

**‘I’ STORIES**

# **LIVED REALITIES OF GIRLS IN KIBERA**

POLYCOM DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

DOCUMENT TITLE



*“Adversity, it can break you or make you if you let it, the choice is yours. Many are touched by adversity, they fall down and they never get back up, whereas some go through adversity and discover their true self” Anonymous.*

These are stories and lived realities of girls who were faced by adversities right from birth and how they discovered themselves and achieved beyond their dreams.

# Introduction

Kibera is the largest slum in Africa with a population of one million people. According to Wikipedia most of Kibera slum residents live in extreme poverty, earning less than \$1.00 per day.

Unemployment rates are high. Persons living with HIV in the slum are many, as are AIDS cases. Cases of assault and rape are common.

There are few schools, and most people cannot afford education for their children. Clean water is scarce. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by poverty and girls resort to either getting married as a way of survival.

With all these systemic challenges girls have realized that they can rise above the many different adversity faced right from birth and as they grow up. Girls living in Kibera are like any other girls; they are ambitious, brave, and smart. They have dreams of a better life. The situation at home and community at large makes it challenging to see beyond their adversities and challenge.

The unwillingness of community to support girl's dream right from home continues to make girls feel like they cannot achieve beyond what they dream of. It is with the support of amazing women and organization that see beyond despair and challenges girls face within

Kibera that they make their mission to support and empower girls to actualize their full potential. It is said that when you empower a girl you empower the whole community.

# The Journey 25 years later: Beijing Declaration Platform for Action and the Girl Child

25 years ago over 189 countries committed to the Platform for Action to achieve gender equality. 189 governments adopted the Beijing Declaration Platform for Action (BDPFA) and committed to implement it. Beijing Declaration conceived the term, 'Women's rights are human rights.'

This historic moment happened during the Fourth World Conference on Women on September 1995 in Beijing. It is believed that over 30,000 women and men attended the conference to call for the commitment of governments in achieving gender equality.

The work to this achievement started way back in 1975 during the – the International Women's Year and marked the beginning of the UN Decade for Women (1976 – 1985) conferences. It was however at Beijing delegates from government, UN bodies and Civil Society analyzed obstacles to women's advancement and recommended steps for overcoming them.

A Platform for Action was adopted that called for greater political will in the implementation of laws and policies that advance gender equality. In order achieve the empowerment of women and equality between women and men, [twelve Critical Areas of Concern](#) were proposed that required action and resources from different stakeholders.

# 189

Total number of countries that adopted the declaration

# 30,000

Women and men who attended the conference.

# 12

Critical areas of concern

One of the critical concerns was the GirlChild where it recognizes the specific forms of violence, discrimination and harmful practices affecting girls such as Female Genital Mutilation, Breast ironing, child marriage, sexual abuse and the denial of rights to education, health and well being.

It calls on all stakeholders and government to invest in programs that empower girls and young women to not only pursue their dreams but also confront discriminations starting from homes, prevent all kinds of violence and advocate for girls rights. This critical concern like the others has not been achieved even though progress of BDPFA has been felt over the world.

This 21<sup>st</sup> century, Adolescents girls and young women still face a lot of challenges from dropping out of school due to teenage pregnancies, sexual harassment, lack of education and lack of basic needs like pads and panties. This is the situation that girls in Kibera face everyday. These issues are deeply rooted in socio economic status of Kibera community.

When faced with so many challenges and obstacles people either break down or triumphed. As B. C. Forbes said *"History has demonstrated that the most notable winners usually encountered heart-breaking obstacles before they triumphed. They won because they refused to become discouraged by their defeats."*

Girls from Kibera Girls sharing their life journey to where they are today, what if there was not women empowerment, what if there were no women right, where would these wonderful girls be? These are stories of triumph, stories of victories, stories of change and stories of hope and realized dreams. A journey it is that started with a small step into the rights directions.

## STORY 1: Child Bride: Against All Odds

There is that age that a woman just wants to feel owned, wants to belong. She wants to show the world that she can paint her world. A woman in that age bracket wouldn't take any advice whatsoever. I was that woman eleven years ago in my mid-teens. A school drop out, deep in the village, orphaned, innocent and yes I must admit a brilliant girl (who wouldn't take pride in that).

I must have been 16 years old and out of school, I don't understand what happened but I know money was involved. I come from a village where economic activity then was pottery. We would then take these pots to our local market on Friday for sale. It was one of these "blessed" Fridays that I chanced on a former schoolmate that had a "thing" on me (let us call him Ray). And I used a "blessed Friday", it is because nothing turns on a young girl in that critical age like being told 'I love you'. He told me he loved me. We had lunch together, no let me just say he bought me lunch, talked a bit then handed me I think a hundred bob for bodaboda back home. He was in school and from a family that anyone would wish to belong to, they were rich, this star landed on me.

2007 December 23<sup>rd</sup> he called on my aunt's phone and instead of him talking he used his sister-in-law (let us call her Lilian), to talk to my aunt to get me. "You have a friend who would love to talk to you" my aunt told me. She handed me the phone and I heard Ray's voice on the other end. He wanted me to go visit on 24<sup>th</sup> but to act like I was a sister to Lilian. He then told Lilian to ask my aunt permission so I would go the next day. She did not resist, neither did she question how long I would stay there. I think that's how I got married.


