appointed to establish the Micro Enterprise Alliance, a membership association supporting small enterprise development in South Africa.

"Setting up and running the Alliance was an exciting and inspiring time of my life," she

reflects. "I'd never imagined I could lead, and yet I had to when the opportunity was there."

Today, Sharda continues her development work, having weathered challenging years during the COVID-19 pandemic. She works on the Innovative Growth Gateway program funded by UK aid, focusing on climate adaptation, gender empowerment, and job creation, alongside community capacity-building programs in South Africa.

While South Africa still faces substantial challenges in reducing inequality post-apartheid, Sharda's own life has flourished with international work opportunities and expansive learning experiences.

She describes herself as single: independent, enjoying the freedom that comes with this choice. In a twist that brings her obvious joy, she has become "Granny Sharda" to three children through her close friendship with Zoya Maboto-Mokoditso. She feels blessed to be part of their lives.

Sharda encourages young women who are searching for their voice and career path to listen to their voice: "The most important voice is the inner one. Follow your heart and let life unfold before you."

Sharda concludes by saying, "Be discerning about what you call blessings; don't fall for the clichés and commonplace; dare to be extraordinary."



KRA's Bold Steps Toward Inclusive Leadership and Workforce Diversity to Accelerate Gender Equality

By Nancy Ng'etich



Kenya Revenue Authority (KRA) has emerged as a key player in this transformation in the country. With a workforce of 9,671 as of March 2024, KRA understands that progress is not only about numbers but also about the significance of inclusivity within those numbers. As we embrace this year's International Women's Day theme, "Accelerate Action," KRA is well-positioned to lead efforts to dismantle barriers and ensure that gender equality becomes a tangible reality.

In alignment with national directives, KRA has taken significant steps to nurture diversity and inclusion within its operations. The adoption of the Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion Policy in October 2024 demonstrates KRA's proactive approach to gender equity. This policy underscores the organization's commitment to eliminating gender disparities in recruitment, promotions, and workplace culture.

Despite these strides, KRA's journey has not been without challenges. In 2024, the Courts invalidated recruitment of revenue service assistants due to hiring practices. However, this landmark ruling reinforced the importance of accountability and equitable hiring practices at the Authority.

In response, KRA introduced a new hiring policy, setting a precedent for diversity and inclusivity. This policy aligns with constitutional mandates and reflects Kenya's evolving socio-cultural landscape. To accelerate gender parity, KRA must remain steadfast in implementing recruitment strategies that promote balanced gender representation at all levels.

In the last two years, KRA has progressively grown the

Kenya stands at a critical juncture in its pursuit of gender equality, guided by a progressive constitutional framework and the ambitious Vision 2030 development blueprint. At the core of this undertaking is a commitment to gender parity, equity, and inclusiveness, principles enshrined in Article 10 of the Constitution, which establishes equality and non-discrimination as national values.

However, transforming these ideals into reality requires more than policy declarations, it demands bold actions, institutional accountability, and the accelerated implementation of gender-responsive policies.

female representation at the Top Management level from 35% to 37% with a 46% female Staff compliment of KRA's workforce.

While this represents progress, it highlights the need for deliberate interventions to bridge the gender gap. To accelerate action, KRA is expanding mentorship programs, leadership training, and family-friendly workplace policies that support women in the workforce.

Furthermore, KRA recognizes that achieving sustainable change requires collective effort. In September 2024, KRA held stakeholder validation workshop that provided a platform for diverse voices to shape the Draft Diversity and Inclusion Policy. By prioritizing public engagement, KRA ensures that its policies resonate with the aspirations of all stakeholders and address real societal challenges.

While commendable progress has been made, sustained momentum is essential to realizing gender equality. To accelerate action, KRA will move beyond policy adoption and focus on robust execution, with clear monitoring and evaluation frameworks to track the effectiveness of gender policies. There is also a pressing need to create pathways for women to ascend to senior management and decision-making roles, ensuring that leadership structures reflect the principles of inclusivity. Enhancing gender data collection will be crucial in identifying areas requiring intervention, enabling informed decision-making and targeted gender equality strategies.

Moreover, KRA will continue to actively promote inclusive work environments by implementing policies that support work-life balance, mentorship, and career progression for women. A supportive workplace is instrumental in retaining female talent and fostering an

environment where all employees can thrive. Equally important is the engagement of men as allies in the gender equality movement. By fostering an inclusive dialogue that recognizes gender equality as a shared responsibility, KRA can drive meaningful and lasting change.

In conclusion, Kenya's constitutional and developmental frameworks provide a solid foundation for gender equality, but frameworks alone cannot dismantle deeply entrenched disparities. True change requires deliberate action, accelerated implementation, and sustained institutional commitment.

KRA's initiatives underscore its potential as a trailblazer in gender-responsive governance. By embedding gender equality into its policies and operations, the Authority is not only adhering to constitutional mandates but also shaping a future where inclusivity is the norm rather than the exception.



As we celebrate our women this year, we must ask ourselves, how fast are we moving toward gender equality? Are our institutions taking the necessary steps to ensure equity is realized in our lifetime?

The time for incremental change is over. It is time to accelerate action, dismantle barriers, and create a gender-equal future. KRA is leading the way, but the responsibility lies with all of us. The time to act is now.

*The writer is the Acting
Commissioner for Shared
Services Department and
Kenya Revenue Authority
(KRA)*



**KENYA REVENUE
AUTHORITY**

Tulipe Ushuru, Tujitegemee!

A portrait of Millicent Juma, a Black woman with her hair styled in braids, wearing a sleeveless floral-patterned top. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is a solid, muted purple color.

“ They will know me
for my passion
and commitment
to disability
rights. ”

A JOURNEY OF RESILIENCE, ADVOCACY, *And Change for Persons with Disability*

By Tabitha Mwai

Millicent Juma, now a permanent resident of Siaya County, had to relocate from Nairobi to make her mark in championing the rights of persons with disabilities.

Born and raised in Nairobi's Eastlands, Makadara Constituency, Millicent had a fairly normal upbringing.

She was one of the brightest students in her community and a gifted debater. She envisioned a future as a legislator, a dream she later pursued, one that changed her life.

Ms. Juma, a mother and woman with a disability, has defied the odds to become a force to reckon with as an advocate for disability rights.

While sitting for her O-level exams, Millicent lost her father, who was the sole breadwinner of her family. His demise meant that her academic journey was going to be cut off.

Due to her resilience and strong will, she stepped up for her siblings without having a firm foundation of her own.

Later on, in 2017, her unwavering determination and passion pushed her into politics. Millicent took a big leap of faith and sought nomination through the Orange Democratic Party to represent Persons with Disabilities (PWD) in Siaya County.

Despite her extensive advocacy work in Nairobi and Machakos County, she had never been in Siaya for more than a month. This did not deter her ambitions.

As they say, luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity. Millicent was selected to be a nominated member of the County Assembly in Siaya.

“I was in Siaya before the swearing-in and was even given a tour of the county assembly,” she says.

However, everything changed on the eve of the swearing-in. She was dropped from the list and Millicent could not believe it until her name was not called on the day of swearing in. The PWD community in Siaya protested her nomination, claiming that they did not know her.

At that moment she made a resolve: They will know me for my passion and commitment to disability rights. She then made the bold move to relocate to Siaya.

To Millicent, leadership is not about having all the answers but about guiding and creating inclusive solutions. She believes in empowering others, fostering unity, and providing an environment where ideas can flourish.

She has made a significant contribution to organising PWDs in Siaya.

In 2022 she noticed that those living in the

southeast region lacked organised groups and support systems. She trained them on their rights, encouraged them to register with the National Council for Persons with Disabilities (NCPWD), and also trained them on economic empowerment.

One of her outstanding achievements was organising Siaya’s first-ever beauty pageant for persons with disabilities through her outfit, Friends of Siaya Disability Organisation.

“As a founding member of Friends of Siaya Disability Organisation, I have led in advocacy for the rights of PWDs and for women in leadership,” she says.

Though she has yet to pursue formal higher education as she desires, Millicent has taken various courses in human rights advocacy, project management, and leadership. These skills have been vital in the establishment and steady growth of the Friends of Siaya Disability Organisation.

Millicent is also an entrepreneur. Through her enterprise, Mellazar Crafts Agency, she produces and sells handcrafted items while providing a marketplace for other artisans.

“Sometimes you would meet me wearing my handmade clothes and accessories,” she says.

Ms. Juma loves education and being a change agent, which led her to establish a community school in her village.

Millicent envisions a world where people, regardless of their background, have access to opportunities that align with their aspirations. She dreams of a self-reliant, informed, and resilient community where individuals have the freedom of choice.

Her next step is to secure a larger platform to address critical community issues—education, health, and economic empowerment. She plans to achieve this by engaging communities, organising sensitisation forums, and fostering partnerships with relevant stakeholders.

She dreams of a self-reliant, informed, and resilient community where individuals have the freedom of choice.



VOICE OF CHANGE IN MOROCCO

Hind Ksiouar

Hind is a passionate advocate for youth empowerment, a dedicated political leader, and an entrepreneur striving to create meaningful change. As the founder and CEO of a digital marketing agency, she has demonstrated her ability to navigate the fast-paced world of business while remaining deeply committed to social progress. However, her influence extends far beyond the entrepreneurial sphere, she is a key figure within Ittihadiya Youth, the youth organization of the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP), where she actively champions policies that foster inclusion, representation, and opportunities for Moroccan youth.

Her journey into politics is both groundbreaking and deeply personal, Hind is the first in her family to embark on this path. This pioneering step was not driven by tradition but by a firm belief in the potential of Moroccan youth and a desire to break barriers for future generations.

Hind's path into political leadership began in an unexpected and almost humorous way. Nearly a decade ago, a friend jokingly suggested she should join politics, an idea that initially seemed far-fetched. At the time, she laughed at the thought. Yet, that moment planted a seed, one that, over the years, grew into a powerful calling. What started as a casual remark has since evolved into a steadfast commitment to justice, solidarity, and empowerment.

As she became more engaged, Hind realized that the obstacles faced by young Moroccans were not just personal struggles but systemic challenges that required collective action. Driven by a vision of change, she joined Ittihadiya Youth, where she quickly transitioned from an eager learner to a proactive leader. Over the years, she has played a crucial role in shaping initiatives aimed at mobilizing young people, advocating for policy changes, and fostering civic engagement.

Her work has not been limited to national efforts, she has also extended her impact through international collaborations, notably with the International Union of Socialist Youth (IUSY). These experiences have broadened her perspective, reinforcing her belief that progress is possible when young voices are empowered and included in decision-making.

For Hind, leadership is not about status or control, it is about enabling others to lead. She believes that the true measure of progress is not in accumulating power but in distributing it, ensuring that young

people have the tools, knowledge, and platforms to drive change themselves.

"True leadership is about empowering people to take ownership of their future, to transform their own realities rather than waiting for solutions to be handed to them," she explains.

At Ittihadiya Youth, Hind has been instrumental in fostering a culture of collaboration, ensuring that initiatives are co-designed with and for the youth they serve. Whether through mentorship programs, political education, or advocacy campaigns, her approach is centered on inclusion, ensuring that the voices of young people are not just heard but actively shape policies and strategies.

Inclusivity is not just a concept Hind speaks about, it is a principle that guides her work. Under the leadership of Ittihadiya Youth, the organization has taken concrete steps toward gender equity, introducing a 50% female representation policy across all leadership and branch structures. This initiative ensures that young women are not just participants but decision-makers within the organization.

Additionally, Ittihadiya Youth is committed to integrating young women and individuals with reduced mobility, ensuring that representation extends beyond gender to include those who have historically been marginalized in political spaces. Hind firmly believes that a truly inclusive society must create pathways for all individuals to engage, regardless of physical or social barriers.

For her, diversity is not merely an abstract value, it is the foundation upon which meaningful and sustainable progress is built.

Navigating the political landscape as a young woman comes with its own set of challenges. Hind has faced the pervasive issue of tokenism, where women are often included in political spaces for symbolic reasons rather than given real influence. Yet, she refuses to be a passive participant in a system that underestimates young women's capabilities.

Through strategic resilience, she has carved out space for herself, not by demanding inclusion, but by proving, time and again, that her presence is necessary. Her persistence has allowed her to push for genuine representation, ensuring that diversity in leadership translates

into diversity in decision-making.

Hind's approach to politics is deeply rooted in the belief that real change happens at the grassroots level. She understands that policies and reforms are only effective when they reflect the lived experiences of the people they aim to serve.

Through local forums and community dialogues, Ittihadiya Youth gathers concerns from young people across Morocco and translates them into actionable policy recommendations. Hind sees these grassroots efforts as the foundation of a more participatory political system, one where governance is shaped from the bottom up, rather than dictated from the top down.

Her work within these spaces is driven by a fundamental belief: that every voice matters, and that the collective energy of engaged citizens is one of the most powerful forces for change.

For Hind, success is not measured by titles or accolades, but by the impact she leaves behind. She draws motivation from the small but significant victories that, over time, contribute to larger transformations. "Seeing lives impacted by our initiatives, seeing young people gain confidence, take action, and become leaders themselves, is what keeps me going," she shares.

As the first in her family to enter politics, she carries a deep sense of responsibility. She hopes that by breaking barriers herself, she can inspire others to do the same. She envisions a Morocco where young people do not feel excluded from political and economic decision-making but are actively shaping the country's future.

Looking ahead, Hind aims to expand Ittihadiya Youth's reach, strengthening its role in both national and international advocacy. She is committed to deepening grassroots engagement, fostering leadership among young people, and ensuring that future generations inherit a political landscape that is more just, inclusive, and representative.

Her journey is proof that one person's decision to step forward can inspire many to follow, and that when young people are given the opportunity to lead, they can transform not just their own lives, but the future of their nation.

Claiming Agency as an African Woman in the Diaspora

Ugonnanyere Audume

Agency, a term rich with depth and significance, yet experienced in uniquely personal ways by each individual woman. How we define and perceive agency is shaped by our personal circumstances, life journeys, and cultural backgrounds. As an African woman living in the diaspora, I often reflect on how my sense of agency evolves over time.

But what exactly is agency? How do I define it as I navigate different phases of life?

At its core, agency is the ability to make one's own decisions and take action based on those choices, even when faced with societal pressures or expectations. It is about owning your narrative, preserving your identity, and resisting the external forces that seek to shape you into something you are not. Agency is a complex and layered concept, manifesting in various ways, such as self-expression, empowerment, autonomy, resistance, and personal choice.

For some, agency may mean the freedom to pursue education or a career without societal limitations. For others, it could be the right to express oneself through art, fashion, or language without fear of judgment. In many cases,



agency is about reclaiming control over one's body, thoughts, and aspirations, particularly in environments where women's autonomy is often challenged.

As women, especially those from marginalized backgrounds, we frequently encounter systemic barriers that attempt to limit our sense of agency. Cultural norms, gender expectations, economic constraints, and historical injustices all play a role in shaping our ability to exercise autonomy. For African women, both on the continent and in the diaspora, these barriers can be even more pronounced due to the intersection of race, gender, and immigrant status.


Living in the diaspora adds another layer to this conversation. The experience of being an African woman in a foreign land often brings a

duality, balancing the cultural expectations of our heritage with the demands of our adopted society. In this context, agency means navigating these complexities while staying true to oneself. It involves making deliberate choices about which cultural practices to uphold and which to challenge. It is the ability to define one's identity on one's own terms, rather than conforming to external labels or stereotypes.

Agency is also closely tied to resilience. It is the determination to carve out a space for oneself despite adversity. It is seen in the young woman who pursues a career path that defies gender norms, in the mother who raises her children with values she chooses rather than those imposed upon her, and in the advocate who speaks up against injustice despite the risks involved.

Ultimately, agency is deeply personal and ever-evolving. It is not a static achievement but an ongoing process of self-discovery, resistance, and growth. Each woman's journey to agency is unique, influenced by her experiences, environment, and aspirations.

"What remains constant, is the power that comes from recognizing and embracing one's ability to shape her own life"

A smiling woman with braided hair, wearing a blue dress and a watch, is talking on a red corded phone. The background is a blurred office setting.

Mental Wellness AT THE WORKPLACE

By Cecilia Njoroge

In today's fast-paced work environment, mental health is no longer a topic we can afford to ignore. As a psychologist and workplace mental health consultant, I have seen firsthand how mental well-being directly impacts productivity, employee retention, and overall job satisfaction. Yet, many organizations still struggle to prioritize mental health in the same way they do physical health.

The Silent Struggle in Workspaces

Despite growing awareness, workplace mental health challenges remain a silent epidemic. Employees often experience stress, burnout, anxiety, and even depression, but many hesitate to seek help due to stigma or fear of being perceived as weak. A culture that values overworking can lead to exhaustion, disengagement, and high turnover rates.

The Cost of Ignoring Mental Health

Poor mental health in the workplace has significant consequences. These include reduced productivity as stress and anxiety can lead to concentration difficulties and decreased efficiency.

The other result could be increased absenteeism since mental health struggles contribute to sick days and long-term leave.

There are also high turnover rates as employees are more likely to leave toxic work environments, leading to recruitment and training costs.

Creating a Mentally Healthy Workplace

1. Encourage open conversations

Organizations should normalize discussions about mental health. Leadership can set the tone by sharing their own experiences or encouraging team check-ins.

2. Train managers on mental health awareness

Equipping leaders with the skills to recognize signs of mental distress and provide support can make a significant differ

3. Promote work-life balance

Flexible work arrangements, reasonable workloads, and clear boundaries between work and personal life can help prevent burnout.

4. Provide mental health resources

Employers should offer access to Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), counseling services, and wellness initiatives.

5. Recognize and reward effort

Employees feel valued when their work is acknowledged, reducing stress and increasing engagement

Breaking the Stigma

One of the biggest barriers to workplace mental health is stigma. Organizations must actively work to create an environment where employees feel safe seeking help without fear of judgment or career repercussions.

A Call to Action

Mental health is not just an individual concern—it's a business priority. Companies that invest in employee well-being see improved morale, higher productivity, and better retention rates. As a psychologist, my message to both employers and employees is simple: Mental health matters, and it's time we treated it with the urgency it deserves.

By fostering a culture of psychological safety, we create not just healthier workplaces but healthier societies. Let's start the conversation today.



I Prefer Trust Than Power

Isabella Oriani CEO & Co-Founder, TAI

From far off lands, in a different continent, Isabella has found her life purpose in rural coastal Kenya. She prefers trust over power, believing it multiplies the strength, confidence, and success of her team.

An Italian currently living in Sweden, Oriani spent most of her career working in programs advancing social and economic development in Africa. She started in Humanitarian Aid before transitioning to development. Realizing the power and impact of business in advancing development, she became involved in social enterprises over the last decade.

Oriani believes leadership is both innate and improved through experience. To her, leadership means service, nurturing an environment that allows everyone to perform their best. She values inspiring teams by developing and sharing vision while allowing them to define processes and implement good working tools.

Under her leadership, The Accessibility Institute (TAI) has grown from a project into an established organization that has changed the lives of about 2500 beneficiaries. Ninety-five percent of their beneficiaries who use SafariSeat wheelchairs report radical life improvement. The family income of 35% of

beneficiaries has increased as a result.

Inclusion is at the core of TAI's business, with its mission to support persons with disability on their path out of poverty and exclusion. She continuously works to make the public see the "hidden reality" of disability, challenging the narrative from viewing persons with disabilities as burdens to recognizing them as active community members.

Her advice to young change-makers is to just go for it. "Start small, be clear on your passion, but stay flexible in how to fulfill it," she advises. Her life philosophy is simple: "Be kind, be fair, be smart, be strong."



Brenda Majune: Rediscovering Purpose

Life is often shaped by defining moments turning points that challenge, transform, and ultimately refine us into who we are meant to be. For Brenda Majune, an Advocate of the High Court of Kenya, a Senior Legal Consultant at Kraidio Advocates and a Board Member at the National Organization for Peer Educators (NOPE), these moments have been deeply personal, painful, and yet profoundly formative. From a childhood of humble beginnings in Western Kenya to navigating the complexities of law and business, Brenda's journey is a testament to resilience, purpose, and self-discovery.

Humble Beginnings and Early Influences

Brenda was born at Sirisia Hospital, a small hospital in Western Kenya's Bungoma County and spent much of her childhood in the village, raised by her grandmother alongside her elder brother and the extended family. Their parents were pursuing higher education, her mother at a local university and her father overseas. It wasn't until around the age of five that Brenda met her father for the first time, initially perceiving him as a stranger. His sudden presence disrupted the familiar, carefree life she had known, introducing discipline and a rigorous academic structure that would later prove invaluable.

"My father, who is also an Advocate, took a whole year off to bond with us, foregoing his postgraduate studies at the Kenya School of Law," Brenda recalls. "At the time, his strictness felt unbearable, but looking back, it was an incredible sacrifice that shaped who I am today." Brenda recalls how her father had initially attempted to spark her interest in law from a young age, but she did not take to it immediately. She remembers being taken to court with him while he attended his cases, an experience she admittedly disliked. "I would go along, not because I had a choice, but because I knew there would be chips and sausages at the end of the day," she reflects with a smile.

Her educational journey saw her excel through primary and secondary school in Western Kenya before joining the University of Nairobi to pursue a law degree. From a young age, she had always known she wanted to be a lawyer. "I remember being very consistent with my answer on what I wanted to be when I grow up. My primary and High School contemporaries and teachers will remember me always saying that I wanted to be a lawyer."

Brenda recounts that on her day of admission to the bar, unlike the other attendees, her dinner shirt and bib (that thing that lawyers wear on the shirt) were quite old. Her mother would later reveal to her that she bought those things when she was still in form two, knowing that one day she would need to wear them.

Struggles and a Detour into Business

Like many fresh graduates, Brenda faced immense challenges in finding placement at a law firm or government institution. Despite applying extensively, responses were rare.