24<sup>th</sup> at around 3 pm, I asked for fifty shillings that I was to use as my bus fare to his home. I was going to be with my supposed husband for Christmas but under the pretense of Lilian's sister. There I was with the family. He introduced me to his mother as Lilian's sister, what a time to live. I would then sneak to his brother's house in the night to perform our rituals (chuckles) then day time revert to the sister that I was. This happened for two weeks. Schools were fast approaching, there we were, all pretending to be friends and relatives but "stealing" each other when night falls".

January 2008, schools opened. Then before he left he had this one request, that his mother tag me along on every visiting day they were visiting. He left me home, heartbroken, desperate and stupid. Whose husband leaves home without telling their mother that the lady he is leaving behind is his wife? He knew I was his wife, Lilian knew I was his wife; his brothers knew I was his wife, I knew it, but the mother was in the dark. In his absence, I became that dutiful wife. Dutiful and foolish and in love. I did all I could to show my "mother-in-law" that I was nothing close to Lilian's sister but her daughter-in-law.

I moved straight to her house with my belongings, but this is how you earn your space and own it.

While at school, he would call his mama and request to talk to me. "I'm fine and please work hard", is all I could tell him in our conversations. But this is a boy I beat seriously in our national exams and had to repeat to get good grades that would take him to school. He now wifed the once brilliant girl and was her advising him to work. First visiting day, I was here doing my chores thinking I would join them to see my "husband" No, they forgot the one request he had to his mother, to tag me along. I was hopeless and in love, so them visiting and coming back with the good news of he is fine and has sent you regards was the most important. Mother-in-law came back that evening and called me to her bedroom.





See when you have so many secrets, so many that everyone knows them and only kept secret from the one person who should know them, such a summon can shut your nerves. But here I was very confident, heads up high. “What do you want to do with your life? You are still young; don’t you think you should be in school? Tell me what you want!” These questions opened a whole new world of thought. From how almost everybody treated me, to how the mother would handle me. Ugly scenes emanating from simple arguments, my clothes being thrown outside, and heavy chores left for you. Then they came for half-term. A young girl he claimed was a friend but could not go to her home as her family was not home, accompanied him. It was her girlfriend. They were always together studying, walking her in the village and introducing her as his future wife. She was told I was a cousin.

Now this one hurt me so bad. I was still the dutiful wife I was. They went back to school, I was still there. Every school holiday he would come back with a different girl but the mother welcomed them. I think these are red flags; I refused to read because I was foolishly in love and stupid at the same time.

Then my aunt learned of my stay there, and the drama and all that reached her ears did not please her. She came to take me back home but I ran away leaving her there only to come back the following day. Wait, what does a young married woman do? She protects her marriage with blood and sweat. What was I even protecting? My dear husband had me as plan B should his many girlfriends decline his invite.

The second attempt to get me out of this boy’s life saw my aunt bring my grandpa home unannounced. 3 pm in the village women run their businesses in those tattered clothes. I was that woman. Husband in school, mother in law out running errands, then me there with my daily duties. Two people come in bicycles, aunt and grandpa. I could run away this time. My grandpa was one of those people who you wouldn’t dare run aware from. Besides, on a disciplinary mission, he never left behind his ‘nyaunyo’ (Maasai whip) and this was one of them. He had his nyaunyo. I welcomed them, you see I was still that welcoming wife.




Only thing he said was get your things we are going back home. He then called mother – in law only to let her know that they are taking back their child. I thought she would ask them to let me stay, no she okayed my leaving.

I had a week at home, all stories going round about me. My peers in school and these people here not mentioning school anywhere as that was the reason they divorced me from my husband. I called the school where my husband was and asked him for money. I didn't care to know if he was in school and if he had money all I wanted was money that would get me to Mombasa to be with my uncle. He did not send, he did not have it. Then I met an old neighbor in our local market and told me of a cousin who wanted a house help in Mombasa soon as I could be available she called her cousin and we agreed. She sent me the bus fare and that same evening traveled to Mombasa. No one knew where I went.

While at Caro's my employer, I could read just any book I chanced upon once I was done with my household chores. Then I found Ben Carson's Gifted Hands. This was the turning point. I was that girl married to a school going boy, a boy that never beat me in any exam, one that was almost coming last, a boy that cheated on me in broad day light in the full glare of my eyes. I was now here working as a help. What a mockery. I remember saving half of my then salary, should a chance to join school comes up. I saved this money with my uncle, if only I knew that I was giving him a bonus on top of his salary.

Caro wanted me to join these evening computer classes, her job shifts were just unpredictable. She was a nurse, other times she would be at work during the day and other days evening. So this proved to be a bit challenging. I stayed and worked for her for almost one and a half years.




2009 my younger sister joined high school, I was still in Mombasa working. As the year was almost coming to an end, my elder sister called Caro my employer if she could release me so I could be back in school. Caro then had me book a bus so I could attend the many interviews that the school had. She always said my place was in school, so when my sister told her they got me a scholarship she could not hesitate.

2009 I joined form one again after spending four years outside school. I did not even care to know that I was old, here I was at 19 yrs old and in form one, with students 5 years younger than me. At this point what mattered to me most was my education only time that ate me up was the then deputy principal wanted to chase me from the school when he learned that I was once married and that he was afraid I would probably run back there.

This took the intervention of my sister's fears and my brother-in-law's knees to ensure I stay in school. I did not disappoint. I still was that brilliant girl. I was a performer. I read well and scored good grades.

Kibra is a home of opportunities and untapped talents. I got to attend many forums that empowered girl child and I wanted to tell the world my story but fear engulfed me. I remember sneaking to this ex-husband of mine once and never returned. His mother told me that she wanted nothing to do with me and body obeyed, all this while they did not know I had gone back to school until in 2013 national results were out. They were told I got good grades and would be joining the university. Like I said this is one man that never beat me in any exam.