Contrary to expectations, her father did not use his professional network to ease her entry into the legal world, each of his children was expected to carve their own path.

After a year of fruitless job searching, disillusionment set in, and Brenda made a bold pivot, venturing into business. With capital borrowed from her father and cousin, she embarked on an entrepreneurial journey. However, her lack of confidence in legal practice persisted. "I felt inadequate. I remember a client calling me incompetent, and deep down, I knew that he was right," she admits.

Her turning point came when a restaurant business she co-founded collapsed due to betrayal. "I blindly trusted my business partners without proper due diligence. They colluded, pushed me out, and the business continued without me," she reveals. The financial loss was devastating, she had taken a loan against her car, which was later repossessed. The experience led to a period of deep despair, which, in hindsight, she recognizes as undiagnosed depression.

A Return to Law and Redemption

With no financial stability and nowhere else to turn to, Brenda sought refuge in her family. Surprisingly, rather than judgment, she found support. Her father took up her legal case against her former business partners pro bono, but more importantly, he reoriented her back to her true calling: the law.

Determined to rebuild, she chose not to seek employment but instead approached top law firms for unpaid apprenticeship opportunities. "I just wanted to regain my confidence," she says. It was at Matemu Katasi & Associates Advocates that she was given a chance. Under the mentorship of Mr. Mumo Matemu MBS and Ms. Grace Katasi, she worked tirelessly to reestablish herself. "I treated every single file as if it were my last chance. I had something to prove, not to others, but to myself."

Financial constraints made this period even tougher. "I had to take motorbikes to work every day, even on rainy days, covering my face with a mask and sunglasses to avoid recognition," she laughs. Support from her elder brother and then-boyfriend (now husband) helped her stay afloat.

A Profound Loss and a Renewed Perspective

Just as her legal career stabilized, life threw another unimaginable challenge her way. In November 2022, just days after celebrating her 30th birthday with her only sister Siti Kraido, tragedy struck, Siti passed away suddenly.

"I had been there for her from the day when she was brought home in a baby shoal, through school, and even into adulthood. She was just in her second year at USIU, and we would hang out every other weekend as I mentored her. Losing her was the worst experience of my life," Brenda shares. The grief was overwhelming, but it also reshaped her outlook on life. "The mortuary attendant told me, 'Just as babies are born every second, people die every second. Use your time well.' That moment shifted something in me."

The loss led to personal reflection, a reevaluation of relationships, and a renewed commitment to living with purpose. "I lost friendships that I thought were lifelong, but I also gained clarity on what truly matters."

Lessons in Leadership, Resilience, and Purpose

Brenda's journey has not only shaped her legal

career but also deepened her understanding of leadership. "Leadership, to me, is about service, guiding, empowering, and standing by others when they need you most."

As an advocate, she now approaches her clients with greater empathy, particularly those dealing with inheritance and family disputes. "I've come to understand that legal matters are not just transactions; they carry deep personal stories."

A Message to Aspiring Changemakers

For young people striving to make a difference, Brenda offers this advice: "Embrace your struggles; they are part of your journey. No experience, however painful, is wasted. Stay open to growth, seek mentorship, and never be afraid to start over."

As for what's next, Brenda envisions a future where she continues using her legal expertise to create meaningful impact. Whether through mentorship, advocacy, or policy work, she remains committed to leaving a legacy of resilience, integrity, and compassion.

And if she were to summarize her life philosophy in one sentence? "Life is unpredictable, but no matter the setbacks, you can always rise again."



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Breaking Barriers as a Woman with Disability and Changing the Narrative for Many Through Advocacy

Charity Chahasi

Charity Chahasi is the 9th born to a family of 10 siblings from Vihiga County, Kenya. Born to the poorest family in Kegoye village and having a physical disability, she had a life defined by struggles and discrimination. Her unbreakable spirit set her on a path to becoming a relentless advocate for persons with disabilities (PWDs).

Childhood of Struggles

Growing up, Charity faced discrimination not just from her community but also at school. Some teachers were very insensitive and unfair, sometimes even stripping her of the marks she had rightfully earned, telling her she was unworthy of education because of her disability and poverty.

High school was no different; constant financial struggles made her journey even more difficult. Her father's unwavering support and encouragement gave her the strength to persist. "Never give up, no matter how hard it is," he would tell her, words that gave her the zeal to keep going.

By sheer luck and determination, Charity completed high school, but there were no prospects of advancing her education because of poverty. She relocated to Mombasa to live



with one of her sisters as she looked for a job. She secured an opportunity to work at an association workshop for persons with disabilities as a casual labourer and raised funds to attend college. This is where her advocacy journey began.

Tackling Discrimination in the Workplace

Charity's first job seemed like a haven. "I thought this was the best place for me because it was for persons with disabilities," she says. However, this was nothing further from the reality.

PWDs were subjected to poor working conditions, underpaid, and placed under managers who lacked both qualifications and understanding of disability rights. They endured harassment, insults, discrimination, and, to top it up, meagre salaries.

These experiences ignited a fire within her. Alongside ten other women with disabilities, she founded the Coast Disabled Group, a forum in which they met to share their struggles and support one another.

“We started a merry-go-round and would sell groceries to support and sustain ourselves,” she says. There was great opposition from the management at work, and they resolved to dismantle the group for fear of losing their jobs. Later in 2000, a more vibrant group was formed, Tunaweza Women with Disabilities, a grassroots movement dedicated to advocating for the rights of PWDs. With all the discrimination at the workplace, Charity decided, ‘Enough is enough.’

The group’s activism led to significant policy changes, including securing permanent employment and benefits for many disabled workers.

When Charity and her colleagues protested unfair labour practices, they faced threats, job transfers under pretences, and, ultimately, job dismissals. With great courage, Charity led peaceful demonstrations, bringing national attention to the plight of PWDs. The government and board were forced to intervene, marking a turning point in her activism.

Impact and Recognition

Charity equates leadership with influence and impact. As the founder and leader of Tunaweza PWD CBO, since 2000 she has been instrumental in setting up other disability rights organisations in Mombasa.

Under her leadership, the organisation has empowered PWDs through job creation, skills training, and advocacy efforts that have led to tangible policy changes. As a professional mediator, she has been at the forefront of supporting conflict resolution among the PWD community and their organisations.

Her efforts have not gone unnoticed. She has been elected twice to lead the PWD docket in the Coast Civil Society Network. In 2022, she was awarded the Best Woman Human Rights Defender of the Year for her persistent fight against gender-based violence and disability discrimination.

Charity has been pivotal in securing positions for women with disabilities in the county government, advocating for accessibility in public buildings, and influencing national policies through petitions to the Senate and National Gender and Equality Commission.

Through Tunaweza PWD, she has spearheaded digital skills training for youth with disabilities, ensuring they have access to employment in the digital space. She has also established partnerships to support business ventures for PWDs, emphasising economic independence as a crucial step toward equality.



“Be persistent and resilient despite the obstacles in your way. You have the power to conquer.”

Personal Resilience

Ms. Chahasi is relentless in her advocacy efforts, which have also attracted great opposition. Some have plotted against her, fabricating issues to tarnish her name or put her in conflict with the government.

In a bid to intimidate her into silence, Charity was kidnapped for 10 hours and cautioned against continuing with activism. “Fear crept in as they kept trailing me for months, and I had to lay low for about six months,” she says.

The passion she has and support from her partners gave her the motivation and resilience to get back to work.

Charity envisions a society whereby PWDs are fully integrated, have access to public spaces and opportunities, and their potential is recognised and utilised. Through awareness campaigns, community dialogues, and policy advocacy, she aims to break the barriers that hold PWDs back.



Marginalized Communities and Dignity in Ageing

Lucy Nyoroka, Hsc

With over three decades of leadership, advocacy, and social development experience, Lucy Nyoroka Mworira, HSC, has dedicated her life to uplifting marginalised communities, championing women's rights, and fostering peace across Kenya and beyond. After losing 3 elections aspiring to be an MP Isiolo North constituency, so she could push older persons' agenda in parliament. She realised that she didn't need to be an MP to make a difference. So she founded The Kenya Pro-Ageing Organisation (TKPAO) to advocate for older persons well-being and ageing with dignity in Kenya and beyond.

As the founder and CEO of the Kenya Pro-Ageing Organization (KPAO), Lucy spearheads initiatives aimed at enhancing the dignity and well-being of older persons. Her organisation promotes active ageing, supports elderly rights, and ensures that Kenya's senior citizens are not left behind in development conversations. Her career is deeply rooted in community development, peacebuilding, conflict transformation, and women's empowerment. She has been instrumental in organising rural women, particularly from marginalised pastoralist communities, to advocate for land ownership, inheritance rights, and economic empowerment.



I am self-motivated, my secret to success is remaining focused, committed, persistent, and never giving up, and my greatest strength is building and maintaining great networks

Lucy's influence extends to governance, having served as a board member at Merti Technical and Vocational College and a member of the Isiolo County Public Service Board. Her leadership roles have allowed her to champion transparency, accountability, and public service excellence.

A seasoned advocate for inclusion, Lucy embraces a multi-ethnic, multi-faith approach to solving social issues. Her commitment to social justice has earned her multiple awards, including the prestigious Head of State Commendation (HSC) from President Uhuru Kenyatta in 2021.

Beyond her professional achievements, Lucy is a dedicated mentor and volunteer, actively participating in organisations such as the Kenya Red Cross, Kenya Child Welfare Society, and

Maendeleo Ya Wanawake.

A holder of a Master's in Development Studies and a Bachelor's in Leadership and Management from St. Paul's University, Lucy combines academic expertise with hands-on leadership to drive impactful change.

Her life's work stands as a testament to the power of resilience, leadership, and service, a beacon of hope for women, older persons, and the marginalised in Kenya.

Giving Back to the Community

The Need, Importance, Commitment, and Ways

By Florence Suji

Giving back to the community is a powerful way to foster connection, bridge societal gaps, and contribute to collective well-being. In a world filled with inequalities and challenges, the act of giving back goes beyond charity, it is an opportunity to create lasting change and build a stronger, more compassionate society.

Communities are often a mix; some individuals and areas thrive, while others struggle to meet basic needs such as education, healthcare, and growth opportunities. This disparity highlights the urgent need for individuals to give back. Contributions help individuals bridge gaps where resources are limited, ensuring that essential needs are met. By supporting communities, individuals also enhance collective resilience, making them better equipped to withstand challenges and promote equity for all members.

Acts of generosity create a sense of shared responsibility and belonging, reinforcing trust and collaboration within the community. Individual contributions drive meaningful, positive change, inspiring others and setting the foundation for long-term benefits. Beyond societal impacts, giving back fosters personal fulfillment, offering a sense of purpose and satisfaction. Witnessing the tangible impact of one's actions not only cultivates gratitude but also reinforces a deeper connection to the community.

While giving back can start with small gestures, creating meaningful change requires dedication and consistency. Recognizing the responsibility to contribute is the first step. This commitment involves prioritizing time for volunteering or participating in community

“What remains constant, is the power that comes from recognizing and embracing one’s ability to shape her own life”



initiatives, staying consistent in one's efforts, and leveraging personal skills, networks, or financial resources to maximize impact.

Donating food, clothes, or books helps those in need while supporting local businesses and participating in cleanups to improve the community. Mentoring the youth, volunteering, and spreading awareness through advocacy or fundraising create positive change. Financial contributions, no matter how modest, help fund critical programs and services. Even small acts like checking in on neighbors can make a meaningful impact. There are numerous ways to give

back to the community, regardless of available resources.

Giving back to the community is more than just a responsibility; it is an opportunity to make a tangible difference in the lives of others. It strengthens communities, fosters personal growth, and inspires positive change. By recognizing the need, committing to sustained efforts, and exploring various ways to contribute, individuals can create a brighter, more inclusive future. Together, we can transform our communities and build a world where everyone has the chance to thrive.

NATURE'S REMEDY:

Maimuna's Quest to Share Moringa's Healing Power

“

In the morning, you can chew the leaves to boost your energy throughout the day

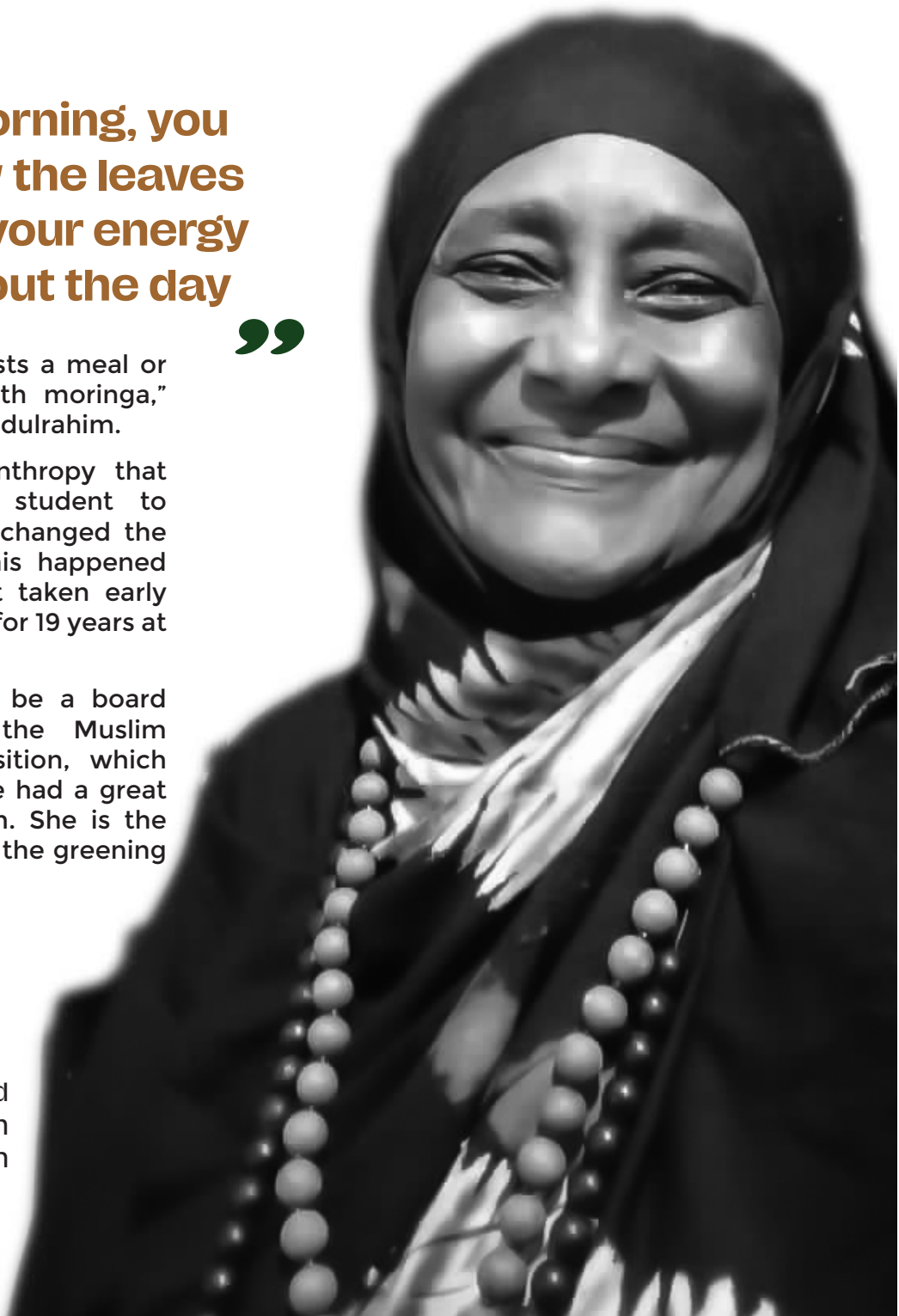
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“I always serve my guests a meal or drink that is infused with moringa,” reveals Maimuna Saad Abdulrahim.

A simple act of philanthropy that involved sponsoring a student to join Kisauni Polytechnic changed the trajectory of her life. This happened when Maimuna had just taken early retirement after working for 19 years at the Bank of Baroda.

She was appointed to be a board member representing the Muslim community. In that position, which she held for 13 years, she had a great impact on the institution. She is the one who is credited with the greening of the institution.

Maimuna Saad
Abdulrahim
Bahannan



At Kisauni Polytechnic Maimuna met John Kingsley, a volunteer with Volunteer Service Overseas (VSO), who linked her with various capacity-building training, particularly on Moringa. One of the trainings was through watching a film explaining the different benefits of moringa and how to cook its leaves, seeds, and powder. This triggered her interest in the plant. She also got trained by Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Ministry of Trade, getting a Trainer of Trainer Certification on Moringa.

Moringa Journey

Maimuna has always loved to read about women's health, which made it easier for her to identify her symptoms of menopause. Some of the symptoms were back pain, irregular menstruation, headaches, mood swings, hyperactivity, and irregular sleeping patterns.

There are many ways to manage menopause symptoms, such as lifestyle changes, including a healthy diet, mental wellness, getting enough rest, and regular exercise. At times, women may need hormone therapy.

For Maimuna, she opted for a natural remedy and discussed it with her doctor. This is when she incorporated moringa into her diet. "I had many symptoms, and when I used moringa, I eliminated them one by one," she says. For a decade now, she has been using moringa.

Maimuna has planted a dozen moringa trees in her compound, and she shares the leaves, flowers, and fruits with her neighbours. She also uses the herb to help those ailing in her community. As a professional practitioner tapping into moringa's medicinal value (for that is what her interest has turned into), she diligently documents everyone she has helped and how the plant has impacted their health.

She has been prescribing moringa to manage constipation, skin conditions, menopause symptoms, back problems,

and malnutrition in children. "If you have any health issues, you can use moringa to manage it before seeking specialized treatment," she says. Maimuna constantly researches how different communities use moringa, acknowledging the plant's diverse application across cultures.

Maimuna advises women to always have moringa seeds, green moringa powder, and dried leaves in their houses. The products can be incorporated in meals such as smoothies, tea, stew, and soup. "In the morning, you can chew the leaves to boost your energy throughout the day," she adds.

She offers some of her recipes. One is a nourishing breakfast whose ingredients are eggs, moringa flowers, and onions. Mix all ingredients and fry with oil on medium-low heat till cooked. This can be served with tomatoes on the side. The other is a recipe for vegetable soup. The ingredients for this meal are potatoes, onions, bell pepper, black pepper, and moringa fruits. The procedure is to peel the moringa fruit, chop the potatoes, onions, and bell pepper. Boil all the ingredients together for 10 minutes, then add black pepper to taste. Let it cool and blend.

With all the benefits of moringa, Maimuna challenges us to embrace its use for healthy living.



Moringa leaves and ground seed



Be
Your Own
Doctor

.....

Understanding the Role of Antibiotics in Vaginal Health and Vaginal Wellness



By Dr. Maryanne Ong'undi

“A woman’s vaginal health is a dynamic ecosystem that requires care and attention.”

Vaginal health is an essential yet often overlooked aspect of women’s well-being. A healthy vagina maintains a delicate balance of bacteria and yeast, collectively known as the vaginal flora. This microbiome plays a crucial role in preventing infections, regulating pH levels, and ensuring overall reproductive health. However, when this balance is disrupted, issues such as bacterial vaginosis (BV), yeast infections, and urinary tract infections (UTIs) can arise. One of the most common culprits behind such imbalances is the misuse or overuse of antibiotics.

Understanding the Vaginal Flora

The vaginal flora is predominantly composed of beneficial bacteria, particularly Lactobacillus species. These bacteria produce lactic acid, maintaining the vaginal pH between 3.8 and 4.5, an environment that inhibits the growth of harmful bacteria and pathogens. When this equilibrium is disturbed, the risk of infections increases significantly.



“A healthy vagina maintains a delicate balance of bacteria and yeast.”

How Antibiotics Affect Vaginal Health

While antibiotics are essential for treating bacterial infections, they are not selective in their action. This means they eliminate not only harmful bacteria but also the beneficial ones that protect the vaginal environment.

Here's how antibiotics impact vaginal health

1. Disrupting the natural balance – By killing Lactobacillus species, antibiotics can create an opportunity for harmful bacteria to overgrow, leading to conditions like BV.
2. Encouraging yeast overgrowth – Antibiotics can also reduce bacterial

populations that naturally suppress yeast (Candida), making women more susceptible to yeast infections.

3. Altering pH levels – Without the presence of beneficial bacteria to regulate pH, the vaginal environment becomes more alkaline, favoring the growth of harmful microbes.

Protecting Your Vaginal Health While Using Antibiotics

If antibiotics are medically necessary, consider the following measures to safeguard your vaginal health:

- Take probiotics: Consuming probiotic supplements or probiotic-rich foods like yogurt, kefir, and kimchi can help replenish beneficial bacteria.
- Practice good hygiene: Avoid douching, scented feminine products, and harsh soaps, which can further disrupt the vaginal flora.
- Increase hydration and fiber intake: Drinking plenty of water and eating fiber-rich foods can help restore gut and vaginal microbiomes.

The Role of Probiotics in Vaginal Health

Probiotics, often referred to as “good bacteria,” are microorganisms that can provide health benefits when consumed in adequate amounts. For vaginal health, specific strains of probiotics, particularly Lactobacillus species, play a crucial role in maintaining the balance of the vaginal microbiota. A healthy vaginal microbiome is essential for preventing infections such as bacterial vaginosis (BV) and yeast infections, as well as supporting overall reproductive health.

1. Restoring balance to the vaginal flora: Probiotics help restore the natural balance of Lactobacillus bacteria, which are predominant in a healthy vagina. They produce

lactic acid, which maintains an acidic environment, preventing the overgrowth of harmful bacteria and yeast.

2. Preventing vaginal infections: By maintaining a healthy balance of bacteria, probiotics can reduce the risk of infections like BV, which occurs when there is an overgrowth of harmful bacteria in the vagina. Probiotics have been shown to prevent or reduce recurring yeast infections.