He performed dismally and here I performed well. I had wasted a year with him in that damn marriage. Four years out of school as a young girl, there was no way I was going to waste my four precious years again in school. I had not come that far to waste donors' money, strangers who spent sleepless nights to see me, poor child, in school.

He wanted me back, there is this one Luo proverb that says “you don’t get dry where you bathed.” We had no chance of being together again. What came as a shock is that I never got pregnant all this while and I think God wanted me lighter and ready for the task ahead.

Here is to the woman that feels has wasted years in marriage, you have not come that far to give up. Keep on pushing, the hard times prepare you even for harder times ahead. Be empowered.

I wanted to share with you this story as anonymous but I remember answering a question in an interview that asked me, “what they should know about me and I responded” I am an open book and this alone got me the job. So instead of anonymous.



I am  
Eldrine Akeyo and  
this is my story

## STORY 2:

### FIERCENESS MY ONLY WEAPON:


#### A SONG OF HOPE

I am a strong fierce young woman who has a voice, I am more often than not outspoken and blunt. I know that I have to claim my role in the community, you ask how I came to be so bold and aggressive, this is a reflex I have resorted to in order to avoid reliving my mother's life. Looking back at all my mom's struggles, they are definitely behind my feisty nature.

I grew up in a home with 3 older brothers and I was the only girl, the jewel of the family and typically daddy's girl... I got so much love and attention and I was overly pampered. We lived in a smallhouse, which was always swamped by dad's relatives. Mom's lack of voice in her own house and her inability to speak out made me sad and I vowed to always be in control of my life and the things around me and that my children would get the best from their dad.

Unlike most families where a girl was expected to carry out all the chores while the boys lived as kings, my brothers were taught by my mother to clean up after themselves, cook and do the house chores. My mother loved house chores and therefore did most of them. After completing my primary education I anticipated joining a boarding school for my secondary education but I didn't manage to get into one and so the other option was getting into a day school.

Boarding schools are good because they provide a conducive studying environment, where you can unwind and leave everything behind and focus on your studies. I did not have that luxury, living in the slum in a one-roomed house where everyone has his or her own priority it's never quiet, especially if there is a television.




My school was far from kibera and so I had to wake up very early and commute two vehicles to get there, traffic jam was also a huge challenge. I'd be sexually harassed daily as I made my way through the dark slum corridors, all these frustrations were beating hard on my will to get an education but I knew that quitting was not an option.

I had seen a lot of strong educated women and I wanted to be just like them, I wanted to savor the prestige of being an educated lady from the slum. It was hell when it rained in the evening, the bus fares would shoot to even double the normal price and getting into one would be a struggle as so many people would be struggling to get into one all wanting to get home as soon as possible.

I remember there was a day when I got home past midnight, it had rained heavily I was soaked, my books were all soaked,, the roads were flooded, there were no vehicles, I cried as I walked up the hill asking myself why me, why couldn't I have it easy like everyone else, isn't this too much for a 15 yr. old girl? I got home to find my mother worried sick, she had stayed up waiting for me.

My frustrations had taken a toll on her, she embraced me and we sobbed together. My dad was also there but he seemed to resonate with my struggles and only encouraged me to be strong but this was well beyond strength. Mama promised to take me to a boarding school because I wasn't getting the space to study in the midst of all those challenges. Most times I would go to bed on a hungry stomach cause I was either too tired to eat or there was no food.




There was a time when I got home and there wasn't a single drop of water in the house, momma was unwell and my brothers were in boarding school and therefore I had to go look for water. I had to go for 2 rounds with a 20litre jerrycan, I walked for almost 3km. that night was my mother's breaking point, she made up her mind that I had to go to boarding school.

Then tragedy struck, in the form of cancer momma was diagnosed with breast cancer. It started as a boil like swelling. She was in a lot of pain and her usually warm lit up face was suddenly dull and full of pain. After a few months of struggle, the doctor proposed a mammogram. Momma would lose one of her breasts and was therefore admitted to hospital for a while.

I had to take up her role and try to take care of my younger siblings and also do the house chores. Since she had no proper medical cover, she had to be discharged from hospital as soon as she became stable to avoid incurring extra charges. I was there to receive momma, I had to take care of her now bathe her, feed her, try to make her as comfortable as possible it was a tough time, but she rewarded me by making me feel special and loved and calling me the sweetest of names.

Polycom team also became a cushion for me during these tough times. My prayer was for momma to get through this, and my prayer was answered she is a survivor to date. After struggling with day school for 2 years, I finally managed to get into a boarding school and though I was very happy and excited I was worried for my mom. St Mary's high school Webuye was the school I went to, it wasn't bad it was my first time being far away from home, away from the slum life.

Adjusting wasn't hard, I had heard wonderful stories about boarding school and was eager to get a taste of it. Waking up early wasn't an issue for me, the morning and evening prep were compulsory and missing them could result in hard punishment. Unlike home, every single meal was guaranteed, the food was terrible as I had been told before but it was bearable.



The strictness of this school did not stop girls from being naughty and having fun. They would sing and dance naked in the dormitory, they'd race to the dining hall to get the top oily layer of the stew, they'd mimic teachers walking styles and talking, they'd exchange love letters and pieces of uniform with boys from neighboring schools...it was all so funny.

I went back home for the holidays; I had lots of stories to tell. My father was quite the storyteller while my mom was the quiet type like my brothers. The holiday was great when it was time to go back to school, I was sent back home due to lack of school fees and this became the unfortunate trend and it got really frustrating because I got left behind in my studies. Momma and daddy tried their best to get the money for my school fees but were unable to get enough.

In my fourth year, we had hit a dead end since I was to sit for my national exam at the end of the year and wouldn't be able to without clearing all the pending fees. I decide to put my faith to play and left it to God, and he came to my aid. I met an Australian lady who was documenting a sexual violence case procedure at kibera law courts through Polycom Development Project,

Judy Rymer, she paid my school fees and enrollment fees and within 2 days I was back in school. I would love to meet her again she was my light at the end of the tunnel. My story is a song of hope that of encouragement to other girls going through rough patches. You may have had thoughts of rebellion, self-hate or hate for people around you it's not your fault and your parents are doing their best. You'll have your breakthrough.



## STORY 3:

### CONFIDENCE ELEVATES:


### NEVER GIVE UP

Grandma looked so weak and frail, I was prepared for the worst. I had seen death knock at my door before and it left with mom and dad. My baby sister was also sickly, the only consolation I gave myself was that kids never died at least I never knew one that did. I was worried about how we'd survive without grandma, how I'll take care of my sister.

My dad's death is just but a blurry scene, I can't remember it well. What I vividly remember is how much my mom suffered with her 3 kids after my father's demise. She was abandoned nobody cared about her or her children and since she came from a different ethnic community from my dad, it worsened the situation. When my grandma finally came to our rescue we were very malnourished and mom's health had deteriorated, she could barely stand.

Grandma decided to take all of us along with her despite my paternal relatives' protests, she could not leave us in that state her gesture filled me within hope, we were going to be alright. Mum regained some strength after some time under grandma's care, 2 years later mom's health plummeted and she died. I remember dad's family coming down hard on grandma to release the body to them so they could bury her in her marital home according to traditions.

This same derogative traditions demand that a widow must be subjected to cleansing and this could only be achieved by having sexual intercourse with a retarded man or one without a family this was believed to make her pure. Luckily, my mom did not undergo any of that since she was very ill and also because she was from another tribe but they insisted on her being buried in her marital home. They however did not have the money to transport the body but expected grandma to raise the money, ridiculous, right? She ended up buried in her home.




Grandma took the three of us to live in the city since people had become so hostile with us because of grandma's decision to bury my mother away from her marital home. We rented a small single roomed house in Kibera slums and slept huddled up together. Grandma worked odd jobs to fend for us, my sister's health was terrible and she was always in and out of hospital. My brother who was a little older than us, he decided to move back to the village as he found our current lifestyle too tough.

I was enrolled at a school called SODA academy (slum orphans destitute academy). We were among the first schools to receive the talking box when Polycom started the project in 2010. It took me time to step out and open up about my challenges since I did not really understand what the talking boxes were about, I also felt inferior and felt my problems were not worth talking about. The Polycom team would come to school after every 2 days to either collect the contents or respond to contents collected during their previous visit, it was during those sessions that I really got to understand the talking boxes.

One night, I had a lot of homework to do. After doing the usual chores, I started off with my homework but I could not concentrate with my sick grandma. She wanted everything, from boiled porridge, which she could not take, then black tea then finally she asked for boiled eggs. I only had 20 shillings that could get me 2 boiled eggs, I ran to the shop in the dark to get some. When I got back there was no paraffin in the house and couldn't boil the eggs, I was very frustrated and lay my grandma's head on my lap and gently stroked her face to calm her.


I was scared, I had faced death before this was exactly what it looked like grandma was going to die. I started thinking of how we'd survive with her gone. That is where I got the content for the talking boxes, I slowly removed her head from my lap careful not to wake her up, and this was well into the night past midnight.



The burning candle was halfway through and would go off soon, so I grabbed the piece of paper that had wrapped the eggs and wrote with newfound confidence. I was only thinking of my future and my baby sister's. I wanted to finish my education while taking care of my sister to live the best life possible. "I am in class 8 at SODA, I am looking for someone who can pay for my exam registration fees and school fees, I would love to pass my exams and join Langata high school. I lack books and decent uniform, please help". I wrote. I kept my paper well and went on to finish my homework, then head to bed, I felt a little relieved. I was one step towards fixing my problem. I had it all laid out; if I got someone to pay my fees I would join a day school in order to take care of my sister.

I woke up optimistic, served my sister and grandma porridge. I made sure to inform my neighbors to constantly check on them, I thank God that in the slums we are one big family you can leave your child for a neighbor to look after. Clothes will never be rained on the neighborly bond is strong. I dropped the paper in the box once I got to school. They only came after 2 days, which felt like an eternity, I crossed my fingers hoping that they'd get back to me. The following day, Polycom came to school for content response they went into the office to speak to our head teacher who then came to class and announced that if there was anyone who had written a personal note to Polycom and wanted to discuss it should come forward.

2 girls got up and followed the head teacher. I held back, my confidence was suddenly gone I waited till the 2 girls finished to approach the Polycom team. They had read my content and wanted to know why I wanted to join Langata high school and not Alliance high school that every girl wanted to join. I explained my situation to them, I cried it was painful sharing what I was going through out loud. The team was very supportive and agreed to try lobbying for resources from their various partners.



The following week the team was back, we assembled in a hall. Talked about the usual girl stuff. They handed over the books they had come with to the school and gave me a pair of school uniform, they also told me that all my dues had been paid and that I only had to study hard.