When to Seek Medical Advice

While mild imbalances can resolve on their own, persistent symptoms like unusual discharge, itching, burning, or discomfort should prompt a visit to a healthcare provider. Self-diagnosing and self-medicating, especially with over-the-counter antifungals or antibiotics, can worsen the issue.

A woman's vaginal health is a dynamic ecosystem that requires care and attention. Understanding the impact of antibiotics on vaginal flora is essential in preventing infections and maintaining overall well-being. Through education, awareness, and proactive measures, women can take charge of their intimate health, ensuring a balanced and thriving vaginal microbiome.



Antibiotics may eliminate not only harmful bacteria but also the beneficial ones that protect the vaginal environment.

If You Could Unlearn One Thing You Were Taught About Sex, What Would It Be?

By Thu Nguyen

I have rewritten my dating app bio more times than I can count. It's a tricky balance—finding a line that sparks interesting conversations while also showcasing something unique about me, all within a character limit. But after plenty of trial and error, I landed on my favorite one yet: “If you could unlearn one thing you were taught about sex, what would it be?”

The responses I get generally fall into three categories: some jump straight into raunchy territory (predictable); some throw the question back at me (clever, but I see what you're doing); and a rare few engage in a real discussion—sharing thoughtful insights, dismantling outdated beliefs, and questioning the norms we've been handed. Regardless of their approach, every answer tells

me something about the person, and that's exactly the kind of conversation starter I was hoping for.

When you only have a handful of words to represent yourself online, I believe great conversations start with the right questions. My bio isn't just a reflection of what I care about—it's also a litmus test to see if someone shares my curiosity and willingness to dig deeper.

But why sex? Why not any other aspect of my personality?

Dating apps exist in this weird limbo between searching for love and searching for sex. For women, that often means fielding a constant stream of unsolicited advances, questionable comments, and thinly veiled propositions. But here's the thing—I can talk about sex too. I can initiate conversations about it, openly and healthily. More than that, I (and every other woman) have the right to question the norms that have long dictated our experiences, often reinforcing dynamics that leave women disadvantaged in relationships.

At its core, my question challenges us to re-examine the toxic narratives we've internalized—especially the ones that harm women in sexual relationships.



So many of the “rules” around sex exist to uphold male power while sidelining women’s needs. The hardest part of unlearning these scripts? The prejudices. Sex remains a taboo subject, shrouded in shame, secrecy, and contradiction. And even in spaces where people claim to be open-minded, conversations about sex are often hijacked by patriarchal views, hypersexualization, or outright harassment when women dare to open up.

That’s why I chose the word unlearn. Learning isn’t just about acquiring and applying knowledge; it’s also about shedding what no longer serves us and continuously updating our understanding to better adapt to the world around us. Unlearning is a crucial part of this process—it challenges the deeply ingrained notions we’ve taken for granted and allows us to rebuild our perspectives and behaviors from a fresh, more conscious standpoint.

And sex, like everything else, requires unlearning just as much as learning. We grow up absorbing ideas and lessons about sex—some valid, some outdated, some designed to restrict certain people while favoring others. Some are truths, while others are just deeply ingrained biases.

Because, let’s be real, we’ve been fed some seriously questionable ideas about sex, here are a few things I—and those around me—have consciously unlearned

to foster a more open, positive, and fair approach to sexuality.

- ***A high “body count” is something to brag about***
- ***Having sex before marriage and having multiple partners makes you “easy.”***
- ***But waiting until marriage makes you “prudish” (pick a lane, patriarchy!)***
- ***You need to look and perform like a porn star to be attractive and deserving of love***
- ***Men should always take the lead, and sex is over when he finishes.***
- ***If you’re in a relationship, you should always be “available” for sex—or else...***
- ***Using sex toys is weird, unnatural, and disrespectful to your partner.***
- ***Sex should only happen between a man and a woman.***

Notice Anything?

A lot of these ideas contradict each other. That’s because they were never about fairness or truth, they were about control, keeping power in the hands of those who already have it while keeping everyone else tangled up in shame and self-doubt.

Talking about sex also isn’t about giggling over dirty jokes or being provocative for the sake of it. Questioning what we were taught about sex isn’t about finding the right answer because there is no single right answer. Our perspectives are shaped by culture, experience, and personal values, and there’s room for different choices and beliefs. What matters is that we have the freedom to make those choices for ourselves, free from outdated expectations and coercion.

More than anything, discussions about sex should be consensual, honest, reflective, and empowering. They should help us recognize unhealthy patterns, challenge harmful norms, and move toward positive, respectful relationships ones where everyone feels safe voicing their desires and boundaries without fear or stigma.



My Natural Hair Journey

From Hate to Love

By Sally Ndwiga

For the longest time, I hated my hair. I mean, really hated it. The tight kinks and coils of my 4B/C hair felt rough and dry to the touch, and to make matters worse, it wasn't even jet black like I wished it to be. Growing up, I desperately wanted hair like my primary school deskmate, Vanita. Her hair was flawless, jet black, silky, and flowing down to the middle of her back. Everyone admired her hair, and somehow, her entire personality seemed to revolve around it. I, on the other hand, felt invisible, overlooked, and resentful of the hair I had been born with.

Attending an Indian public school in the heart of Nairobi exposed me to a different standard of beauty, one where long, straight, and shiny hair was the ultimate goal. My own hair, by contrast, felt like an obstacle to feeling beautiful. I longed for the day when I could change it.

The Big Relaxer Letdown

In high school, my mother finally made the decision I had been waiting for: she allowed me to chemically relax my hair.

I was ecstatic! I imagined that the relaxer would transform my hair into something closer to Vanita's, long, flawless, and effortlessly manageable. But reality hit hard. My relaxed hair didn't grow long, it didn't turn jet black, and worst of all, it became weak and brittle. The more I relaxed it, the more it thinned out and lost its life. My dream of "perfect" hair had officially crumbled.

I continued to relax my hair for years, believing that it was my only option. That was until 2017 when I met a woman at church who changed everything. She wore her natural hair in a high bun, her edges sleeked to perfection, and her crown full and healthy. She looked radiant. For the first time, I saw natural hair not as a burden but as something beautiful and regal.

That very evening, I fell into a deep rabbit hole of YouTube tutorials on natural hair care. I had never seen so many women

not only embrace but celebrate their natural hair! Their confidence was infectious, and I knew I wanted that for myself. That's when I decided to give my natural hair another chance, and I have never looked back. Over the years, my love for my hair has grown to the point where I now influence those around me to embrace their own kinks and coils.

The Cultural and Historical Weight of Black Hair

For centuries, Black hair has been misunderstood and even despised. Terms like "nappy" were used to demean the natural texture of Afro hair, reinforcing the idea that it was unruly and unprofessional. In Kenya, straightened or chemically treated hair became the gold standard in workplaces, with natural hair whether in an Afro, dreadlocks, or twists, deemed unprofessional in certain industries.

Though there has been progress, the bias against natural hair still exists. However, the natural hair movement has given many of us the confidence to push back against these out-dated norms and redefine beauty on our own terms.

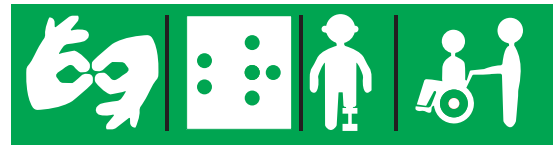
Embracing the Crown

My hair is no longer something I resent, it's something I cherish. It carries history, resilience, and power. The journey to self-acceptance wasn't easy, but today I proudly wear my hair in all its natural glory. And if my story inspires even one person to embrace their own kinks and coils, then every moment of struggle was worth it.





Transforming Lives Through Community Empowerment



WOTE KWA WOTE
Impacting Change for PWDs to improve their future

Located in the heart of Dandora, Nairobi, Wote Kwa Wote Community-Based Organization (CBO) stands as a beacon of hope and transformation for children, youth, women, and people with disability. Founded on the principles of inclusivity and empowerment, Wote Kwa Wote uplifts communities through innovative programs, skills development, and strategic partnerships.

A Vision of Inclusion

The name Wote Kwa Wote, Swahili for "Everyone for Everyone", reflects the organization's vision of a community where no one is left behind. Guided by a commitment to social justice, economic empowerment, and personal development, Wote Kwa Wote addresses key challenges faced by marginalized groups, particularly the youth, women, people with disability, and vulnerable populations.

Programmes and Impact

Youth Voice Project - equips young people with entrepreneurial and employability skills. The Mzizi Project - a vital feeding program that provides nutritious meals to individuals and families in need.

A Mile in My Shoes Walk - an annual event to raise funds and awareness for people living

with disability.

Creative Arts and Sports Engagement – a workshop and training camp that harness the creative potential of young people.

Community Capacity Building - address the specific needs of community members through financial literacy sessions, digital marketing training, and business development workshops

Mentoring and Networking - connect the youth with industry leaders and professionals, providing guidance, role models, and opportunities for personal growth.

Partnerships that Drive Change

Wote Kwa Wote's success is through collaboration organisations including SHOFCO, UDPK, Next Step Foundation, Kenya Forest Research Institute, Dandora Hospital, Local Businesses & Government Bodies.

The Road Ahead

Wote Kwa Wote is committed to expanding its programmes and deepening its impact to include projects that foster innovation and entrepreneurial thinking, equipping the youth with 21st-century competencies and aligning with organisations that share the vision of community



From The End of the Road to Reshaping Women's Futures

Betty Adera's Story

By Tabitha Mwai

"I'm a product of mentorship by women, some not even related to me, who have challenged me at every stage of my journey"

A social advocate for justice and peace with global accolades, Betty Adera has carved a trail for herself as the world grapples with embracing women's leadership. She is a global public health specialist in adolescent sexual reproductive health and rights.

Betty is also in the political space. She believes "political influence is key to achieving goals for communities, particularly for women."

Upbringing

Born and bred in Migori County, in a village known as Wuoth Ogik (Dholuo for 'the end of the road'), having a career as a woman seemed like a distant dream.

"I could see my classmates, a good number of them, today they were in school, tomorrow they were not," she recalls.

A lot of young girls had to drop out of school due to teenage pregnancy and others were forced into marriage to manage the embarrassment, which is still a reality in many areas, not just in Kenya.

Having been raised by educators, her parents prioritised their education. Her father would tell the girls, "Your job will be your first husband." By this, he implied that he did not want to see his five daughters, without a source of livelihood and relying 100% on a man. The statement made little sense then but, in the fullness of time, Betty has come to understand the analogy.

"I am the sixth born in a family of eight and we lost our dad when I was in class four and none of my elder siblings had finished school," she says.

This left her mother, a primary school teacher, with the burden of educating them. She did all that was humanly possible to educate them and would take all kinds of loans available to keep them in school.

Betty has much admiration for her mother. She was widowed at 32 and left to care for eight children. She focused on her children and never remarried yet she was still in her prime. In Betty's view, there was something extraordinary about her mother. She was not a mother to just them but also to the cousins who lived in their household.

"As we went on with our daily lives, she always covered us with prayer. If she was not in class teaching, she was somewhere kneeling in prayer," Betty says.

The Journey

Ms. Adera is now a mother of two young men, a title she carries with honour and pride. She believes that being a mother is one of the greatest tasks that God gave her and one that she has given her best shot.

For her, it was a deliberate decision to choose her sons after going through divorce. She has let go of many attractive opportunities because they did not serve her sons' best interests. It is their unwritten rule to be home by seven o'clock to have dinner together. This is a time to bond and a way for her to know what is happening in her sons' lives. Otherwise, it is so easy for family members to be estranged despite living under the same roof.

"Like everyone else, life has done life on me." Betty had to raise her children by herself from a young age, following her encounter with domestic violence, an experience that she endured for 18 years, including emotional and physical scars that outlived the marriage. Over time, with a lot of work towards healing, Betty has been able to speak up about her experiences to inspire others.

Betty vividly recalls the day she went public with her story. She had been invited as the chief speaker in an international event focusing on women's empowerment. As the master of ceremony introduced her, enumerating her achievements, she was struck that she did not see herself that way.



She points out that violence has a way of tainting how one views oneself, different from those of their admirers. “Any form of violence, particularly against women and girls, takes away something from you. It rips your confidence and your drive and tears you apart. If not handled professionally, even capable productive women may end up lost on account of damning mental health issues.”

As it were, that is the introduction that sparked the courage to speak out. Ms Adera decided to share her story. It was a surprising story to many, but its outcome was even more shocking, perhaps overwhelming.

Betty started getting calls from dozens of people, both male and female. People from all walks of life, including women high up the corporate ladder who had endured violence at home and in the workplace. “No matter the level of education or exposure or position in society, violence is violence,” she says.

Betty Adera Foundation

Exactly one week after Betty shared her story, the Betty Adera Foundation was born. The foundation is a platform that offers a safe space for people experiencing sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). They offer a listening ear and work collaboratively with the victim to develop mitigation measures.

Their interventions are guided by professionals. For those who choose legal redress, a team of lawyers working on a pro-bono basis helps them understand what the process will look like. Those who seek reconciliation are also supported through counselling, and those with physical injury are given medical care.

She says sadly that they have not won every battle for every woman or girl. Some cases slip through their hands and some victims lose their lives in the process. Some of those who seek their help vanish and they never get to find them, so they have no idea what happens to them.

Nonetheless, she says, many stories need to be told even if they are hard to listen to. This is where platforms such as Turning Point Magazine play a critical role in our society.

Ms. Adera applauds the initiative by the Kenyan President, His Excellency Dr. William Ruto, for setting up a commission to look into the rising cases of femicide. This is a demonstration that the issue of violence against women and girls has gotten the attention of the highest office in the land. This action alone will go a long way in strengthening legislation and policy framework in Kenya. “We hope this will make women and girls in this country feel safe,” she says.

Leadership Journey

From an early age, Betty held various leadership positions. She would be appointed class prefect, games captain, and choir leader despite her not being the best.

At home, she was a ‘Daddy’s girl’ and would get more responsibilities than her siblings. By the age of seven, she was already cooking for everyone. Betty reveals that she was also a snitch and would tell on her siblings. At times she acted as their bridge to seek favours from the father.

Betty’s earlier roles did not feel like leadership to her, yet at every level in her life it appears she has been in charge of something, including projects, teams, and departments at work. Currently, she is a senior technical advisor for HIV/AIDS and health at Global Communities.

She has won numerous awards locally and internationally. Most recently, in January 2025 she scooped

the United States President’s International Leadership Award at the African-Caribbean International Leadership Conference.

In 2024 she was awarded the Ambassador for Peace by the Universal Peace Federation. She also received the Outstanding Women’s Voice Award in 2023 from Humanitarian Awards Global. 2020 saw Betty bagging the National Ambassador for Clean Content Award by the Kenya Film Classification Board and The Role Model of the Year Award by Talent Prenuer Awards.

In 2019, she received the UNESCO’s Books for Peace Award, the Humanitarian Medal of Honor by the World Peace and Diplomacy Organization, and the Global ICON Award



Any form of violence, particularly against women and girls, takes away something from you.



BETTY ADERA FOUNDATION
Leading Women's Health
Source: [www.bettyadefoundation.org](#)

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2019 by Passion Vista. Global Communities has awarded her twice, in 2018 she received the CEO of the Year Award and in 2015 she got the Global Award for “Exceptional Field Staff”.

Betty believes that leaders need to be knowledgeable and intentional. For success, leaders must put in the necessary effort. A leader should be able to make intelligent contributions to various situations. This explains why despite her specialisation in global public health, she holds multiple postgraduate diplomas in diverse fields, including climate change.

She holds that leaders should empower others and be accountable for their actions, decisions, and words. She also advises all women to get mentors in different areas of their lives.

“Like everyone else, life has done life on me”

“I’m a product of mentorship by women, some not even related to me, who have challenged me to the core at every stage of my journey,” she reflects. “Being a female leader comes with more than a fair share of challenges.” She explains, “There are gatekeepers everywhere in any influential leadership position, who are often men.” Betty has been to spaces where people were shocked by her presence as a woman.

Getting into Ms President – The Media Focus on Africa-fronted reality TV show showcasing and developing women’s leadership skills which aired on Kenya Television Network - afforded Betty the opportunity to display her leadership ability to the world and brand herself. The show was meant to spark conversation on women’s capacity to take the highest office.

“Our society still has a long way to go in embracing women in leadership,” she says. Therefore, it is prudent for women to build their confidence and match it up with proper qualifications to protect their positions.

Girl Child Education

Betty is deeply passionate about girl child education. She sees education as an empowering tool that expands opportunities for women. “If I never went to school, I wouldn’t have managed to take care of my children and me.” She adds, “That means I wouldn’t have a story to tell.”

Betty Adera Foundation, in partnership with Rise Up, is working on a project advocating for young and child (teen) mothers to return to school. A large number of girls drop out of school due to early pregnancy.

She says that others are only victims of ignorance, not having information about their sexual health. As they experiment, they find themselves pregnant and, worse still, having contracted sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Others go for backstreet abortion, thereby risking their lives.

Poverty, Betty mentions, is also another factor contributing to girls dropping out of school.

With limited resources, some parents prioritise boys’ education, leaving girls to do unpaid care work at home, making them vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Such girls end up having several children by the age of 18 and their chances of going back to school get slimmer by the day. For girls who have dropped out of school to continue with their education, a multi-sectoral approach is needed. This is the intervention approach that Betty Adera Foundation is jointly taking with Rise Up. They bring together the girls, their families, and other stakeholders to offer support to the girls. Such support enables the girls to get back to their studies even if it is through adult literacy programs.

“My dream is to have the least educated girl in Kenya having completed secondary education,” Betty says. She is aware that this is a costly dream and that is why she has started a social enterprise for sanitary towels. She aims to create a scholarship fund with the profits made from the sales. This is her way of giving back to society.

What Next for Betty

Betty will soon be graduating with a Doctorate in Public Health. Her eyes are also set on scaling up the Betty Adera Foundation to widen its reach to be a national outfit as well as restructure her mentorship program to reach out to more young people. Her book is also on the way, with plans to launch it next year.

Her final plea to the society is: “Let us educate, mentor, and support women to make their mark.”



Wife Model Of
The Year 2020
**BETTY
ADERA**





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Spotlight >

Women Changemakers

PLATFORMS TO ADVOCATE FOR MEANINGFUL CHANGE.

“**Remain resilient, focused, and take consistent, purposeful action.**”

Kudzai Meda

Kudzai Meda is a policy, advocacy, and campaign lead for the Regional SRHR Fund at Hivos. Her journey into development was shaped by her educational background and professional experiences. During her internship in South Africa, she gained crucial insights into how intersecting factors create systemic vulnerabilities, particularly affecting children, adolescent girls, and women.

Kudzai had a turning point when she witnessed firsthand the systemic under-representation of women and girls due to patriarchal norms. Through community volunteering, she observed the challenges faced by girls regarding bodily autonomy and healthcare access, igniting her passion for gender equality and reproductive rights advocacy.

For Kudzai, leadership transcends position or power; it's about impact, influence, and mobilising others toward common goals. In her daily work, she amplifies young people's voices, ensuring their participation in decision-making

processes affecting their lives. One of her most significant impacts came through community outreach activities that created safe spaces for young people to access SRHR information and services despite societal stigma.

Despite facing resistance to inclusive approaches, Kudzai remains committed to ensuring marginalised groups shape programs and policies. She addresses these challenges through persistence, education, and strategic collaborations with like-minded organisations.

A personal setback—being retrenched from an organisation she deeply valued—taught her not to define herself solely by her job. She maintains resilience by cultivating a positive mindset, drawing strength from her faith, and prioritising physical wellness through regular gym sessions.

Kudzai hopes to leave a legacy of a world where child marriages are eradicated and young people have equitable, stigma-free access to SRHR services. Her advice to young changemakers is simple but powerful: remain resilient, focused, and take consistent, purposeful action. When given opportunities, use those platforms to advocate for meaningful change.

BREAK BARRIERS, CREATE OPPORTUNITIES

Caren Kaloni

Caren Koloni's journey in hockey began at Cardinal Otunga Girls in Bungoma. She played for the school and later moved to campus and club levels. It did not take her long to be aware of the stark under-representation of women, particularly young women, in officiating roles. This realisation fueled her transition into officiating as a technical official, driven by a desire to create change and open doors for other women.

Koloni has since officiated numerous African tournaments and achieved a significant milestone with her promotion to the international panel, enabling her to officiate globally. This achievement underscores her belief in women's potential to excel in all facets of sports, including officiating.

For Koloni, leadership is about breaking down barriers and creating opportunities. As the Assistant Secretary of the Kenya Hockey Umpires Association, she actively recruits and mentors young women, encouraging them to pursue officiating careers. Her position also allows her to advocate for policies that support women officials, paving a smoother path for future generations. She challenges stereotypes and inspires women to embrace leadership roles by occupying spaces traditionally dominated by men.

Koloni's achievements serve as an example for young girls, demonstrating that they can thrive in male-dominated fields. Mentoring and training aspiring female officials has been particularly fulfilling for her, as she witnesses the impact of representation. She credits Esther Adolwa, International Hockey Federation central panel member, as a major inspiration. Adolwa's journey has taught Koloni resilience, professionalism, and the importance of mentorship, emphasising that success involves lifting others.

As a Black woman in Africa navigating the international hockey officiating scene,

“ Change begins with small steps, whether mentoring, speaking out, or challenging norms. ”

Koloni has faced challenges. Limited tournaments in Africa restrict exposure compared to their European and Asian counterparts. However, she maximises every opportunity, works diligently, and cultivates a strong network within the international hockey community. She believes grassroots movements are crucial for long-term change, advocating for the introduction of officiating at school and club levels to create a pipeline of future officials.