I went home and shared with my grandma she was so happy, she had this spark in her eyes, her health even improved. After primary, I got a scholarship to some boarding school it however did not last long because the scholarship was meant for HIV positive girls. I spent another year out of school and grandma's health had worsened again, I couldn't bear to burden her with my worries. I went to Polycom and they got a sponsor for me through high school, a day school seeing my sis and grandma motivated me a lot.

After secondary school, I joined the Polycom mentorship team, I was now the one collecting contents and conducting forums. I did this with much enthusiasm remembering where I had come from. I meet girls who are broken, looking for a little love and support, I give them all that I even take part in home visits. I don't want any girl to suffer yet they can be helped. I personally look for empowerment opportunities for girls.

When I was told to write an essay to enable me join a youth empowerment group called Confidence Elevates. I wrote all about my passion, ambitions and what drives me. I was taken in, I have never looked back since then. Confidence Elevates has molded me into a confident person, able to tell my story in front of everyone for inspiration. I'm still learning from the powerful women on the platform.

I am very proud of the feminists' spaces, it is for females who own their femininity and seek empowerment. They require commitment and dedication. I urge all girls to exploit such spaces, let us join to make the world a better place.

## STORY 4:


### WHEN DEATH STARES AT YOU:

### GIRLS CAN DO IT

They would come for mentorship forums and talks in our school, we got the opportunity to attend these forums where we got pads, panties and even T-shirts. So everyone was hoping to get posted to Polycom for the mandatory community service after school. I was lucky enough to get posted to Polycom alongside 2 young men. I got very attached to the girls, I still make time for them to date my past is what links me to these girls.

My aunt introduced me to a man who would be my guardian after my parents died while in primary school. I moved into his house where I lived with him and his wife, life was okay for a year as I had become their own little did I know that this man wanted to take me as a wife in future. One night while his wife was on a trip, he tried forcing himself on me and I ran away. I wandered on the streets for 2 days not knowing what to do. I finally managed to sneak into the house and get my aunt's number. When I called her she was very angry with me as she had already been told about what had happened. She could not understand why I was resisting this good man who would give me a better life, she told me never to call her again unless I wanted her to help me make up with that man.

I was scared, the only option I had was to go back to that man's house but the man made my life unbearable. He would pick fights with me over the smallest issue, one day he came up to me and told me to decide whether I'll agree to be his wife and continue with school or leave. I chose the latter and left, my schooling stopped I didn't know anyone and had nowhere to go.



I finally got a place to stay after a few weeks. I was going to serve as house help, the lady paid me no money. I would wake up very early and go to bed late doing house chores and helping the kids with homework. I missed my school days.

One day as I was coming from the market, I met students from St Aloysius Gonzaga, I really admired them and started chatting with them the school was fully sponsored. My dream of going back to school was ignited and I started reading a few books to see if I was still fit. One day when I was sent to the market, I sneaked to the school to ask if they could admit it they hesitated at first considering that I had been out of school for 2 years.

I was persistent; I would not give up on this tiny possibility. They gave me an interview, which I did not pass well but because of my story they decided to give me a chance. My employer did not take it well, I was once again in a fix having to choose between my education and accommodation.

I went to look for a place to stay and found an orphanage in Kibera near the school, they didn't have anyone my age I pleaded for them to let me live there, the school even made some commitments before they allowed me in. I was ecstatic to be in school again. Life in the orphanage was not easy, a girl even died in the dormitories after complaining of headaches for a long time.

The children were moved from the dormitory and I remained all alone, scared and worried. I had to fend for myself, the room was small and scary with no electricity I would be very scared when it rained at night, but I overcame it all. I managed to sit for my KCSE after that I landed in Polycom for community services, it was a life changing experience. I was able to mentor other girls, conduct forums, and guide the girls. I was able to reorganize my life and reconnect with my family. The Polycom anthem We Girls Can Do It was what kept me going forward.

After community service, I enrolled in college for my certificate course and then proceeded to diploma, which I graduated and I'm looking forward to getting a degree. I have become a beacon of hope, I have set my own standards...I know that I am destined for greatness.

# STORY 5:

## SECOND CHANCES:

### A MOTHER AT 17

I am a 17-year-old back to school mother and in Form Two. (Form Two is the Kenyan education system equivalent of 11<sup>th</sup> grade)

Growing up in Kibera Slums, my siblings and I were unfortunate enough to witness first-hand what domestic violence and what it can do to a family. Mum and Dad fought almost everyday, we did not know what to do or where to run to. After growing tired of the constant battering from dad, mum decided to run away leaving us in the hands of a man who did not bat an eyelid before raining blows on us for the most mundane of reasons. My father was negligent in every definition of the word. Not only did he fail to provide food for us, he also didn't provide any school fees for our education. As young as we were, we had no choice but to try and survive on our own in the largest slum in East and Central Africa. Things were tough.

Being the oldest, my brother was the first to move out into his own typical slum house. Though I was happy that he had managed to find a place of his own, I realized soon enough that his responsibilities had now become mine. I was left to take care of my younger sister. I was a minor at that time and legally not allowed to seek employment. If life had been unbearable before my brother moved out, it increased in intensity and became even more so.

The slum is full of all types of predators and, in my state of childish desperation and vulnerability, the vultures started circling. Along came a man who initially claimed to be interested in helping out of the goodness of his heart. He helped my sister and I by giving us money for utilities, but after a while he started asking me, as the older one, to give him something in return. Whenever he gave me Ksh. 50 (50 cents), he would demand that I sleep with him. Confronted with the option to either have my sister or me continue starving or give in, I chose the latter. The rest is biology. I became pregnant after four months of being intimate with the predator, my child's father. I was 15 at the time.



Being a pregnant teenager in the slum is nothing rosy. First of all, despite being biologically capable of becoming pregnant, at 15 no one had ever told me anything about reproductive health. To compound the severity of the situation, when I disclosed the news to my child's father, like the typical slum boy who gets a girl pregnant he was not amused and went out of his way to show that he could care less. Instead of being the supportive person he had pretended to be before he got me pregnant, he called me all the names in the book such as a prostitute, loose girl, cheap girls etc. I would get extremely embarrassed whenever I had the misfortune of coming across him when he was with his friends as he would shout obscenities at me which was all very disrespectful.

Needless to say, the situation in our tiny slum was not peaceful at all and I ended up running away to look for my mother. I managed to trace her to Murang'a and when I explained my situation to her she welcomed me and my sister who, realizing that she had to choose between staying with my father and I, decided tagged along. Life in Murang'a with my mom turned out to be impossible as we did not even have the food we needed to survive. Confronted with perennial hunger, I swallowed my ego and was forced to go live with my child's father after a month in Murang'a. The once supportive man turned out to be as abusive as my father and would often beat me up and even chase me out of his house at night sometimes. In one episode, he hit me and I decided enough of enough ending up homeless in the streets of Kibera.


I would roam its dusty streets from dawn to dusk heavily pregnant and trying to eat what I could. Word of my sorry destitute state would soon reach my father and in a move that surprised me, he looked for me and took me in on condition that when I came to term and it was time to deliver, I would have to provide food for my child. Again, I was forced to choose from a list of options that stood in stark contrast to each other. One either remain homeless in a slum while pregnant and two to move in with an abusive man who would turn on me with blows and kicks with no prior warning. In my desperation, I chose the latter as a roof over my head and my soon to be born child was worth any sacrifice at that point in my life.

The rest of my pregnancy can only be summarized with 2 words – torture. After everything I had gone through I thought I had grown numb but it was the psychological torture that got to me. During my pregnancy my relatives, friends and neighbors all laughed and jeered at me. The father of my child did not care about me at all and never made any effort to seek me out.

When my water finally broke and I went into labor, I had to go and deliver alone in the hospital. I felt so alone and abandoned. After delivery, in an act of desperation I contacted my mother to assist me and was genuinely surprised when she came. When my father heard that I had delivered a healthy baby, I was also surprised that my father no longer was violent towards me. As I held my baby in my arms I felt multiple emotions at the same time. I was happy to see my baby and I was sad because I wanted my baby to have a better life than I did but I did not know how to give him that.

Because I want to protect my child from the violent nature of his father, I am currently not on speaking terms with the father of my child. I am also in a state of constant confusion, because my mother does not have a job and she is the one who normally takes care of my baby when I go to school. She carries the child on her back and goes to wash clothes and gets between 200-300 KES on the days that she is lucky enough to get work to do. On the days that she doesn't get a job, we sleep hungry. My father is also a casual employee who does not get the job daily.

The days that he gets money, he will give us only 50KES. Life is difficult but my baby has turned out to be a source of unity in our family. The father of my baby has not been supportive at all and he avoids me whenever he sees me. He has another woman living with him, who insults me any time we meet, I am the other woman in their lives, which is not the case.



I decided to go back to school because I want a better future for my child and myself. I am aware that education will take me places and will change my life. During my free time during weekends and vacations, I peel potatoes and wash clothes so that I can put food on the table. Though sometimes I do not get these jobs and sleep hungry with my child, I feel optimistic because I am still in school.

If only I knew life would be this tough, I would have suffered, gone without food but not allowed any man to take advantage of me, I love my baby, I do not like the father and I am not sure if I would allow my baby to know him, but will I ever get a man who will accept both of us? That is story for another day, I just want to concentrate on my education, I am focusing on my future. Let someone learn from this, the 50/= or chips we get from men are never free, we pay dearly with our lives at the end of the day.


# Story 6: LACK OF INFORMATION AND PREGNANCY: LIFE AS A TEENAGE MUM/ There is Hope

I was 16 years old when I met the father of my baby. I joined a dancing group and we used to go for shows together at times even competing against one another in dance-offs. We didn't know each other for long – we knew each other for barely two months before I became pregnant.

My lack of exposure to any sort of education on sexual reproductive health meant that I didn't know immediately that I was pregnant. It was well until the 3<sup>rd</sup> trimester that I got to know I was pregnant. I was sent back to the village to stay with my grandmother in her rural home, my parents were not ready to have a pregnant girl in their small house in Kibera. I had gone to fetch water as routine one day, a wave of nausea overcame me and I fell into the well, lost consciousness and according to the rescuers, who saved my life, almost drowned. I regained consciousness late the next day and found myself in hospital. By this time, the doctors had run quite a few tests, and from the results they told me that I had developed complications. I was also told that I had to be deliver the baby as soon as possible.

As I had my labor induced, I thought back to the multiple times I had bled and mistaken it for my normal period. However, as it turned out, I had been losing blood, which had contributed to the complications that landed me in bed. My delivery was not straightforward. I had surgery and gave birth to twins a girl and a boy. The complications claimed my boy as a victim as he died barely hours after being born.

As a teenage mother I needed help and the first person that came to mind was the father of the baby. He said that it was ok and that we would figure things out after I had been discharged from hospital. My parents on the other hand were very angry when they found out that I had been pregnant all this time and had already given birth. My mom swore that she would never help me and that she never wanted to see me again. My dad went mute on me vowing to never speak to me again. I was very scared and felt so alone. I stayed with my grandmother for a while but after some time my mother came for me and brought me back to Nairobi.