Competing with officials from regions with more opportunities has been a major challenge. Rejections and limitations due to fewer African tournaments have made gaining international experience difficult. Koloni focuses on what she can control: her skills, knowledge, and dedication. She remains prepared, motivated by her desire to create pathways for young women.

Koloni's vision is to be remembered as a catalyst for change for women in sports officiating. Her goals include creating more opportunities, ensuring equal representation, and mentoring the next generation of female officials in Africa. She aims to continue growing within international officiating, aspiring to join the FIH leading panel, and to expand training programs for women officials in Kenya and Africa.

Her advice to others is to start where they are, utilising available resources. She believes change begins with small steps, whether mentoring, speaking out, or challenging norms. Consistency and passion are key. Koloni emphasises that everyone can contribute to positive change by advocating for equal opportunities, mentoring young athletes, and challenging gender biases, creating a more inclusive and diverse sports community. Her closing reflection is, “Break barriers, create opportunities, and leave a legacy that empowers others to rise.”



WOMEN STEP INTO THEIR PURPOSE

Every Woman's Brand Is Built Daily Through Actions, Values, And Presence

Joan Mwende

Personal Branding Strategist & Confidence Coach YOUniquely Branded



Born and raised in rural Kenya, where opportunities were scarce and dreams seemed distant, Joan Mwende has emerged as a global personal branding strategist and confidence coach at YOUniquely Branded. Her journey from modest beginnings to international success embodies her belief that strength lies in embracing one's uniqueness.

Growing up fascinated by the power of stories and identity, Joan faced cultural and societal barriers that initially made her question her worth. Balancing multiple roles as a preacher's wife, corporate professional, and mother initially left her feeling overwhelmed. However, these challenges became the foundation for her transformation.

A turning point moment came while managing global brands across 28 countries, where she realized success transcended skills to encompass confidence, clarity, and visibility. This insight led to a personal reinvention guided by her core values: faith, authenticity, impact, community, and empathy.

Through her non-profit work in rural Kenya and interactions with diverse women leaders, Joan witnessed how talented women often struggled to be seen and valued. This observation crystallized her mission to help women build powerful personal brands that

command respect and create opportunities.

Today, she coaches women from rural entrepreneurs to high-level executives, teaching them that personal branding is not about perfection but authenticity and alignment. Her approach emphasises owning one's unique story, building strategic networks, and maintaining intentional visibility.

Joan's philosophy centres on the belief that every woman's brand is built daily through actions, values, and presence. Her message to women everywhere remains clear: they are worthy, capable, and their legacy deserves recognition.

Her journey from rural Kenya to the global stage stands as testimony that with the right mindset, strategy, and courage, transformative success is possible. Through her work, she continues to prove that when women step into their purpose, they not only transform their own lives but also inspire others to do the same.

“with the right mindset, strategy, and courage, transformative success is possible”

USTAWI NUTRITIONAL CARE LIMITED

Judy Mutunga - CEO

Ustawi Nutritional Care Limited



Judy Mutunga's curiosity about food extended beyond mere nourishment to its role in culture, tradition, and economic activity. As the founder of Ustawi Nutritional Care Ltd, her journey into food science and entrepreneurship was driven by a commitment to innovation, sustainability, and community empowerment.

A pivotal moment in her career came when she witnessed the devastating scale of post-harvest losses in Kenya's mango industry. Seeing heaps of quality mangoes rotting due to lack of market access and preservation solutions became the catalyst for her entrepreneurial venture. With up

to 40% of mango harvests going to waste, she recognized this wasn't merely an agricultural issue but an economic, environmental, and social crisis.

Through Ustawi Nutritional Care Limited, Judy introduced mango drying technology, transforming perishable produce into long-lasting, high-value products. Her approach combines farmer training in post-harvest handling with sustainable processing techniques, helping increase earnings while reducing waste.

Her leadership philosophy centers on service, vision, and impact. Working closely with Prof. Mugalavai, a food scientist mentor, she learned to merge scientific excellence with practical entrepreneurship. Her commitment to inclusivity is demonstrated through prioritizing women and youth participation in agricultural innovation, despite cultural barriers.

When faced with early setbacks in technology implementation, Judy transformed failure into opportunity by simplifying systems and enhancing farmer training. She maintains resilience by connecting to her bigger purpose and celebrating small wins, viewing challenges as growth opportunities.

Her vision extends to creating a legacy where smallholder farmers, especially women and youth, have tools and resources to thrive. To young changemakers, she shares Bruce Lee's wisdom about mastery through dedication: "I fear not the man who has practiced 10,000 kicks once but I fear the man who has practiced one kick 10,000 times."

“**I fear not the man who has practiced 10,000 kicks once but I fear the man who has practiced one kick 10,000 times**”

- Bruce Lee -



POWER IN KNOWLEDGE AND EDUCATION



Catherine Muthoni Mwangi Waweru

Educator and child protection advocate

At 45, Catherine Muthoni Mwangi-Waweru stands as a testament to the power of education and dedicated service in Kenya. Born in Mombasa County to parents who valued education, particularly for girls, Catherine's journey reflects both privilege and purpose.

Her father, a financial accountant at Kenya Port Authority, and her mother, who transitioned from teaching to smallholder farming, provided a blended upbringing between urban Mombasa and rural Murang'a County. This dual perspective would later inform her approach to development work.

After completing her Bachelor of Education at Moi University, Catherine's career began with a three-year volunteer position with the Fellowship of Christian Union (FOCUS). A pivotal moment came during her time in Norway, where she attended the Millennium Development Goals conference in Oslo and witnessed Professor Wangari Maathai receive the Nobel Peace Prize, experiences that shaped her development career trajectory.

Her professional journey has spanned teaching English at Kakuma Refugee Camp, working with Plan International in Tharaka Nithi, addressing child protection in Nairobi's informal settlements with GOAL Ireland, and managing urban education at Concern Worldwide. Currently, as Country Representative at VSO, she leads a diverse team promoting volunteering for development, enabling knowledge sharing across communities worldwide.

As a wife and mother of "three wise men," as she affectionately calls her sons, Catherine balances her professional commitments with family life. She finds joy in catching up with friends, watching movies with her family, and maintaining her well-being through quiet reflection time.

THE ENTREPRENEUR WITHIN

A PATH TO SELF SUSTAINED ACHIEVEMENT



Clarena Amatha

Clarena Amatha's entrepreneurial journey springs from the early teachings of her parents, who instilled in her the values of tenacity, diligence, and compassion. Their unwavering support and confidence in her abilities gave her the foundation to pursue her aspirations in community development.

Throughout her career, she has been at the helm of numerous community-based projects, specialising in capacity-building and sustainable development. Her expertise in facilitating workshops on strategic planning and project management has enabled community members and colleagues to successfully implement their initiatives. Through effective communication and engagement strategies, she has fostered strong relationships with stakeholders, creating an environment conducive to sustainable outcomes.

A defining moment in her career came in mid-2023 with the "Tomato Value Chain" project in Bungoma County, Kenya. The initiative aimed to revitalise local tomato production while supporting rural economic development through job creation and poverty reduction. Under her leadership, the project successfully equipped 60 smallholder farmers with irrigation systems, production information, and market access.

Within a year, her team's efforts yielded remarkable results: a transformed and resilient community with enhanced farming capabilities, reduced post-harvest waste, and improved greenhouse gas management.

Clarena firmly believes that success is a collaborative achievement, combining personal dedication with the support and encouragement of others. Her philosophy centers on the power of combining internal determination with external support systems to overcome challenges.

As she continues her work, Clarena's mission extends beyond personal achievement. She aspires to leave a lasting legacy of transformation, measured not just by her own success, but by the positive impact she has made on countless lives throughout her journey.

WHEN LIFE PULLS YOU BACK, AIM FORWARD

Dorcas Kemunto



Born and raised in Kisii, Dorcas Kemunto has forged a remarkable path from education to international human resource management. Despite holding a Bachelor's degree in Education, Linguistics, and Literature from the University of Nairobi, she chose to transition from teaching to HR, a decision that would lead her to work across Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

The turning point in her career came when she confronted her initial hesitation and successfully applied for an expatriate HR Director position in Sudan. This experience reinforced her belief that career success demands boldness and a willingness to try.

Her leadership philosophy centres on accountability, vision, and empowerment. As Chair of the Board at Mama Lucy Kibaki Hospital, she has demonstrated these principles by spearheading the institution's transformation, working alongside Governor Johnson Sakaja to overcome operational challenges and improve its reputation.

In navigating male-dominated environments where her input was sometimes dismissed, Dorcas developed strategies of demonstrating competence and building strategic alliances to earn respect. She maintains her resilience through daily running, faith, and gratitude practices, believing that societal change begins at the family level before expanding to create broader impact.

For young professionals, Dorcas emphasises the importance of technical competence and mentorship. "Master the skills and knowledge necessary for the work you want to do," she advises. "Seek out mentors and learn from those you admire and respect."

Her life philosophy, "When life pulls you back, aim forward," precisely captures her approach to challenges. She views setbacks not as defeats but as opportunities to adjust, refocus, and progress toward greater goals. Through her work and leadership, Dorcas aims to leave a legacy of excellence, proving that integrity and commitment can yield meaningful results in any field.



LEADERSHIP ISN'T JUST ABOUT TITLES

It's About Stepping Up And Paving The Way For Others

Margaret Kiune

Margaret Kiune exudes an undeniable aura of determination and warmth, with infectious energy and a passion that makes it clear she is no ordinary woman. Her confidence comes from overcoming adversity

Growing up as the last-born in a bustling family of eight, Margaret's home was filled with love despite the chaos. Life brought significant hardships, particularly the loss of her brother, which triggered family land disputes. "It felt like everything was falling apart," she recalls. "You'd look around and see nothing but hopeless faces." She found strength in her mother's unwavering spirit, learning early that resilience isn't an option—it's a necessity.

As the only girl in her neighbourhood, Margaret faced unique challenges. "Who was I supposed to ask about girl stuff? My brothers? Please!" she laughs. This isolation left her craving female companionship, which she finally found in high school, where she built lasting friendships with

girls from diverse backgrounds.

Her education journey began at Ruruguti Primary School before moving to St. Maria Goretti Secondary School. Margaret's leadership path started with small roles in high school and then flourished at Kabete National Polytechnic, where she became Deputy President. Her influence expanded to national positions, serving as Secretary and Administrator of the Nairobi Youth & Student Leaders Forum and Deputy President of the Technical and Vocational Training Student Association. She completed a year-long training under the President's Fellowship program with the Global Peace Foundation and now stands as an ambassador representing Nyeri County.

"If you had told me years ago that I'd be here, I'd have laughed. But life has a way of surprising us," she says. Margaret's journey proves that leadership isn't just about titles—it's about stepping up and paving the way for others. When obstacles appear, she doesn't just climb over them—she uses them as platforms to rise higher.

Entrepreneur, Advocate for Gender Equality & Youth Empowerment.

Hon. Jane Wangechi Kagiri - County MP, Laikipia

Hon. Jane Wangechi Kagiri is a visionary leader, dynamic entrepreneur, and passionate advocate for gender equality, youth empowerment, and economic inclusion.

As the County MP for Laikipia, she has been instrumental in driving legislative reforms and championing community-driven initiatives that promote sustainable development, equitable opportunities, and social cohesion. With a strong background in business, technology, and governance, she has played a pivotal role in shaping policies that enhance urban development, housing, and economic growth. Her leadership extends beyond politics, influencing national conversations on entrepreneurship, women's empowerment, and inclusive governance.

Hon. Kagiri's commitment to transformative leadership is reflected in her strategic roles in Parliament and key organizations. She serves as the Chairperson of the 47 County MPs Caucus, where she steers legislative priorities and national policy alignment. As a member of the Housing, Urban Planning & Public Works Committee, she actively contributes to shaping policies that drive sustainable urban development and housing reforms. She also serves on the National Cohesion & Equal Opportunity Committee, advocating for social inclusion and unity across Kenya's diverse communities. Additionally, she is a dedicated member of the Kenya Women Parliamentary Association (KEWOPA) and the Kenya Association of Women Business Owners (KAWBO), working to strengthen women's legislative representation and foster a thriving business environment for female entrepreneurs.

Her leadership extends into the private sector, where she has made significant contributions as the Vice Chairperson of the Gender & Youth Board at the Kenya Private Sector Alliance (KEPSA) from 2015 to 2019. During this time, she played a key role in advancing gender equality within Kenya's private sector and promoting youth entrepreneurship. Her influence and dedication have earned her numerous accolades, including the prestigious Order of the Grand Warrior (OGW) Presidential Award in 2015 for her distinguished service in leadership and governance. She was also

honored with the Young Entrepreneur Award at the African Women Innovation & Entrepreneurship Forum in Cape Town, South Africa, in 2018 and the Enterprising Woman of the Year Award by the Enterprising Women Foundation in the USA in 2019 for her outstanding contributions to women's economic empowerment.

Academically, Hon. Kagiri has built a strong foundation in business and technology. She holds a Master's in Business Administration (MBA) from the United States International University (USIU), Kenya, and a Bachelor of Science in Computer Science from the University of Madras, India. She further enhanced her entrepreneurial skills through a Certificate in Entrepreneurship from Babson College, USA, where she was awarded a scholarship. Her professional journey includes serving as an Advisor in the Executive Office of the President of Kenya (2020-2022) and running a successful entrepreneurial career from 2007 to 2020, where she played a key role in business innovation, development, and mentorship for women in business.



Her key areas of interest include gender and youth empowerment, economic inclusion and entrepreneurship, urban development and housing, and national cohesion and equal opportunity. She remains deeply committed to creating opportunities for women and youth in leadership, education, and business while driving policies that support startups, SMEs, and women-led enterprises. A strong advocate for unity and social cohesion, she works tirelessly to build bridges across communities for shared prosperity.

Beyond her professional commitments, Hon. Kagiri is an avid reader and traveler, continuously seeking knowledge and cultural exchange. She is also a lawn tennis player and swimming enthusiast, advocating for active and healthy living. A passionate football fan, she proudly supports Arsenal, staying true to her love for sports and competition.

With her unwavering dedication to public service, economic transformation, and social inclusion, Hon. Jane Wangechi Kagiri continues to be a powerful force for change in Kenya and beyond.

ARASA: Advancing Health and Human Rights Across East and Southern Africa

By Takaitei Bote, ARASA Regional Communications Officer

In a region where inequalities and human rights challenges continue to fuel the HIV epidemic, one organisation has emerged as a driving force for justice, dignity, and inclusion. The AIDS and Rights Alliance for Southern Africa (ARASA), established in 2003, has become a key player in promoting human rights-based responses to HIV, tuberculosis (TB), and broader public health challenges across East and Southern Africa (ESA).

A Partnership for Change

At its heart, ARASA is a regional partnership that brings together progressive civil society and community-led organisations working to ensure that human rights, equality, and dignity are central to the region's health responses. Through advocacy, training, and capacity strengthening, ARASA empowers organisations and communities to demand accessible, acceptable, affordable, and quality health services and legal protections that uphold their rights.

The alliance also works closely with governments and policymakers, ensuring that public health policies reflect the lived realities and needs of the people most affected by HIV, TB, and health inequities.

Putting Bodily Autonomy and Integrity at the Centre

A cornerstone of ARASA's work is promoting bodily

autonomy and integrity (BAI), the right of all individuals to make decisions about their bodies free from violence, coercion, or discrimination. In East and Southern Africa, where gender inequality, harmful cultural practices, and stigma restrict access to health services, this focus is critical.

By promoting BAI, ARASA not only advances individual freedoms but also tackles gender inequality and the social norms that drive HIV vulnerability.

Amplifying Marginalised Voices

ARASA's work prioritises the rights and health of marginalised communities, including:

- **Women, adolescent girls, and young women**
- **LGBTQI+ individuals**
- **People who use drugs**
- **Sex workers**
- **People living with HIV**

These groups often face systemic discrimination and barriers to healthcare, leaving them at higher risk of HIV and poor health outcomes. ARASA works to amplify their voices ensuring that they are not only seen and heard but also actively involved in shaping the policies and programmes that affect their lives.

A Holistic Approach to Health and Rights

In addition to its focus on HIV and TB prevention, ARASA is a champion for universal

health coverage, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and inclusive policies that protect the rights to health, dignity, and equality for all.

Through capacity building, advocacy campaigns, and policy engagement, ARASA helps its partners demand better services, challenge discriminatory laws, and advocate for rights-based health systems that leave no one behind.

A Future Rooted in Justice and Equality

As ARASA continues to work across the region, its vision remains clear, a future where everyone, regardless of gender, sexuality, or social status, has access to quality healthcare and can live free from stigma, discrimination, and violence.

In a world where health and human rights are inseparable, ARASA's work is a powerful reminder that achieving health for all is not just a medical goal, it is a human rights imperative.

For more information, visit: www.arasa.info

ARASA
AIDS & Rights
Alliance
for Southern Africa

One Woman's Path to Inspiring a Generation

Susanne Margaret

Susanne Margaret's journey began with a strong foundation of values instilled in her upbringing and education: hard work, resilience, and problem-solving. These principles fostered collaboration and drove positive outcomes throughout her life. From holding positions as class representative and timekeeper to chairing clubs and ultimately representing students nationally, she quickly found herself in spaces that drew her to lead and inspire those around her. Today, she is an ADR and legal practitioner, a platform that empowers her to advance human rights and promote good governance globally.

Two pivotal turning points shaped her direction. First, her passion for humanity and leadership led to her election as Students' President of the Nyanza Chapter, Kenya Secondary Schools Students Council in 2010, and she later represented Student Leaders in South Africa in 2011. In this position, she influenced the drafting of a petition, "Learner Friendly Schools," which encouraged students to use dialogue rather than resort to school unrest, resulting in marked academic improvement in the region.

The second turning point came during her law studies when she joined the Labour Party of Kenya, rising through the ranks to her current position as Executive Director. She considers this success significant as she leads the party



Secretariat, formulates and implements policies, advises leadership, and manages the party's growth.

To Susanne, leadership means influencing people through action to aspire and cause positive change. Her professional role entails leading a team, mandating her to adopt values such as equity, compassion, dependability, boldness, and growth.

Her mother, Josephine Betty, stands out as an inspiration who led a hardworking, resilient, and prayerful life. Susanne ensures inclusivity by considering the needs of marginalized groups in her initiatives, including the SiasaToT and Gender Equity & Equality ToT projects, which target civic participation of young people and promote justice within communities.

When facing setbacks, she rarely dwells on them, instead using them to harness the power of hindsight. Her advice to young people: "Start now, start small, start afraid and the stars will align. Find a gap around you and do your part to fill it." Her life philosophy is simple yet profound: "What you are looking for is also looking for you, just not this version of you, so grow into it."

"Leadership means influencing people through action to aspire and cause positive change."

"I have chosen to no longer be apologetic for my femaleness and my femininity. And I want to be respected in all of my femaleness because I deserve to be." Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "We Should All Be Feminists"

"I raise up my voice, not so that I can shout, but so that those without a voice can be heard ... we cannot all succeed when half of us are held back." Malala Yousafzai

Sexual and Reproductive Health Champion

Doris Kathia

Doris Kathia is a communications specialist, human rights defender, and the founder and Executive Director of Raise Your Voice CBO, a youth-led organization dedicated to advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

A Journey of Strength and Determination

Born and raised on the slopes of Meru, Doris exhibited academic brilliance from an early age. After excelling in KCPE, financial constraints forced her to settle for a local day school despite earning a spot in one of the top schools in the country. Her leadership qualities were apparent there, particularly as an active St. John Ambulance service member, Kenya Red Cross Society and Family Health Options Kenya (FHOK) among others.

While still in school, she took on part-time jobs in the afternoons to support herself enabling her to complete her O level, undergraduate and now proudly pursuing her masters degree.. Her early experiences instilled a sense of responsibility and shaped her advocacy for young people facing similar struggles.

The Birth of a Passionate Advocate

From her teenage years, Doris became acutely aware of the challenges surrounding sexual and reproductive health in her community. Misinformation, stigma, and cultural taboos prevent young people from accessing vital health services and making informed choices. Determined to change this narrative, Doris took to writing and public advocacy to amplify these issues.

She has contributed to leading media outlets such as Daily Nation and The Standard, addressing pressing concerns, including reproductive rights, harmful cultural practices, and gender inequalities that affect young people's health and well-being.

Her work extends beyond writing; she is a sought-after speaker at youth conferences, community forums, and digital campaigns



seeking to break the silence on reproductive health. Growing up in an environment where such topics were rarely discussed fuels her passion for advocacy.

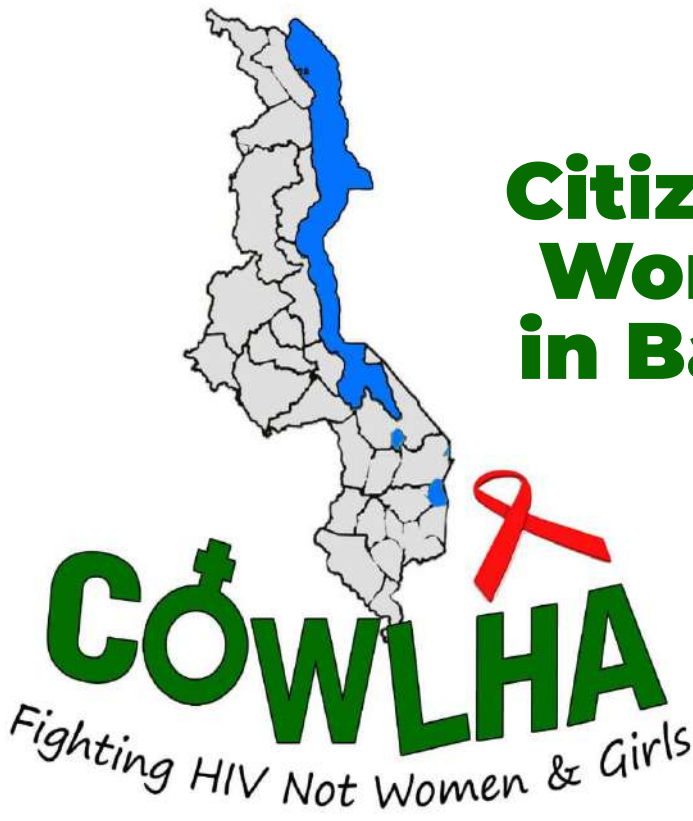
Using Communication for Impact

As a communications specialist, Doris understands the power of storytelling. She leverages this skill to amplify the voices of young people often marginalised in society. By sharing real-life experiences, she creates awareness, fosters dialogue, and encourages policy changes that benefit the youth. She raises awareness and calls for action, challenging policymakers, educators, and communities to invest in comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education, making services more accessible and inclusive.