Teenage motherhood carries a lot of stigma and I was very scared of what my neighbors would think of my friends and me and how would treat me. My biggest source of hardship instead turned out to be in the house rather than without.

Whenever I wanted to leave the house to go and get my kid something to eat, my mum would ask that I pay her so that she would take care of my child. As I was unemployed at the moment and was receiving practically no financial support from the father of my child, this was extremely difficult and almost impossible. When I couldn't raise the money, my mom would sometimes hurl abuse at me saying things like she didn't give birth while still in her parents' house. My ego took quite a beating and I got used to the abuses.

On the day that I told my mother that I wanted to go back to school, she replied that this was ok but only if I could find money for school by myself. She also wanted me to repeat form two and would only consider supporting me if I did as she asked. Faced with this, I enrolled in the school that I am in right now. I spoke to the school director and explained my situation. She was very supportive.

Lucky for me I had heard of a scholarship program for adolescent mothers, I approached them and they supported me. While they did supplement my school fees, they only did it for two years then they left me. I was forced to go to wash people's clothes on Saturdays to earn money. I would get 1000 shillings a day but mum would take the whole of it leaving me with nothing. Since the father of the child has refused to support the baby, I have finally decided to let it go.

Life has been hard. I have continued washing clothes to earn something and sometimes the baby gets sick forcing me to stop attending classes and take her to hospital. My father has been transformed somewhat and loves the baby. Sometimes he brings her sweets and he gets along with the baby very well. However, he had never spoken to me.




One night when he decided to speak he sent me away with my child insisting that he wants to know who the child's father was and I responded by telling him that there was no reason because the father wasn't helping me in anyway. I stayed at my friend's place for over a month before he called me back. He has, however, never spoken to me since then and I am afraid that it is only a matter of time before he erupts again and sends me out of his house.

My mum has continued with the verbal abuses and at sometimes she tells me to go to school with my child. I get days when I don't have money for daycare or pampers and I sometimes call my dad telling him there are some things I need for school. The little money he sends I use for the babies needs because I know that if I ask him for such money directly, he wouldn't give it to me.


When I got to form four I started boarding at school to at least to reduce the stress and allow me to focus on my studies but the environment there did not favor me I got sick after a short while and had to go back to being a day scholar. My mother, as verbally abusive as ever, said I was back because of the men.

To provide the best I can for my baby, I decided to look for a job finally landing the night shift at KFC. I work all night and go to school in the morning but because of this I don't get along with my mother. She has even would tell me to carry the baby to work on occasions and I had no choice but to do so. Luckily at work they have no problem with me bringing my baby along as long as it doesn't affect my job performance.

A large, dark blue, curved shape that starts from the left edge and curves upwards and to the right, resembling a thick, stylized 'C' or a partial circle.

Life as a teenage mom was always going to be a struggle and has just kept on getting harder and harder. I have, however kept on being hopeful about the future. I am about to complete my high school education and I am honestly scared about what the future holds for me. I have no idea on how am I going to support myself during tertiary education.

My goal of becoming a journalist and requires university education but my child is just about to start going to school and will need fees. Despite all these challenges seeing my daughter's face every day brings me lots of joy to me and through her I get the strength to work hard. Every cloud has a silver lining. My pregnancy and subsequent motherhood has given me a daughter whose presence has lit up my life and is providing me with the motivation I need to become a better person.

A large, solid yellow circle centered in the lower half of the page.

*'I need to become a  
better person'*



## Story 7:

# THE STRENGTH WITHIN


For some reason, my current life makes me believe that everything happened for a good reason. Right now, I look at my daughter and I am sure I do not want the same life for her. I can't quite remember my parents, but according to my aunt (the one who raised me), my mother was promiscuous and infected my father with HIV. They both died when I was still young.

This was a constant insult from her as I grew up, it made me feel bad and miserable, at some point I hated my mother for being responsible for my tough life. But now this is an open secret that I am no longer ashamed of, I understand life better. Some of my relatives have also said she was amazingly beautiful, and when she worked on the farm, only the best came out. I choose to stick to that opinion.

As a young girl, I lived with my paternal grandma, she loved me and we had an amazing time together, I still remember her singing for me and giving me all sorts of praises, that is why I chose to name my little angle after her, she is Leonida, the only mother I knew. I felt lost and lonely when she died, it was actually the first time I felt orphaned, genuinely heart broken.

Friends and family made promises, but when it came to implementation, it was a major challenge. After one year of living alone with my younger brother who was just 8, my aunt who lived in Kibera took us in, I was 2 years older.

I was so excited to be relocating to the famous capital city. I had always admired her children anytime they came upcountry.




The journey was long and by the time we got to Nairobi my legs were swollen. Life became tougher than I expected, my aunt made it very clear that I had to take control of all the house chores to let her four daughters' study. I had no issues with this, since she had taken me away from the tough village life, I had a family again and she would in return educate us, my brother and I. By the 3<sup>rd</sup> day my cousins would insult me push me around and my aunt would do nothing about it, instead I would be beaten badly for trying to defend myself or my brother from these older

cousins of mine. Years went by, each day harder than the previous one, punishments worsening, wounds and scars piling on the inside and outside. I completed my high school without any pocket money or visiting days or shopping, but to me those were the happiest days of my life because for 3 months I would be safe from the violence and suffering back at home.