A Vision for a Better Future

Through her relentless efforts, Doris is helping shape a society where youth can thrive, armed with knowledge, confidence, and the right to make informed choices. As she continues to lead Raise Your Voice CBO, Doris remains committed to amplifying youth voices, dismantling harmful norms, and creating a future where every young person can access the healthcare and information they need to live with dignity and autonomy. Her journey from a determined young girl in Meru to a national and global SRHR champion and human rights defender is a testament to her resilience, passion, and unwavering commitment to breaking barriers, fighting stigma, and creating a world where no young person is left behind.

A Call to Active Citizenship Through Women Leadership in Balaka District of Malawi



By Edna Tembo, Executive Director & Harry Madukani, Programs Manager

“Currently, Phalula has 11 women and 13 men in the ADC and this is a great improvement.”

Active citizenship involves communities taking action to influence decisions in their communities. Often, men are in the forefront, influencing such decisions in their communities. It is high time women and girls rose and played a central role in active citizenship in their communities, hence a call to women leadership.

In light of the foregoing, Coalition of Women Living with HIV and AIDS (COWLHA) is implementing a project in Balaka District of Malawi using SASA! Faith approach with funding from Irish Aid through Trocaire. Through the project, COWLHA trained women in Traditional Authority Phalula in Balaka District on women leadership. The outcome of the training is that there has been a paradigm shift in the way

women and girls perceive their own roles regarding leadership in their communities.

Women who felt that leadership roles are for men have begun to challenge this notion by taking up leadership positions. For instance, Phalula Area Development Committee (ADC) initially had 24 duty bearers. Out of the 24, only 2 were women. As a result of the exposure to leadership concepts and skills that the women who attended the training got through their faith spaces, women mobilised themselves to vote for fellow women who have leadership skills during the recent elections of the ADC organised by the local council.

Currently, Phalula has 11 women and 13 men in the ADC and this is a great improvement.

Through participation in the ADC, women and girls are now contributing to issues such as gender responsive budgeting and the 50-50 campaign is taking shape in Balaka as Malawi moves towards the general election in September 2025. One of such empowered women is Ellen Hauya who had this to say: “Initially, my thinking was that leadership was for men. I could not even think of speaking in front of men in my own church. With skills obtained from the women in leadership training, I am now an elder in my church and I stand in front of the church to preach the word of God.”

“Initially, my thinking was that leadership was for men...”

Championing Life

Push boundaries and own change

By Nelly Munyasia

Nelly Munyasia serves as Executive Director of Reproductive Health Network Kenya (RHNK), a network of healthcare providers spanning 44 counties, ensuring women and girls access comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services. Collaborating with the Ministry of Health, RHNK reduces maternal mortality through service delivery and policy advocacy.

A trained nurse-midwife and health systems expert, Nelly's roots in Bungoma exposed her to gender inequalities favouring boys. Her father, "Baba Girls," defied norms by ensuring that she and her sisters had equal opportunities. Witnessing preventable maternal deaths in nursing school spurred her shift to the NGO sector, advocating for nurses and women.

Systemic gender norms and nurses' sidelined roles shaped her values. She challenged these by proving women and nurses could lead. She says that leadership is a lonely learning journey. She listens, stays authentic, and grows, guided by mentors Evelyn Opondo, who introduced

her to reproductive health, and Professor Joachim Osur, a male ally. Her team's dedication, especially in tough areas like safe abortion care, inspires her.

Key to her is her supporting the Ministry's adoption of the 2019 WHO self-care guidelines, which enhance access via telemedicine. In 2017-2018, the Global Gag Rule slashed RHNK's funding, leaving only three staff. Nelly stayed, strategising with Kariya Kiyoga and securing support through She Decides, growing to 15 funders.

Seeing women thrive and her team's heroism fuel her resilience. She advises youth to push boundaries and own change. She believes in authenticity. She'd love to ask Martha Karua how she maintains integrity, admiring her unwavering resolve.

'Baba Girls,' defied norms, ensuring equal opportunities for her and her sisters.

Kicking Down Barriers and Building Resilient Communities in Marsabit County, Kenya

Fatuma Abdulkadir Adan

While young people get into lucrative professions to advance themselves, Fatuma Abdulkadir Adan went against the grain.

Story by Tabitha Mwai

Being the first woman to acquire a law degree in Marsabit County, she left behind a promising legal career to return to her community and effect change through football and social development.

Fatuma founded Horn of Africa Development Initiative (HODI), an organisation dedicated to addressing social challenges in her community through sports and other initiatives. They started as a community-based organisation in 2003, becoming a fully-fledged national non-governmental organisation in 2007 and expanding into Ethiopia in 2016.

She gave 15 years of her prime years to her community, transforming lives, breaking down cultural barriers, and redefining the role of women in leadership. Her exit at the age of 40 years was to give room for younger leaders whom she had mentored to take over.

“The organisation is still running and has continued to expand into other regions since I left,” she says. This is a testament to her leadership, where she believes in walking alongside people rather than ahead of them, leaving no one behind.

Community Impact

HODI has three flagship programs: Shoot to Score, Not to Kill; Breaking the Silence on Female Genital Mutilation and Early Marriage; and Building Resilient Communities. They tackle everything from youth radicalisation and gender-based violence (GBV) to economic empowerment and climate resilience.

“We use football as a tool for social change. It’s not just about playing the game, it’s about disarming young people mentally and physically,” Fatuma says.

Marsabit is prone to drought and their resilience program aims to reduce dependency on aid and relief food as they build communities to be self-sustaining. When Fatuma went to support her community, most of them were poverty-stricken. She worked as a volunteer, offering them



legal aid and she would even pay for their court fees.

Gradually she introduced a program where every household would save 10 Kenya Shillings per day which grew into a 10 million Kenya Shillings kitty. The contribution is shared at the ratio of 3:2:5 for education, health, and savings and borrowing respectively. Every village operates its account independently with HODI only overseeing the operations.

Recognition

Fatuma and her organisation have received numerous awards. She received the Stuttgart Peace Prize in 2011, the Vital Voices Fellowship in 2014, and the Beyond Sports Award in 2015. She became an End FGM Ambassador in 2017. In 2012, Fatuma was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. In 2018 she was awarded the Social Entrepreneur of the Year by the World Economic Forum and the Schwab Foundation. The same year she won the Commonwealth Points of Light Award for her work with HODI in Marsabit.

In 2015, HODI won the Beyond Sports Award for Diversity and they were named NGO of the Year at the 2017 Peace and Sport Awards in Monaco. HODI received the FIFA Diversity Award (2018), making HODI the first African organisation and the first female-led initiative to win.

For Fatuma, her achievement is not in the numerous accolades but in “transforming the community from dependency on relief to having a decent life”.

Breaking Barriers as a Female Leader

As a young woman taking on leadership in a traditionally patriarchal society, she has faced resistance from family and community members.

“The expectation was that I would live in the city, make money, and send support home. Instead, I returned and started working as a volunteer,” she says.

Initially, her father could not come to terms with the fact that he educated his daughter and she was back in the village doing charity work. With time he understood and appreciated her work. Fatuma is glad the father did say “I’m proud of you” at some point before he passed on.

She also faced cultural hurdles. “When I started, elders would not allow me to sit in their meetings simply because I’m a woman,” she recalls. Her girls football program was also taboo as girls would “expose themselves inappropriately, lifting their legs” which was

considered indecent, going against religious and cultural values.

Fatuma recalls painfully how they had to pause the girls football program in 2008. She had taken a team of 12 girls for a football tournament in Nairobi and when they got back eight of them were kidnapped for forced marriage.

She considers this her greatest failure but she chose to fall forward and re-strategise. Fatuma engaged her community and redesigned their football uniform to something culturally acceptable, a long-sleeved jersey, head scarf, knee-length shorts and tights.

They relaunched the program in 2012. Today, girls football team is celebrated, and HODI even has mixed-gender teams. One of their unique rules is that a score is invalid unless a girl player is involved in the last moments of a buildup towards the goal.

One of their signature programs counters ingrained cultural practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage. Instead of criminalising traditional circumcisers, the organisation provides them with alternative skills and startup capital to establish income-generating activities.

“For them, ‘cutting’ is just a job. If you offer them an alternative, many will stop the practice,” she says.

Her resilience and innovation to community empowerment as a female-led organisation in a male-dominated space sets Fatuma apart.

“People always ask why I chose football over more ‘feminine’ initiatives like netball or cooking. But football is a team sport that mirrors real life, you need collaboration, strategy, and resilience to win. These are the skills we want to teach young people,” she declares.

After years of volunteer work and legal aid, Fatuma is getting into commercial law and is setting up a law firm in Nairobi.

Her advice to young women is, “You only have one life to live and it is not a rehearsal; if you have a passion, if you have a dream, go for it.”

“The expectation was that I would live in the city, make money, and send support home. Instead, I returned and started working as a volunteer.”

Career Adaptability

from
Marketing
to Life
Coaching

Coach Sheila Chimoli



Sheila Chimoli's career began over two decades ago as a part-time receptionist at Avenue Hospital while she pursued her university studies. She would later work for the same hospital after graduation in the marketing department, building a robust career in branding, marketing, and communications both locally and regionally.

Her typical work revolved around supporting underserved communities and enhancing people's lives through either affordable health services or financial solutions. This is evident in her work with organizations such as Population Services International in Kenya and Malawi and Letshego Holdings.

Turning Point

A major moment of crisis in Sheila's life made her realize that the perception others have of her as 'strong' hindered them from offering her the support she desperately needed.

This revelation reshaped her approach to professional relationships and leadership, emphasizing the importance of balance between helping others and maintaining self-care.

In 2017, at a training workshop in Johannesburg, she was encouraged to explore the possibility of becoming a coach. The following year, she took up the training and graduated at the top of her class as a Certified Professional Coach.

A career path as a life coach enables her to support her clients while maintaining professionalism and clear boundaries.

Leadership and Impact

For Sheila, leadership is about fostering collaboration, inspiring teams, and ensuring individuals reach their full potential. She believes true leadership demands respect, courage, self-awareness, and resilience.

She is a champion of inclusivity and equality in the workplace, whereby everyone is heard and receives recognition for their work.

"My core values include integrity, empathy, and fairness, emphasizing the importance of taking responsibility

for one's actions and recognizing their potential consequences, whether positive or negative," she states.

One of her most impactful contributions was co-founding Haki Water, an NGO dedicated to providing sustainable drinking water solutions to underserved communities in Nairobi. "We focused on drilling boreholes in schools, coupled with educational programs on sustainable water management," she reports.

The initiative not only improved access to clean water but also created revenue-generating opportunities for schools, with proceeds going to underprivileged children.

Professional Resilience and Career Growth

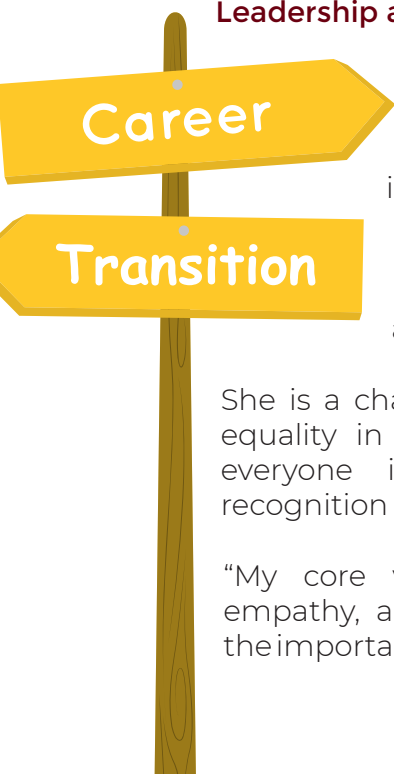
Reflecting on her career setbacks, Sheila highlights a habitual trait of working tirelessly behind the scenes while allowing others to take the spotlight. While she once saw this as humility, she now understands the importance of recognizing and promoting her contributions.

Her structured approach to work has been crucial in maintaining resilience. Whether facing professional or personal adversity, she finds strength in structured routines, physical activity, and creative outlets. She also leans on a trusted network of mentors and colleagues for guidance and encouragement.

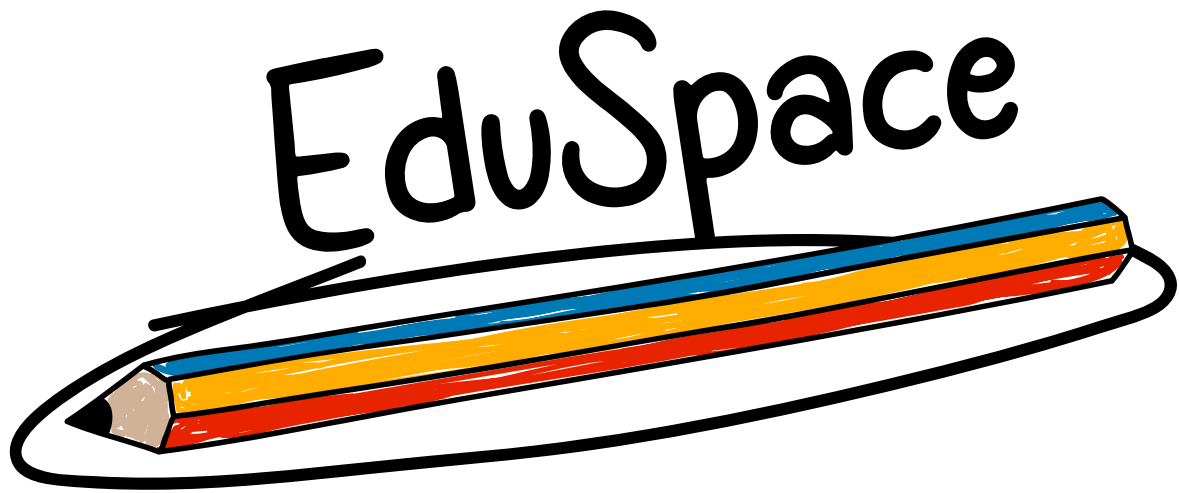
Her advice to emerging professionals is for them to identify their strengths and innate abilities, which can be used to better their communities. She emphasizes the need to prioritize self-care. "You cannot pour from an empty cup," she states.

Sheila's guiding philosophy is simple yet profound, "**Trust your gut.**"

Her career path is a demonstration of resilience, adaptability, and purpose-driven work. Through coaching, she continues to inspire and empower professionals to unlock their full potential and make lasting contributions to their fields.



EduSpace



Lessons yesterday, today, & tomorrow



Mothers, Our Foundational Educators

“From the moment a child is born, their mother becomes their primary source of learning and development.”

By Gilbert Francis Odhiambo

As the saying goes, “If you educate a man, you educate an individual; but if you educate a woman, you have educated an entire village.” This saying emphasises the significant impact of educating women. Though often undervalued, women play a critical role in society, and their education has an immense influence on it as well.

One only needs to consider the roles that women play to agree that they need proper education. As mothers, women are the childhood development experts. From the moment a child is born, their mother becomes their primary source of learning and development. Mothers are essentially their children’s first teachers.

Mothers instinctively talk to their babies, even before they can understand words. The terms “mother tongue” and “motherese” illustrate their central role in language acquisition. They are the first choir children

listen to as they sing lullabies. They help children with the sounds, words and rules of language. The foundation for literacy is built when they read to their toddlers, point to pictures and name objects.

Through play, exploration, and problem-solving, mothers help with cognitive development. As mothers teach their children games, they develop their spatial reasoning and fine motor skills. And when they answer those never-ending “why” questions, mothers build curiosity and critical thinking in their children. As they also take part in pretend games, their children are prepared for the real-life situations that will soon follow.

Mothers also play a critical role in shaping their children’s social and emotional development. Secure attachment, a crucial foundation for healthy relationships later in life, is built through the mothers’ touch, when they cuddle, comfort, and respond to their babies’ cues. Through labeling

and modeling, babies get to learn about feelings. The stories mothers share with their children are also invaluable lessons on interaction and emotions.

Additionally, mothers support their children's physical growth. They help develop motor and coordination skills when they encourage their children to run, jump, and climb.

Mothers lay the foundation for language acquisition, problem-solving, social, emotional and physical skills. Their love and support create a safe and nurturing environment that allows children to thrive and learn.

This valuable role may often go unrecognised because a mother's expertise is often seen as intuitive, learned through experience, and driven by love, rather than classroom instruction. Secondly, and erroneously so, society usually thinks that education begins at the point when children join formal school. The truth is that the most crucial learning happens in the earliest years of life, and mothers are at the heart of this process. Furthermore, many wrongly assume that schools entirely take over the educational role once children begin formal education. For all these reasons, women are indeed the unsung heroes of education.

Mothers must be recognised for their critical role as primary educators. They should be supported to address the diverse disparities they may face. For example, mothers in marginalised communities often lack resources and support

systems. Therefore, they require assistance to provide equitable access to early childhood education and support services.

Apart from socio-economic disparities, there may exist educational disparities, where mothers with limited education may face challenges in supporting their children's learning; geographic disparities, where mothers from different regions may face unique challenges, including limited access to healthcare, education, and other essential services; cultural and linguistic disparities, where marginalised groups may face discrimination or their cultural beliefs or practices may differ from the mainstream; and disparities due to disabilities, where mothers may face unique challenges due to their physical limitations.

Policymakers, educators, and communities should recognise and support the vital role of mothers in early childhood education. Policies should provide mothers with necessary resources and encourage greater paternal involvement. Additionally, culturally sensitive programs tailored to diverse community needs are essential. Society will be better when we enable women.

As we mark the 2025 International Women's Day, Eduspace celebrates women who have offered society enduring lessons. I want to especially mention Judith Mikal Nyakiti (Nyanam) whose counsel remains true though she departed ten years ago. Cheers to our first teachers! Cheers to our wonderful mothers!

“The most crucial learning happens in the earliest years of life, and mothers are at the heart of this process.”

“Women are the unsung heroes of education.”

A TRAILBLAZER IN GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL IMPACT

“ There will always be challenges, always people who doubt you or try to hold you back... ”



Tinebeb Barhane

Tinebeb Barhane describes herself as a feminist leader and a strong Pan-African woman. Throughout her career, which spans community development to gender equality, she has contributed to the social struggles, especially for women and girls.

Having been in the gender and development space for the last 27 years, she has made significant contributions to the civil landscape in her country, Ethiopia. A key contribution is the establishment of the Ethiopian Civil Society Council, an apex body established by parliament that supports the widening of the civic space.

Her journey is not about titles but a demonstration of passion and great impact. She currently serves as the Country Director of Action Aid Ethiopia, a position she has held for the last eight years.

Leadership and Legacy

Getting to where she is today has taken hard work, determination, and resilience. She started her career in nursing and then transitioned to development, a move she claims was aimed at “broadening and deepening my experience.”

To be effective in her work, she invested in long-term education, took on traveling to gain a world view of social justice issues, and understood power dynamics, especially for girls and women. She also does extensive reading,

coupled with content analysis and political analysis. “Whatever happens in the global space impacts us, both positively or negatively,” she asserts.

She believes in always having a plan and swiftly learning from challenges and moving forward. This comes in handy with her position as the Country director. Despite it being a challenging job, she defines it as a “very powerful and inspirational position.”

Tinebeb joined Action Aid as the head of Program country sign and quality assurance Department. Two years later, she was deployed to the Democratic Republic of the Congo as an interim country director for about nine months. Going back home, she was assigned the role of Head of Programs and soon after the Country Director. She has been a trailblazer, becoming the first female department head and first female national county director.

Her position is very demanding, but she holds it with great poise. She is keen on accountability, integrity, and managing expectations in the workplace. “As a feminist leader, I understand the power that I possess and how I use that power,” she adds.

What has kept her going is her passion for her work. She describes herself as a passionate and ambitious person who gives others opportunities to grow and help communities flourish, which makes her grow. As she makes a difference in her organization and the women and girls they support, she believes she is also doing the same in her children’s lives and herself.

“My work resonates with my values and principles, thereby making it very easy to be more creative and innovative,” she chimes.

Tinebeb was not an overnight success. There was a time in her life when she went through a challenging situation and decided to rise above her circumstances. She developed a clear mindset and worked towards who she wanted to become. At that moment, she defined herself as a global citizen, human being, woman, and leader.

“ You can achieve anything you set your mind to, but you have to be prepared for the journey. ”

“I’ve multiple identities. I’m a powerful person; I can make things happen, you know. I’m a decision-maker,” she states.

For her, leadership is all about creating an enabling environment for others to unleash their potential and achieve a shared goal. She believes it is important to be self-conscious, prioritize self-care, and also create an inclusive environment for others to play their role.

Tinebeb is proud of her contribution towards the work they do at Action Aid, where their mission is to achieve social justice, gender equality, and poverty eradication. Over the years, they have impacted millions of lives. Together with her team, they have made Action Aid Ethiopia the most preferred partner in the country.

She counts motherhood in her list of accomplishments. “I’ve got three decent, disciplined, and intelligent children in whom I’ve invested so much in terms of education and exposure to the world and provided them with a stable home.” She goes on to say that she is inspired by one of her daughters, who has grown to have a remarkable understanding of feminism and human rights.

“I want to be remembered as a woman who made a significant contribution to bettering the lives of others at all levels,” she says. Additionally, she wants to be looked upon as a strong and resilient woman who encounters challenges all the time but prevails regardless of their enormity.

For young women seeking to follow in her footsteps, she has a simple but powerful message: “You can achieve anything you set your mind to, but you have to be prepared for the journey.” Leadership, she says, is more than just ambition—it is about preparation, resilience, and the willingness to keep going even when it feels like everything is stacked against you.

“There will always be challenges, always people who doubt you or try to hold you back,” she explains. “But if you remain true to your purpose, stay focused, and keep learning, nothing is impossible. The world needs strong, confident women now more than ever.”

Fighting for Girls' Education

Belief in education's transformative power

Dr. Opala Violet Oyungu's journey mirrors the struggles and triumphs of women fighting for girls' rights and empowerment. Inspired by trailblazers like Malala Yousafzai and Wangari Maathai, her path has been dedicated to breaking down barriers to girls' education. Growing up in rural Kenya, she witnessed firsthand the obstacles girls faced, fueling her resolve to create a more equitable society.

As a young teacher, Dr. Oyungu established mentorship programs and support networks to empower girls to stay in school and pursue their ambitions. Her 16-year tenure as a high school principal has been marked by unwavering advocacy for quality education, particularly for the girl child. Every decision has been guided by her belief in education's transformative power.

Her journey took a decisive turn with her appointment as Principal of Friends School Kaimosi Girls. Inspired by women like Oprah Winfrey, she worked tirelessly to create a nurturing environment where every girl felt valued. During her time at Kaimosi, she received the Principal of the Year Award and the Vihiga County Governor's Silver Medal for her contributions to education and girls' empowerment.

At her third school, Dr. Oyungu faced her greatest test. Despite improving academic performance and enrollment, she encountered resistance

from local politicians and community leaders, rooted in outdated stereotypes. Yet she refused to be silenced, rallying support from allies. The opposition intensified when she was transferred to her fourth school. Accusations of incompetence were leveled against her, threatening her mission. Still, she refused to cower, drawing strength from educators, activists, and community leaders who shared her vision. She was honored to receive the Head of State Commendation (HSC) from the President of Kenya.

Dr. Oyungu's journey culminated in her recognition as Dr. Violet Oyungu Opala, HSC, Chief Principal. This personal milestone stands as a beacon for young girls, demonstrating that no ambition is too great. Her academic pinnacle, achieved through resilience and sacrifice, underscores the transformative power of education. Her doctorate is not just a title; it's an open door, an inspiration, and a challenge for girls to rise above expectations. It's a call to embrace lifelong learning, reject limitations, and occupy spaces where their voices are needed. Her education has also allowed her to travel the world, gaining invaluable insights that fuel her advocacy for girls' education.

Beyond advocacy, Dr. Oyungu has introduced scholarships for financially disadvantaged girls, rescuing many from early marriage and other hardships. Her community service has further solidified her commitment.

She has learned valuable lessons in leadership: in her first school she learnt that "A star shines in the dark"; in her second, "It is good to diligently serve humanity"; in her third, "God establishes His servants for His work"; and in her fourth, "Remain God's good vessel in any assignment He calls you to do for Him."

Spirituality has played a crucial role in shaping her beliefs and guiding her actions. Through prayer and reflection, she finds courage and wisdom. Her spirituality sustains her and inspires her to be a beacon of hope.

Standing before her students at Keveye Girls High School, she remembers the women who paved the way. Their stories remind her that no obstacle is insurmountable. She remains steadfast in her commitment to ensuring every girl has the opportunity to reach her full potential. Her journey is proof that girls can excel, overcome hurdles, and redefine what is possible. Her doctorate is not the end, but a torch passed to the next generation of fearless, educated, and empowered women. She strives to live a life of meaning and significance, impacting others and serving with purpose.

Her doctorate is not just a title; it's an open door, an inspiration, and a challenge for girls to rise above expectations.

A star shines in the dark. Girls can excel, overcome hurdles, and redefine what is possible.

Queen's Tender Grip

With unmatched strength and boundless love, she carries her cub, firm yet gentle. A protector, a guide, a mother. In her grip lies both power and tenderness, the perfect balance of a queen.



Kennedy Amungo

I'm Kennedy Amungo, a storyteller through the lens. My photographic journey began with sketches of cameras during my early photography classes. With a background in football, I discovered my passion for sports photography and have since collaborated with renowned brands worldwide. My journey from freelancing to working in newsrooms allowed me to evolve into a photojournalist, capturing diverse and compelling stories.

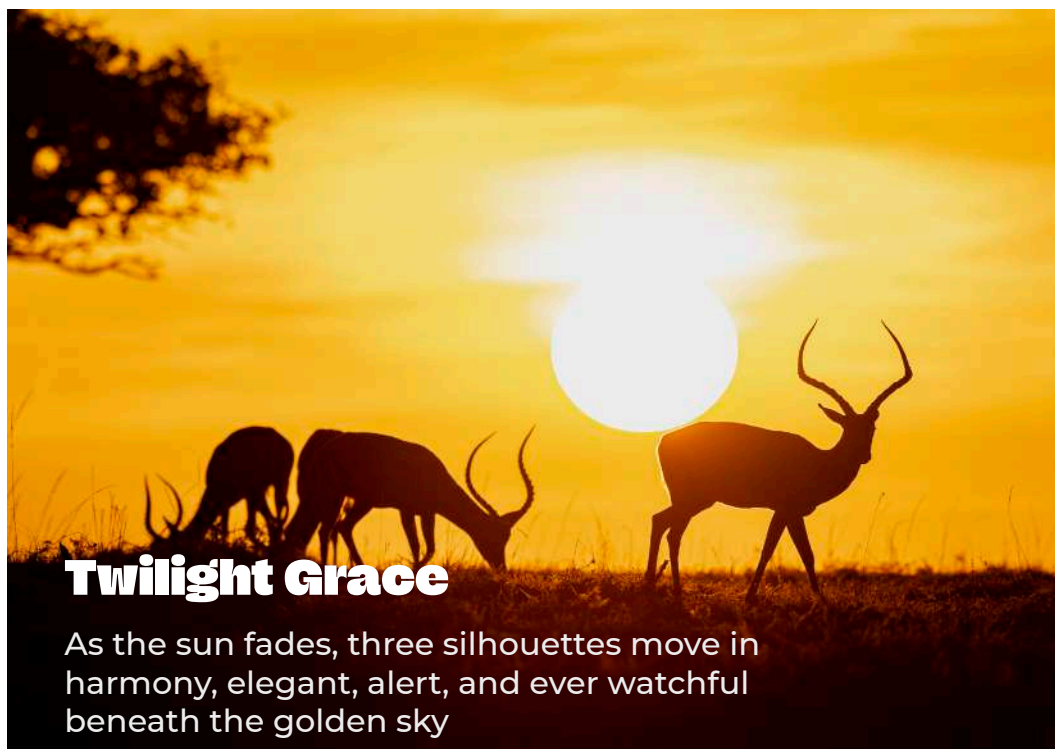
The Canon-Miraisha program played a pivotal role in enhancing my skills, guiding me through freelancing to newsrooms, and eventually leading me to the captivating world of wildlife photography.





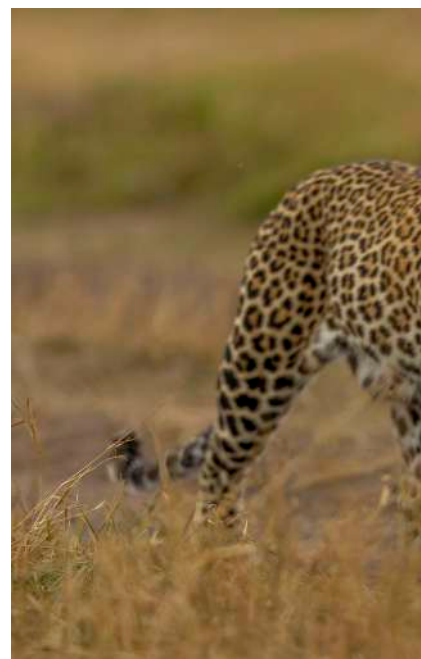
Future Queens in Stride.

Side by side, they take their first steps into the wild, a journey of curiosity, courage, and destiny. Today, they are cubs. Tomorrow, they will rule.



Twilight Grace

As the sun fades, three silhouettes move in harmony, elegant, alert, and ever watchful beneath the golden sky



Majestic Sisterhood

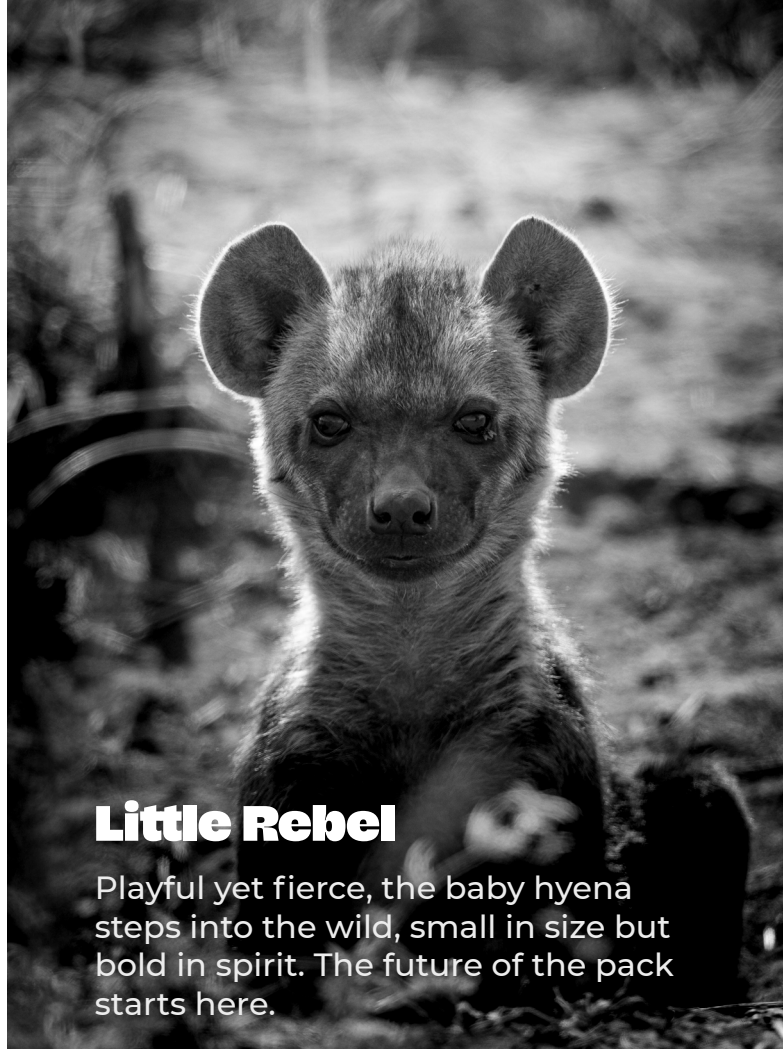
A family of giants, led by wisdom and bound by love. Together, they roam, protect, and thrive.





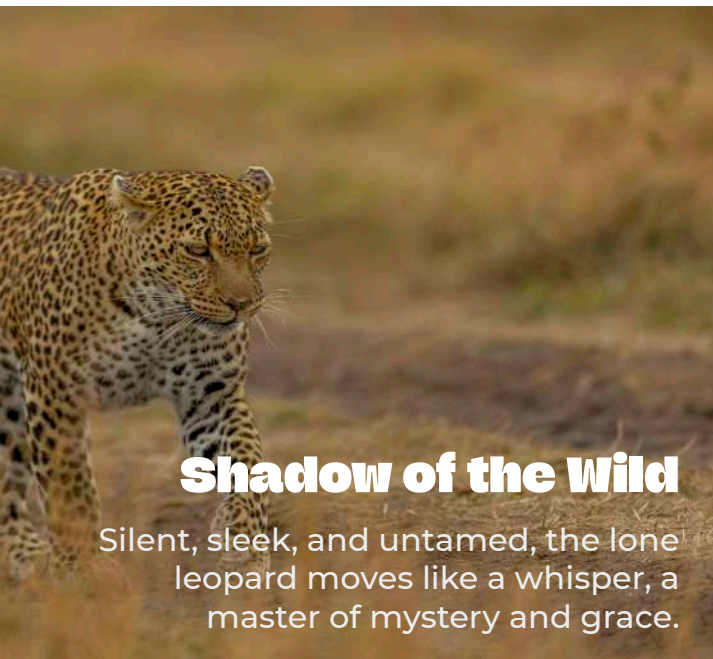
Lone Explorer

With tiny but determined steps, the young cub ventures into the unknown



Little Rebel

Playful yet fierce, the baby hyena steps into the wild, small in size but bold in spirit. The future of the pack starts here.



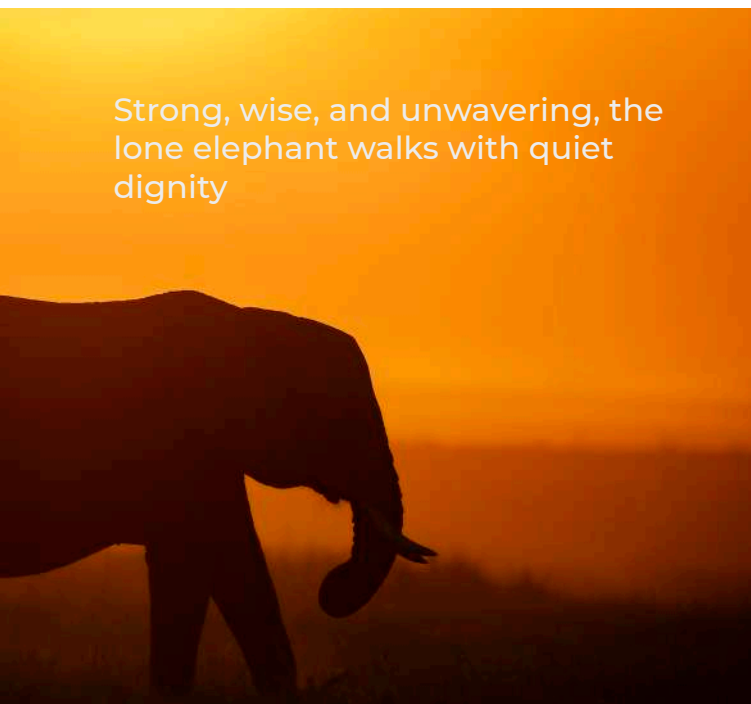
Shadow of the Wild

Silent, sleek, and untamed, the lone leopard moves like a whisper, a master of mystery and grace.



Wild & Whiskered

Clumsy paws and playful growls, three young cubs turn the Savanna into their playground, where every branch is a throne in the making.



Strong, wise, and unwavering, the lone elephant walks with quiet dignity

JOSEPHINE IRUNGU:

THE POWER OF PURPOSE, FAITH, AND RELATIONSHIPS IN BUILDING A LEGACY

By Tabitha Mwai

When you meet Josephine Irungu, you will find her a very outgoing person who always has a perspective on just about everything. She is not your typical human resources (HR) person. “I am an extrovert and choleric,” she asserts. Purpose, faith, and relationships are the cornerstones of her life and career.

“I came to know my purpose 10 years ago,” she says. For Josephine, purpose is what you are passionate about; it is where you find your peace; that is where God is. This peace, for her, is supporting people, enabling them through their journey, and helping mend relations. She calls it “a gift for healing.”

The Journey

Josephine pursued an undergraduate degree in IT and got an industrial attachment at Coca-Cola Bottlers in Kisumu, and soon after graduation she became an IT assistant. This was a small department of two in a big organization. With her as the only lady, she put her best foot forward and did her work diligently.

After six years on the job, the organization introduced a digital HR system and did an internal recruitment for a technical person to join the HR team. This is how Josephine found herself seconded to HR. At the time it seemed like career suicide, and she considered seeking alternative employment.

As she kept her options open, Josephine embraced her new role and outshone some of her colleagues because of her IT proficiency. Some doubted her professionalism given her IT background. So, Josephine decided to get HR certification. This boosted her confidence in the role, and she was able to tackle numerous issues discretely and coordinate major staff recruitments.

After three years, Josephine exited Coca-Cola Bottlers, left Kisumu, and embarked on a career path in Nairobi as a human resource manager at an engineering company. She helped set up the HR department, which hitherto was nonexistent. When



“ I want to leave a legacy of being a bridge in people's lives. ”

the time came to leave the organization, they could not let her go. So she became an associate, consulting on particular HR issues. This is how she transitioned into consulting.

Gradually, she started to take requests for consultancy work, necessitating her to register a business, leading to the incorporation of Prestine HR-Engine Ltd. in 2018. Like any other business, she has had good and bad moments. Twice she has had to go back to employment.

Her work has not gone unnoticed. In 2019, she was recognized as the Best in Human Resource Management by Women in Business. The following year, she was nominated as the Most Promising Founder of the Year by FOYA. Elite Brands Awards International recognized Prestine HR-Engine as the Outstanding Human Resource Consultancy Firm of the Year 2024. She is awaiting results for the nomination of Founder of the Year Africa under SHE Awards Africa.

Josephine is now venturing into mediation and has gotten the accreditation. “My purpose is in bringing people together, and I feel mediation is the next level in my career,” she says.

Overcoming Setbacks

Do not be mistaken. Josephine’s career and road to finding purpose have not been smooth sailing. “Those close to me know Josephine is a woman of faith. If I want to get something, I know I will get it. Even if I fail, I still work towards my goal,” she says.

She goes on to explain that she has dealt with challenging situations in life, like losing a relationship with the father of her children and having to raise them alone from a tender age to date. “Juggling a career and family as a single mother hasn’t been easy. I’ve faced all sorts of both teenage parenting and entrepreneurial challenges,” she admits. Sometimes she has failed to show up for school matters,

and at times she has also had to disappoint clients on account of the need to prioritise her children. It has been a tough balance.

Another big blow was the loss of her mother, whom she considered her beacon of hope, encouragement, and prayer partner. This was during those days of uncertainty when she was transitioning from IT to HR.

She also talks of losing a job in unfair circumstances at a time when she was about to take her son to boarding school. This led to years of court battles and she eventually got a generous compensation. Because of her good relationships, she was able to get a job within two months after getting referrals. Over the years, it is her professional relations that have yielded opportunities. This is one of the reasons why Josephine values relationships.

“All these experiences have raised my faith; they have also toughened me and taught me how to let go,” she says. Josephine explains that she does not hold issues to heart, especially if you get on her bad side. She loves everyone as it is a command from the Bible, but she limits access to her inner circle.

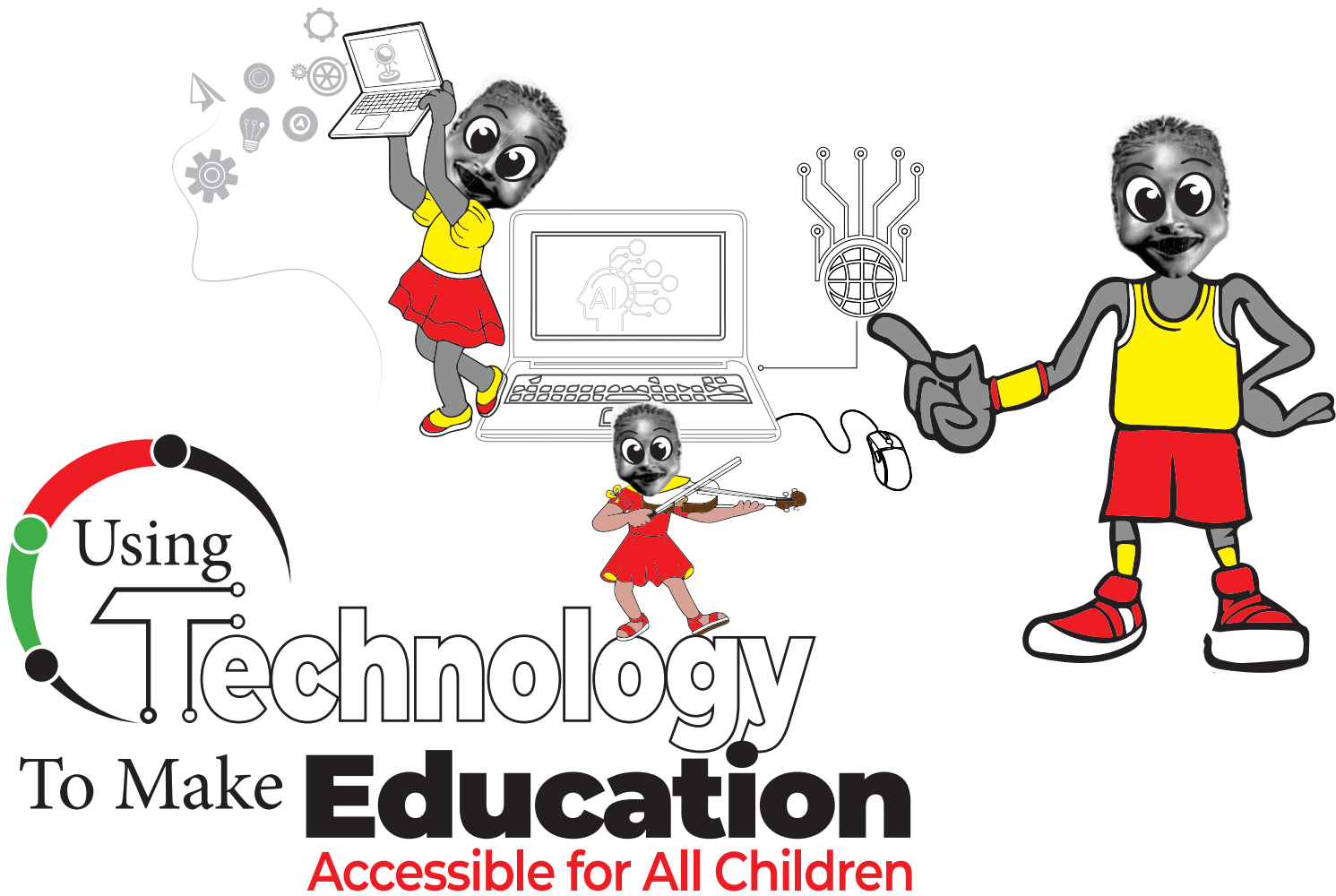
Leadership

“Leadership is servanthood, and it is from God,” she says. Josephine has held multiple leadership positions, and she believes God has put leadership in her. For her, it is about serving God and missions.

She chooses to see everyone as the same, only different based on their abilities and not gender. Josephine is a firm believer that God has put a skill in everyone that aligns with their purpose, and once you understand this, then you will excel.

Josephine wants to leave a legacy of being a bridge in people’s lives and someone who brought people healing, improving the quality of their lives.

Her advice to young people is for them to believe in themselves, to stay focused, and to take that first step. “Don’t wait for someone else to make the first move. Find your purpose and go after it. Your faith will guide you,” she says. She emphasizes that the relationships you build along the way will be your strongest support system.



Lilian's journey toward championing inclusivity in education, as she puts it, was a case of being at the right place at the right time.

Having a background in banking and finance, Lilian Mutegi worked at UAP Investments, holding different roles until the merger with Old Mutual Asset Management. A career that had seemed lucrative ended when she resigned following internal challenges associated with the merger.

“For the first time in my life I felt confused,” she says. She considered enrolling for an MBA but a career in finance was no longer appealing. A session with a career coach and retrospection led her to Information Technology (IT), something she had loved from a tender age.



Lilian Mutegi

Lilian made the leap and enrolled for a postgraduate course in IT. At the same time, she crossed a path with a friend who was working in an IT firm. He offered her an internship and Lilian got to learn on the job.

This was when the Competence Based Curriculum (CBC) was coming up in Kenya and soon after the COVID-19 pandemic hit. The company slowly transitioned to EdTech and Lilian was right in the middle of it, deploying e-learning materials and systems.

This gave her hands-on experience and in 2021 she founded Uptyke Education.

Uptyke Education

Online learning was at its peak but it was still unclear to many what e-learning was all about. As a company, they did experiment a lot until they carved their niche in EdTech for learners with disabilities.

“As much as one of the drivers of e-learning was accessibility and inclusivity, it was not meeting that threshold,” she says. There were still a lot of assumptions and barriers in access to content.

This is why Uptyke Education onboarded experts to help them curate content specific for learners with disability, with their focal point being learners who are deaf, learners with visual impairments, autism, and intellectual disabilities.

Their content is embedded with multiple assistive technologies such as text-to-speech and sign-language narration videos. “We are using technology as an enabler to make learning accessible and inclusive,” she says.

She admits that the reception has been slow despite there being a growing demand for e-learning in Kenya. Some of the barriers include limited devices and teachers struggling with using technology. She believes in empowering the teachers to enable them effectively do their work.

“The student-teacher ratio in Kenya is very high, particularly in public schools, a problem that can be solved using moveable devices in schools,” she observes. This would help children to learn digitally even in places with no teachers.

Lilian’s goal is to have at least 100,000 students being impacted directly by their digital learning materials. Currently, they have an average of 10,000 direct subscribers. With this initiative, her mission goes beyond just education. She is advocating for a shift in societal attitudes toward inclusivity and accessibility.

Challenges

Lilian has faced various challenges in this male-dominated sector. “As a woman, you have to do ten times more than your male counterparts to get noticed,” she states.

Raising funds for her cause has been particularly tough, as statistics reveal that women-led businesses are often underfunded. “It’s frustrating,” she admits. But her commitment has kept her going.

Lilian believes in the power of balance and refuses to be consumed by pressure. “I have learned the art of moving on,” she submits. This mantra has guided her through both

the highs and lows of her career.

While she is deeply committed to her work, she makes a conscious effort to spare time for herself. “I love my personal space. I’m an adrenaline junkie - I’ll go to a shooting range, do some archery or go swimming... or just disconnect from everything,” she says, sharing how these activities help her recharge and maintain a healthy work-life balance.

“God first,” she says, attributing her resilience to her faith. “Life is a journey, you have to keep moving.”

What Next?

Beyond the business, Lilian is also looking to serve her country in a leadership role, with aspirations to influence policy in education, technology, and women’s empowerment. Her vision is clear. “I want to build something that lasts, a business with an enduring social impact,” she affirms.

She is not just building a platform—

she is building a future where every child, regardless of ability, has the chance to thrive.

“**I want to build something that lasts, a business with an enduring social impact.**”





KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Childline Kenya

Children's safety is a priority for every caregiver, and now more than ever, the threat to children has been heightened by technology. The Internet provides numerous opportunities and challenges in equal measure.

"The Internet has everything, and knowing what to consume is difficult not just for children but for adults," says Martha Sunda, Executive Director of Childline Kenya.

Childline Kenya

Childline Kenya is an organisation that was established to support children, whether they are in distress or they just want to talk. Children can reach them 24/7 through their toll-free number 116, via email, and on all their social media platforms.

The organisation and its content, provides therapy to children who are survivors of violence, and they link them to services they

may require, such as rescue centres, therapy, counselling, and legal support.

They also create awareness on child protection and child abuse to ensure everybody can play their role to ensure child safety.

The Digital Dilemma

Despite children using the Internet for genuine reasons, they may be exposed to significant threats such as:

Inappropriate content

Children might be triggered by pop-up ads to click on inappropriate materials such as sexually explicit materials and violence. "There is not much control on what is available online, and people may post inappropriate content that might traumatise children," says Martha.

Cyberbullying

Social media provides a certain level of anonymity, with people hiding behind proxies and pseudo-accounts. Martha says that this

has led people to be mean, causing a lot of harm to children's mental health and self-esteem.

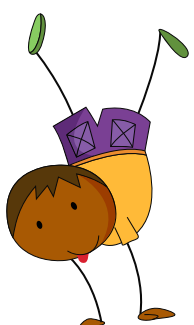
Addiction

The Internet provides entertainment in different forms whose continuous consumption may lead to addiction. "The constant stimulation that the internet provides can result in antisocial behaviour in children as they prefer gadgets and the virtual world," Martha explains.

Online predators

Socialisation has evolved with technology. "The close connection and relations within families are getting weaker," she says. Children are now making friends on social media, where they form strong bonds. As they seek friendship, they may

“The Internet has everything and knowing what to consume is difficult.”



“**Build trust with children so they feel comfortable discussing their online experiences.**”

be exposed to people who want to take advantage of them for sexual exploitation, human trafficking, violent extremism, and other vices.

Gambling and Gaming: Children may still have access to online gambling as there is not much restriction, and economic hardship has made gambling attractive, which may seem to offer quick financial gains. In some cases, some may end up with a gambling addiction.

Games, on the other hand, expose children to a lot of violence, nudity, and a distorted view of life. “Some will not understand the finality of death and may become very inhuman with prolonged exposure,” Martha warns.

Danger Signs

Martha advises parents and guardians to develop a healthy relationship with their children. This will help them realise changes in their children’s behaviour. Some of the danger signs include:

- *Sudden withdrawal from social activities*
- *Excessive screen time and secrecy around online interactions*
- *Loss of interest in school and declining academic performance*
- *Money and expensive gadgets that cannot be accounted for*
- *Distress, anxiety, fear, or extreme aggression*
- *Unusual company and friendship, for instance, a 13-year-old hanging out with a 24-year-old*
- *Sudden behaviour change, for example, cursing*

Safeguarding Children Online

Martha emphasises the importance of parents being deliberate about the time they spend with their children. You should provide a safe space for children, whether you are present or not.

Establish Open Communication:

Build trust with children so they feel comfortable discussing their online experiences. You can also observe their behaviour, which communicates even more.

Set Clear Boundaries: Establish rules on internet usage, including screen time limits, content restrictions, and information sharing. Train them to be discreet with personal information.

Use Monitoring Tools: Install parental control software to track online activities, but be transparent with children for them to understand it is for their safety. This will build trust.

Educate About Online Dangers:

Teach children about Internet risks and encourage them to question suspicious online behaviour. Speak about hypothetical scenarios to prepare them for different situations.

Encourage Healthy Offline Activities:

Promote hobbies, sports, and real-life social interactions to reduce screen dependency. In conclusion, Martha calls on all parents to invest time on their children and cultivate healthy relationships with them.



**Helpline 116
(Toll free)**

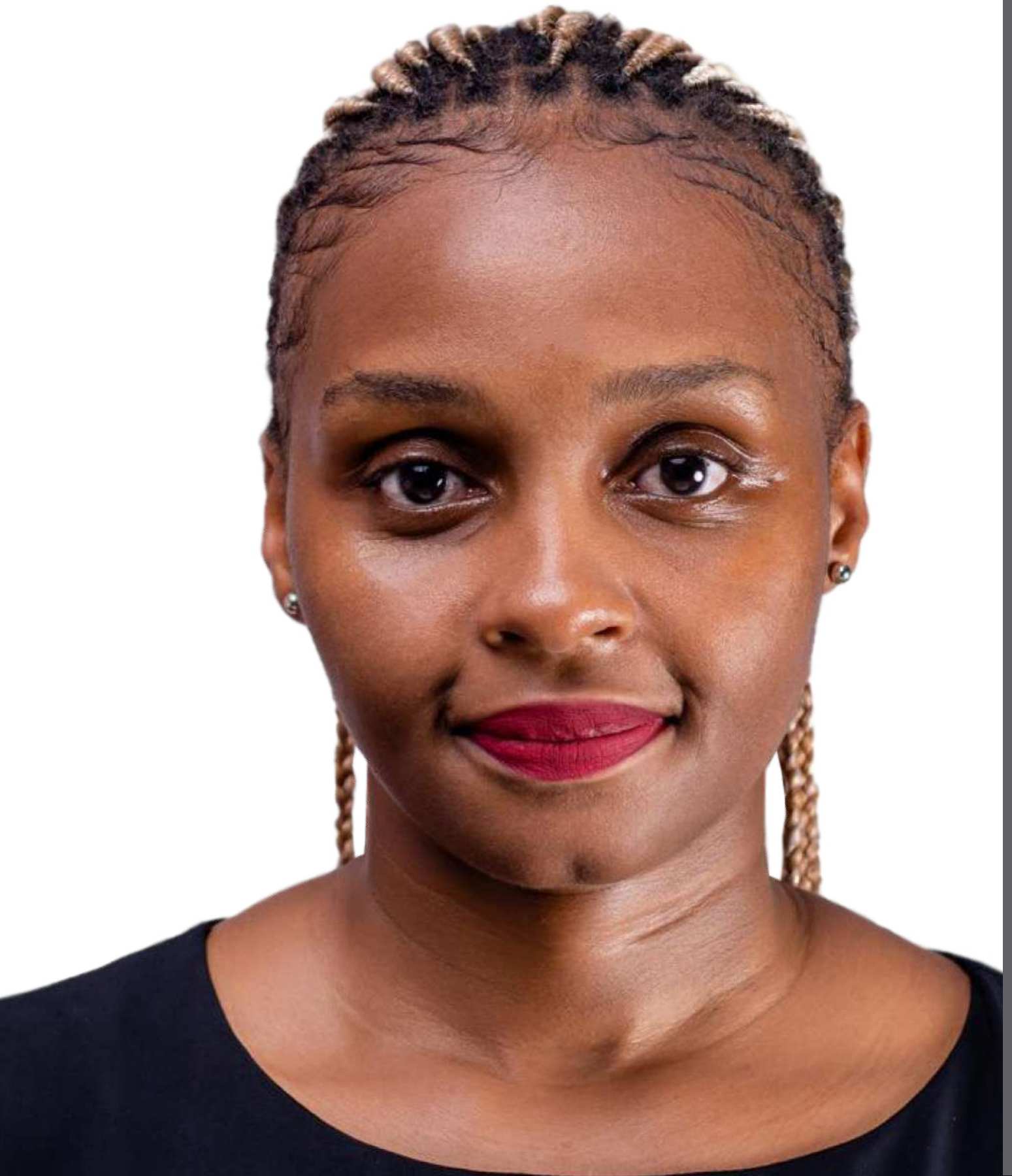
Childline Kenya currently implements projects to end online child sexual exploitation and abuse, funded through ChildFund Kenya, Terre des Hommes Netherlands and Child Helpline International.



The Nurturer's Journey:

Be the Light You Wish to Shine

By Winnie Nyato (*Dar es Salaam, Tanzania*)



Women are often seen as nurturers—caretakers of homes, families, communities, and workplaces. We see and are taught that our strength lies in giving, caring, and uplifting others.

But nurturing isn't just about what we do—it's about who we are. True nurturing goes beyond action; it starts with self-awareness, growth, and becoming. The most powerful way to nurture is by embodying the values, confidence, and resilience we wish to pass on.

Whether raising children, leading a team, or simply navigating daily life, the energy we radiate becomes the lesson we teach.

When we invest in ourselves—mentally, emotionally, and spiritually—we give from a place of abundance, not depletion. This journey isn't about self-sacrifice; it's about self-discovery, owning your story, and stepping into your power.

1. Silence the Doubt—You Are More Than Enough

How often do we second-guess our worth? How often do we hesitate to share our thoughts because we think they aren't "big enough" or "important enough"? To nurture confidence in others, you must first own your value. When you embrace your worth, you permit others to do the same.

2. Ground Yourself—Who You Are Speaks Louder Than What You Do

Being grounded entails realising that your worth is not determined by your titles, achievements, or

other people's opinions. It's about standing firm in your integrity, kindness, and respect—unapologetically.

It means refusing to shrink yourself to fit expectations and embracing your truth with confidence. It's about standing strong on a foundation so steady that no setback, criticism, or doubt can shake you. As you remain authentic, you nurture others to follow suit.

3. Stay Open—Grow, Learn, and Expand Your World

A nurturer is not someone who has all the answers but is always willing to learn. Growth doesn't happen in isolation—it happens when you seek knowledge, embrace experiences, and remain open-minded.

Read. Travel. Engage with people from different backgrounds. Step out of your comfort zone. The more you expand, the more you have to give. To nurture curiosity in children, be curious yourself. To nurture resilience in others, show them how you rise after failure. To nurture confidence, walk like you believe in your worth.

4. Own Your Confidence—Nurture It, Believe You Can

There's something undeniably powerful about a confident woman who walks into a room with her head held high. She doesn't just take up space—she owns it. But confidence isn't something you're simply born with; it's nurtured.

The world often tries to shake that belief: "You're too ambitious." "That's not for you." "You should stay in your lane." Believing in yourself doesn't mean you won't

feel fear or doubt—it means moving forward anyway. Want to lead? Step up. Want to grow? Keep learning. Want to inspire? First, believe in yourself.

5. Passing the Crown—Nurturing Confidence in Others

Someone is watching, absorbing, and learning everything from how we describe ourselves to how we deal with challenges and whether we step up or step back.

Children don't just listen; they mirror what they see. If we show them that confidence is self-respect, not arrogance, they will believe in their worth. If we embrace failure as a stepping stone, they will learn to take risks.

By walking in our truth, we permit others to do the same.

Step Into Your Power, Queen—Nurture Yourself, Nurture the World

If you've been waiting for a sign to believe in yourself, this is it. Confidence, resilience, and purpose are cultivated from within. When we nurture our growth, we strengthen the foundation from which we lead, support, and inspire.

You are enough. Your story matters. And yes, you can.

So fix your crown, walk boldly, and take up space. Be rooted in your truth, fearless in your pursuit, and intentional in how you nurture both yourself and those around you.

The world is waiting for you—not just to rise, but to help others rise with you. Step into your power, Queen.

What it Means To Be Remarkable

By **Atlese Robinson** (Saint Paul, MN. USA)



Attempting to encapsulate all that it means to be a woman, especially woman, Afro-descendant, and emerging from poverty is no small task, even if I had a book's worth of words to illustrate this experience. Even then, I would still fall short of reflecting the varied experiences of my sisters, no matter how hard I tried. So I will tell only the story that I can: my own.

I am 31 years old, unmarried, and without children. I am also African American, have two degrees, and I've traveled to 8 countries. I am only two generations removed from tenant farming, or sharecropping, and yet with grace, taste, and determination I have shaped a life for myself that has come with unexpected turns and twists, but nonetheless, it is a life I am honored to be living.

As a child, the first woman I ever admired was my mother. I distinctly remember the way my mother would tuck her hair in a French roll with a bang before work, adorning her lips with her signature pinkish hue. I saw my mother work 60-70 hours a week to care for my brother and me when we were children. I learned from her that to be a woman, you must be determined beyond the weight of your circumstances; that even if you are tired, there is still work to be done to take care of those who are depending on you.

As a woman in my twenties, I took this lesson and nurtured a creative career for myself, starting a theater company and working as a booked and busy freelancer. I championed the works of artists, including myself, who are committed to telling the

full and complex stories of being black. And I loved every part of carving out my own path, even if it wasn't the easiest way to go. I understood, even at 23 years old, that I had a purpose and that there were people depending on me to create the means for us to thrive.

Concurrently, with my career fulfillment, I found myself unfulfilled as the desire for marriage and children led me to experience grief. I hedged a lot of my worth in whether or not I was chosen to be a mother and wife. I even doubted if I had what it took. In my late twenties, I took one of the largest leaps of faith and moved abroad for my education and to be close to who I believed would be my husband. While wedding bells did not ring for me, I have realized something more important

about being a woman. What makes us truly special is the fact that we are natural creators not only as mothers to children of our womb, but birthers of worlds.

Each economy on this globe needs women. You can see it when you walk through the cacophony of people haggling at the market in Nairobi or Accra. You can see it at graduation ceremonies, with black women leading as the most educated demographic in America. You can see it in your own mothers, whether she birthed you or not, as they make incredible things happen for their families and communities. We are what it means to be remarkable. Being remarkable is what it means to be a woman.

The Art of Moving Hearts and Minds

By Boera Bisieri

Executive Director-BlackMotion Marketing

In today's fast-paced world, storytelling is the key to capturing attention, evoking emotions, and driving action. Whether advocating for change, raising funds, or spreading awareness, a compelling story helps people not just understand but feel the urgency of your message.

Why Storytelling Works

Humans are wired for stories. Facts and figures may inform, but stories inspire. During the World Suicide Prevention Day 2024 campaign in Nairobi, I saw firsthand how real-life stories of resilience resonated far more than statistics. Similarly, at another event, a woman hesitant about video content changed her mind instantly when she saw a

sample reel, proving that people connect with what they can see and feel, not just what they hear.

How to Tell Stories That Matter

Make It Visual - Photos, videos, and reels bring stories to life, making advocacy work more engaging. Instead of a long report, a short, impactful video can be more persuasive.

Tap into Emotions - Joy, hope, urgency, stories that evoke emotions leave lasting impressions.

Show, Don't Just Tell - Rather than stating impact in numbers, highlight an individual's journey of transformation.

Be Authentic - Honesty builds trust. Share successes and challenges openly.




Know Your Audience - Tailor your stories to what funders, communities, or partners care about most.

Beyond a marketing tool, storytelling builds trust and deepens engagement. People don't just invest in projects; they invest in stories that inspire them. So, as you push for change, don't just tell people about your work, show them. Let them feel it. That's how you create real impact.

Leading Feminist Change *from* Uganda

Story of Penelope Sanyu



Penelope Sanyu wears many hats. When I first asked her who she was, she smiled and proudly introduced herself as a Ugandan, deeply rooted in her motherland. The firstborn in a large family, she has always carried the weight of responsibility, earning the affectionate title of “Deputy Mother” from her siblings. Even now, as grown-ups, they still call her that—indicative of the leadership and care she has shown them from an early age.

Penelope studied law, but instead of arguing cases in court, she chose the streets—advocacy became her true calling. She is the founder of Femme Forte Uganda, a safe space for young women and girls to find their voices, discover their purpose, and break free from gender-based

injustices. Having personally battled societal prejudices, body image struggles, and self-doubt, she turned her pain into purpose.

Femme Forte Uganda: A Movement for Women and Girls

Founded in 2017, Femme Forte Uganda has expanded across eight districts in Uganda, working in schools to establish Femme Forte Clubs. These clubs support girls on their menstrual hygiene journey, body changes, career choices, and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). But Penelope’s vision goes beyond the physical world. She recently embarked on a groundbreaking project—the Virtual Feminist Museum, which launched on March 7th.

“When others tell women’s stories, a lot gets lost. The narratives are distorted and diluted. I wanted to create a

platform under Femme Forte Uganda to archive feminist work across Africa, not just Uganda. The goal is to connect feminists across the continent—to share ideas, collaborate, and build a strong, unified movement,” she explains. The platform will categorise women by their contributions, featuring those in academia, activism, and various other fields.

From Law to Feminism: Finding Her True Path

Born in 1987 to a teenage mother, Penelope’s early life was not without challenges. Her mother had to drop out of school to care for her, but her family ensured she received the best education Uganda had to offer. She attended Shimoni Demonstration School, Lugazi Mixed School, and later Makerere University, where she studied law for four years.

After graduating, she realised the courtroom was not where she wanted to be. Instead, she felt drawn to civil society and women's rights. Identifying as a women's rights activist at first, she later found her ideological home within the Ugandan Feminist Forum, a radical feminist movement.

During her time at the Uganda Youth Network, she had an epiphany—she needed to create a space where young women could be seen and understood. It all started in her small two-bedroom house, where she would gather women for tea and conversation. What began as an informal support group soon evolved into a structured feminist organisation.

Building a Community, One Conversation at a Time

Penelope turned to social media to engage more women, running a Facebook poll to understand what young Ugandan women needed. The response was overwhelming. Women wanted to be heard, empowered and mentored without being exploited.

The movement's initial name was Amandla (meaning "power"), but upon attempting registration, they discovered the name was taken. They searched for another name that symbolised strength and settled for *Femme Forte*—which translates to "strong woman" in French.

Their gatherings evolved from casual conversations to structured empowerment programs. They even started a Sacco (savings and credit cooperative) to equip women with practical survival skills. The breakthrough came when a pioneering feminist organisation offered them a free office space—a moment Penelope describes as nothing short of

miraculous.

From there, they secured their first grant of \$5,000. More grants followed, and the movement took off. But beyond financial support, it was the spirit of community that genuinely uplifted them. "Women from existing organisations gifted us office furniture, electronics, even money," she recalls.

"When others tell women's stories, a lot gets lost. The narratives are distorted and diluted."

Feminism in Uganda: The Journey and Challenges

Feminism in Uganda is often misunderstood and faces relentless backlash. "One of the biggest misconceptions is that feminists are bitter, sad, and uneducated women who have failed to get married and use feminism as a fallback plan," Penelope shares. But for her, feminism is not a reaction—it is a mission.

Contrary to the belief that feminism is solely for women, she emphasises that it is a call for a fair and equitable society. However, in Uganda's restrictive environment, feminists like her face labels and accusations—especially under the country's strict LGBTQ laws.

Engaging Men: Changing the Narrative from Within

Understanding the need to include men in the gender equality conversation, *Femme Forte Uganda* introduced a program called *Tabakas*, where male community members and leaders engage in discussions on positive masculinity and gender equity. "Feminism is not about exclusion—it is about fairness," she states.

When asked about the state of feminism in Uganda today, she

acknowledges its complexity. "There is no single word to define it because feminists are at different stages—some are radical, others engage digitally, some write blogs or create videos, while others are still finding their voice." But despite the differences, she believes Uganda's feminist movement has never been stronger.

Facing Judgment: Standing Firm in Her Beliefs

When asked how she handles criticism, Penelope is clear: "I've made peace with two things: one, it's not my responsibility to educate everyone about feminism; an two, not everyone will like me because of my strong feminist stance."

For women afraid of being judged, her message is simple: "Be gracious to yourself, extend the same grace that you give to others to yourself. If you can give others second and third chances, do the same for yourself. Feminism is a journey, not a destination enjoy it."

Advocating for LGBTQ Rights in a Hostile Environment

Under Uganda's restrictive laws, advocating for LGBTQ rights is dangerous, but Penelope and her movement refuse to be silent. "The law is unjust, a direct threat to human rights. While we do not condone it, we create safe spaces for LGBTQ individuals—to heal, to find love, to build community." *Femme Forte Uganda* has stood in solidarity, opposing the law and engaging with stakeholders to make Uganda a safer, more inclusive society.

Looking Ahead: Challenges and Hopes for the Future

Despite *Femme Forte Uganda's* remarkable impact, challenges remain. Funding is scarce, and oppressive laws make advocacy difficult. Yet Penelope remains undeterred.

Beyond financial support, their work relies on the community's willingness to share, uplift, and build together. "We have seen a shift in how young women understand themselves. They now have the language to express their needs and advocate for their rights," she says. Issues once silenced, abortion, menstruation, gender roles—are now openly discussed.

Life Beyond Activism: Finding Solace in Books and Sisterhood

When she's not leading change, Penelope turns to books. She is also an author and profoundly values her intentional sisterhood—the community of women who support her in return.

Through her work, she has redefined what it means to be a feminist in Uganda. She has built a space for women to thrive, heal, and empower one another. As she continues her journey, she does so with an unwavering belief in the power of women, because, for Penelope Sanyu, feminism is not just a movement—it's life itself.

"Be gracious to yourself, extend the same grace that you give to others to yourself."



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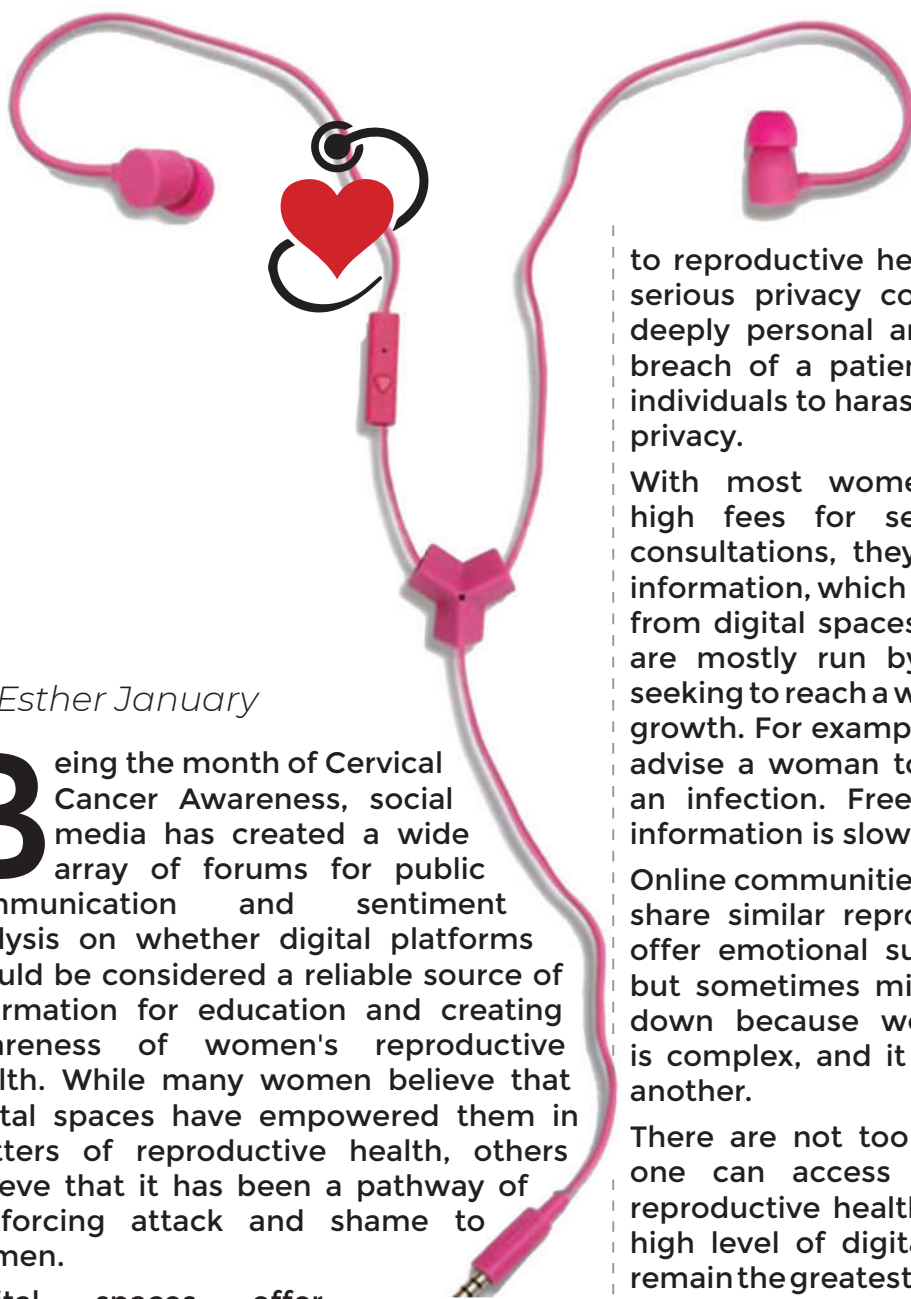
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Women Reproductive Info *VS* Digital Spaces



By Esther January

Being the month of Cervical Cancer Awareness, social media has created a wide array of forums for public communication and sentiment analysis on whether digital platforms should be considered a reliable source of information for education and creating awareness of women's reproductive health. While many women believe that digital spaces have empowered them in matters of reproductive health, others believe that it has been a pathway of reinforcing attack and shame to women.

Digital spaces offer immense potential for good, but they can also be misused, particularly when it comes to sensitive topics like reproductive health.

Online harassment is rampant, often exacerbated by ineffective laws governing digital spaces. Therefore, the quality and accuracy of the information shared can vary at times. Women must seek trusted, evidence-based sources for reproductive health information.

While digital spaces offer increased access

to reproductive health services, they also raise serious privacy concerns. Health matters are deeply personal and require confidentiality. A breach of a patient's health data can expose individuals to harassment and compromise their privacy.

With most women complaining about the high fees for seeking reproductive health consultations, they have opted to go for free information, which they also believe is accessible from digital spaces. These platforms, however, are mostly run by influencers who are only seeking to reach a wider market for their business growth. For example, a gynaecologist will never advise a woman to use Yoni products to treat an infection. Free and credible reproductive information is slowly becoming scarce.

Online communities where women connect and share similar reproductive health experiences offer emotional support and practical advice, but sometimes misinformation can be passed down because women's reproductive health is complex, and it differs from one woman to another.

There are not too many online spaces where one can access reliable information about reproductive health. That's why, even with the high level of digital resources, gynaecologists remain the greatest source of information as far as women's reproductive health goes. The medical practitioners, however, can try to regulate the consultation fees and make them affordable for every woman, increase free medical camps, and verify their social media accounts for credibility.

“ Digital spaces offer immense potential for good, but they can be misused ”



DEEJA ATIS:

BREAKING BOUNDARIES THROUGH DANCE

As a child, Atis was drawn to dance and would participate in school competitions. Her love for dance got serious in high school, where she would perform at school events and music festivals. She even took up music and acting.

Deep down, she wanted to pursue a dance career but her parents envisioned a more traditional career for her and asked her to prioritize her studies.

Being the eldest daughter in a family of eight, she grew up under strict parental supervision and high expectations to be a good example.

Coming from a lineage of professionals—doctors, lawyers, engineers, and architects—her academic path seemed predetermined. After high school, she was advised to explore courses such as law and business before settling for engineering.

Self-Discovery Journey

While waiting to join the university, Deeja volunteered at a local NGO using her dance skills for community engagement. The opportunity allowed her to connect with other dancers, forming a group that explored contemporary dance, ballet, jazz, and Afro-Latin styles.

After graduating from university, she abandoned her engineering profession to pursue her passion for dance.

“My parents struggled to understand why I abandoned engineering for dance and fitness,” she says.

Leadership and Impact

For her, leadership is not about authority but about continuous growth and learning.

“I practice leadership by extending compassion, encouraging innovation, and creating a space where everyone can learn and contribute,” she says.

One of the most impactful moments in her career was leading a training session for a group of corporate professionals holding top leadership

“Just do it. Don't wait for the perfect moment”

Deeja Atis

positions. She fondly remembers, “At the end of the session, some of them were visibly emotional, even breaking down. They told me that the experience was exactly what they needed.”

This experience reinforced the value of her work and the impact she has on people. Deeja has also received recognition from major organizations and dignitaries, further validating her contributions to dance, fitness, and community engagement.

As a hijabi Muslim woman from coastal Kenya, she is passionate about making dance and fitness accessible to all. “I ensure my classes are open to everyone regardless of age, background, body type, and skill level. I teach different levels of yoga, including chair yoga for those with disabilities and yoga for kids and seniors,” she says.

Despite challenges, such as misconceptions about dance and yoga, as an exclusive practice, she remains steadfast in promoting accessibility and inclusivity. She offers free introductory classes to those who seek to try out what she offers.

Setbacks

Deeja had a significant financial setback when a school defaulted on payments, plunging her into debt and depression.

“This experience taught me financial literacy. Now, I secure contracts and structured payment plans to protect my business,” she says. Thanks to the lesson, she formally registered her business, built a reliable team, and partnered with professionals in physiotherapy and law. These steps have strengthened her venture, ensuring sustainability and growth.

Her dream is to establish a studio that will be a sanctuary for relaxation, wellness, and creative expression for both children and adults.

“I want a space where people can rejuvenate, work on their fitness, and access healthy food,” she says. Eventually, she plans to expand, opening

studios across the country and turning them into community hubs.

She also envisages a fitness festival in Mombasa, an event that will bring together fitness professionals and enthusiasts to network and share ideas.

Her advice for young people aspiring to make an impact is simple: “Just do it. Don’t wait for the perfect moment. Start with what you have and keep learning, unlearning, and relearning as you go.”

“My parents struggled to understand why I abandoned engineering for dance and fitness.”



A Winner in Education

Dr. Sarah Njeri

Dr. Sarah Njeri has risen from humble beginnings to becoming a respected academic and researcher at the Department of Development Studies, at SOAS, University of London. She has overcome immense challenges to carve out a path of excellence. Her journey, marked by struggle, sacrifice, and ultimate success, inspires many, especially women and individuals from marginalized communities.

In her childhood, Dr. Njeri's life was defined by adversity. Growing up in an environment where even necessities were hard to come by, she faced challenges that would have deterred many.

Coming from a household headed by a single mother, she had to re-take her Kenya Certificate of Primary Education exams to allow for time for her mother to secure the necessary funds for her secondary education. When she finally got to secondary school, it was a day school, which meant traveling long distances without provision for lunch and having had little or no breakfast.

Yet, these hardships only fuelled her determination to pursue education. Her academic journey was anything but conventional. While working at Jesuit Refugee Service, Eastern African Regional office here in Nairobi, she applied to the University of Bradford's world renowned Department of Peace Studies to pursue a degree in Peace and conflict Studies. Due to her work experience, she was offered a spot to study a Master's in Conflict Resolution, however, the offer was conditional of excelling in all her taught elements of the course, failure to which she would have been awarded a postgraduate diploma. The university had equated her work experience to an undergraduate degree. Despite uncertainty about funding, she secured financial support to study abroad and quickly distinguished herself by earning top marks.

She wrote her masters dissertation, completing it with successful, earning a distinction and giving birth just two days after her graduation. Her family especially her mum played a crucial role, coming to the UK at critical times to support her during her studies. Her husband also supported her financially including in managing the household. After her masters, she immediately embarked on her PhD.

However, after 6 months in, she took a two-year break to formalize her UK residency. She then resumed her PhD studies having had a premature baby girl who had defied all the odds to survive. Being a Black woman in academia in the UK presented additional challenges

When her first PhD supervisor was dismissive and unsupportive, she presented her case to the university and appealed for a change, a turning point that led to her success in completing her PhD. Her groundbreaking research focuses on landmines and explosive remnants of war in countries recovering from war and her fieldwork took place in Somaliland. Throughout this period, she balanced childcare with studies, sometimes bringing her children here in Kenya to focus on research while working at the university. Her resilience culminated in an exceptional achievement, passing her PhD examination with no corrections, an exceptionally rare outcome in academia. Since her PhD she has carried out research in places like Angola, Cambodia, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Nigeria and has travelled widely sharing her research with global audiences,



Throughout her journey, she navigated the complex balance between career ambitions, personal well-being, and family life. "Do not allow societal limitations to define your potential, my past

does not limit me. It gives me the tools to navigate my future.", she says, and views education as a tool of empowerment. She recently reflected on this during a recent visit to Buckingham Palace where as a member of the Kenyan academic in the UK, she was invited for an audience with the King and Queen of England.

Her story demonstrates that with determination, support, and self-belief, even the most daunting obstacles can be overcome, lighting the way for others to dream boldly and persist despite hardships.

“Do not allow societal limitations to define your potential, and view education as a tool of empowerment.”



...Through a transparent savings and loan process, UFEL has successfully built a network of over 400 businesswomen across five branches, helping them save, invest, and grow their businesses...



United Female Entrepreneur Liberia (UFEL) Empowering Women, Transforming Communities

In the aftermath of Liberia's civil war, the nation faced significant challenges in education, economic stability, social services, food security, and empowerment. Women and children, especially single mothers, widows, uneducated women, and orphans, were among the most vulnerable, often exposed to violence, exploitation, and abuse.

Recognizing the urgent need to restore dignity and security to women, humanitarian organizations, philanthropists, and civil society activists collaborated with international groups such as the Global Fund for Women, Afailit, the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), Women's International League for Peace & Freedom (WILPF), the Organization for Women Empowerment (OWE), and Plan Liberia. Together, they initiated programs aimed at addressing the pressing economic and social challenges women faced in Liberia and across Africa.

One of the most impactful initiatives introduced was the Village

Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) model, pioneered by CARE International in 1991. This model has since become a powerful tool for promoting financial independence among small business owners, especially women.

In 2018, United Female Entrepreneur Liberia (UFEL) joined this transformative movement, adopting the VSLA methodology to equip small and medium-sized businesswomen with essential financial management skills. Through a transparent savings and loan process, UFEL has successfully built a network of over 400 businesswomen across five branches, helping them save, invest, and grow their businesses.

Beyond savings and loans, UFEL has expanded its impact by addressing key issues affecting women and their communities. While financial empowerment remains our core focus, we also prioritize advocacy, championing women's rights and economic justice, women empowerment through skills training, mentorship, and leadership development,

community services that uplift and support vulnerable populations, and agriculture, promoting agribusiness as a sustainable source of income and food security.

At UFEL, empowering women is the key to a prosperous and self-sufficient Liberia. By fostering financial independence and social resilience, we are committed to transforming lives and building a stronger future for women, their families, and their communities.





Esther Muiruri

Disaster Risk Management and the Role of Women

The thought of writing this article fills me with both excitement and anxiety. As an expert in disaster risk management, I wonder where to put my focus. Given that disaster risk management is broad by the nature of its multidisciplinary formation, my decision is to reflect on the role of women. My view is that the place of women in disaster risk management remains limited, yet women and girls are the most vulnerable when disasters occur.

The history of disaster risk management as a profession started with civil defense agencies, which, as we know, were fields dominated by men. As the discipline continued to grow and countries formulated laws and regulatory frameworks after World War II, most of the laws and legal frameworks were not comprehensive enough to address all disasters or hazards. Furthermore, these laws and frameworks failed to address all phases of the disaster cycle, and therefore most of the agencies were mandated to undertake emergency response interventions, which only form one phase of the disaster risk management cycle.

The emergency response phase of any disaster can be overwhelming, demanding, and requiring flexibility and high adaptability. It can be resource-intensive, both materially and financially. Given these considerations, most of the countries gave the mandate of disaster risk management to civil defense agencies where women were generally underrepresented.

Although in the modern day there has been concerted effort to enhance the role of women in disaster risk management, the historical development of this field, coupled with the place of women in African societies, continues to limit their engagement. In most societies, women have full responsibilities at home, taking care of children. This role in particular can be too challenging for women in this field to balance. Disasters know no boundaries nor time, and they can occur anywhere and at any time. For women, it becomes extremely

challenging to have flexibility and rapid adaptability to these needs.

When disasters occur, women and girls are hardest hit, and their roles in society are further brought to the surface. During drought, women and girls trek for long distances to fetch water for domestic use. Besides, girls face the risk of missing school due to a lack of proper menstrual hygiene products and sanitation facilities. Women further face extreme dangers and challenges, including health impacts from long exposure to heat. On the other hand, when floods occur, women can suffer health risks when healthcare systems are cut off. Yet, women

have continued to show resilience and have always been at the forefront of rebuilding after disasters.

“Women have continued to show resilience and have always been in the forefront of rebuilding after disasters.”

So what can be done to ensure women are not underrepresented in the disaster risk management field? My thoughts are that the existing disaster risk management frameworks must address the gender gap by ensuring there is equal representation for men and women within the disaster risk management governance; where there are existing comprehensive laws that ensure gender inclusion, the

implementation must be accelerated.

There should also be efforts to ensure gender-sensitive approaches at workplaces that support women, coupled with a good support system at the family/social level. Mentorship of girls and women in this field can also be a great way to gain first-hand insights into the field and practical guidance.

Esther Muiruri is a mom and an MSc expert in Intelligence, Security, and Disaster Management with over 10 years of experience in Disaster Risk Management in Kenya and abroad.

Impact Is Not About Doing Everything

Arjmandbanu Ebrahim Khan

Arjmandbanu Khan, fondly referred to as Banu Khan, carries her mother's purpose and conviction on her sleeve. She speaks and acts like the empowered woman she would like all women to be, bringing energetic and positive energy to every room.

As Senior Gender Specialist at FSD Africa, Banu has worked in corridors of power, sat at decision-making tables, and continues to ensure policies for women's betterment turn from theory into practice. Whether at the Kadhi's Court advocating for Muslim Women's rights, at UN Women making presentations about women's financial inclusion, or promoting gender-responsive climate finance at FSD Africa, Banu has her work cut out.

Her journey has always been about opening doors for women in economic empowerment, market access, and financial inclusion. During over 12 years at UN Women, she worked on pioneering initiatives advancing women's access to justice and economic opportunities. Her mission has been clear: women should not just participate in the economy, they should thrive in it.

For Banu, leadership means creating spaces for others to succeed and challenging the status quo. She believes leadership is not given but claimed through action, persistence, and

vision. She bridges grassroots voices with high-level decision-making and challenges financial systems to integrate gender inclusivity.

One of her proudest achievements was leading gender-responsive procurement policy reforms in Kenya, unlocking millions in business opportunities for disadvantaged groups including women-owned businesses.



Her mother has been her greatest inspiration, teaching her that resilience, purpose, and conviction are more powerful than any obstacle. Banu ensures inclusivity is not an afterthought but a starting point in her work, embedding gender in financial policies and giving women entrepreneurs seats at decision-making tables.

Her guiding life principle? "Change doesn't happen by waiting for the right moment, it happens when you decide that this moment is the right one."

"Women should not just participate in the economy, they should thrive in it"



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