Right after high school, unlike my cousins who went to college immediately, my aunt started an open-air business, selling small fish (omena) that I was the one running, I would look in admiration by the road as girls my age went to college. One time a male classmate of mine from primary school said hello to me by the roadside and we hugged, he had just come for holiday.

My aunt got wind that I had hugged a boy, it was disaster, I was pulled from the road with terrible beatings, I was publicly humiliated and to this day I nurse my heart from the incident. My aunt hit me, stripped my clothes and called me a prostitute, some of the insults I can't even put to words. She then paraded me all over. The boy was Muslim, I tried to explain to my aunt that there was nothing between us but it all fell on deaf ears. I was beaten like a snake; my aunt was popular at this time she was a politician and was making more and more money but taking me to college was not her priority.




That night in my despair and frustration, I tried to take my own life but failed. I woke up with my aunt's husband beside me at the hospital bed as usual my aunt was not there. He and my aunt had been separated for some time but when they were still married, he was very supportive of me. When I looked at my phone, I saw a long text from my aunt with one of the statements being She will kill me the same way people say she had killed my parents.


I wept bitterly, my uncle consoled me and we had a long talk on self-love and appreciation. After I recovered, knowing my helplessness, I apologized to my aunt and stayed humble. One year later she helped me get a job at a dental hospital as a cleaner and would take half my salary of 6000 Kenyan shillings. I would give it to her gladly because she was still educating my baby brother.

We soon moved out of Kibera because now she had been nominated as a member of the county assembly. She helped me secure a job as a publicist with county and kept taking half my salary until my brother completed high school. When he did, I enrolled myself to university still very frustrated because we lived together, and I was still the housemaid but with a lot of hope. When I was just getting into my final year, I discovered I was pregnant.

I was not in any serious relationship, but I ended up pregnant, I wasn't so informed about responsible sexual behavior. I decided not to tell anyone, I was scared of what my aunt would do if she discovered, I was scared of being thrown out. I was scared of the church, the community and being branded as just like my mum. My aunt finally found out and threw me out. I was desperate and felt helpless; a colleague of mine saw my desperation. I was slowly slipping into depression. Women can stand up for each other; she mentored me and supported me in securing a place for myself.



At my surprise baby shower, my cousins and aunts bought me household equipment's out of shame because my colleagues had done the same and I had somewhat control over my life. Right now we have a healthy but somehow respectable relationship, though once in a while she gild trips but I know myself and I am an independent 26 year old single mother and I will give my daughter the best starting with the house I am currently constructing.



*'I will give my  
daughter the best  
starting with the  
house I am  
currently  
constructing'*

# Story 7:


## Tribute to Mama,

Baba was harsh, very brutal, Mama acted as a small child any time he was around. She had a headscarf over her head all the time, made only very nice food for Baba who never really provided much. I am told he married Mama when she was barely 15 years old, my young mama couldn't handle him, so she ran away after only 3 months, but she was already pregnant with her eldest sister, so she had to come back. Baba already got another wife by the time she came back young and pregnant – this is story for another day, but I never loved Baba, I promised to tame my husband never to handle me the way Baba handled Mama. Sadly here I am at home with 2 children at a young age of 20, I am still very hopeful and determined to make my life better.

I stayed in the village with mum and my other siblings as Baba worked in Nairobi, both elder my brother and sister stayed with Baba Nairobi where he worked in construction, they were so unhappy and cried any time they had to go back to Nairobi, they shared that Baba was very harsh on them. I was so scared as I sat for my primary exams, because I knew I had to go to Baba for my high school.

I scored highly and true to my word, I had to join the same school where my sister had studied and where my brother was still studying. My dad was cruel and harsh, he would use very vulgar language while talking to me. He told me that he will not tolerate prostitution and would kill me if he found me with any man. He was less harsh to my brother.


Every Saturday, we would join Baba where he worked as casual workers, giving people what they needed, like spades, stones, drinking water and any other thing as requested for. This was very tough for me, some men would wait while Baba wasn't watching and touch me inappropriately. I faced a lot of sexual harassment and I did not know what to do or who to talk to.



Baba would beat me up every Tuesday night, it was a routine, according to his instructions I had to be at home from school by 5:00 p.m but we had a pastoral programme every Tuesday that would end at 6, so I had to go home late, Baba never understood, not even for a day. Our neighbor his best friend would at times save me from the beatings and reason with him. He started taking good care of me especially while Baba was away, I was only 15, one thing led to another, I though I fell deeply in love with him, he was so passionate. I started having sex with him, I did not even realize when I became pregnant because that was never in my mind.

Sadly Mama died in July the same year, I had not seen her for months and was missing her so much, I felt lost and empty, didn't know that I was expectant until someone mentioned during the funeral. That was the day I arrived home in the morning, Mama's body was to be taken from the mortuary, seeing Mama's body broke me, I cried my heart out and fainted. My friends took me away, I was weak and lost, I spent at my fiend's home not far from our home.

Unfortunately everyone discovered that I was missing, their conclusion was I was out with some me, really? At such a time, when I was mourning the best woman I knew in this world, the woman I was sacrificing so much so I could deliver her from her brutal husband, it was terrible. Just before Mama was laid to rest they had all assembled to teach me a lesson, my dad and his brothers, I pleaded, I cried, but they never listened. An aunt of mine came and stopped them, she shouted, can't you see that she is pregnant! What? Who was pregnant? Not me, not at all. But this was the truth, I was in deed 4 months pregnant, it was visible to all expect me. My aunt later asked me questions that convinced me that I was pregnant, but I still denied, so I went back to Nairobi after the funeral and to school.



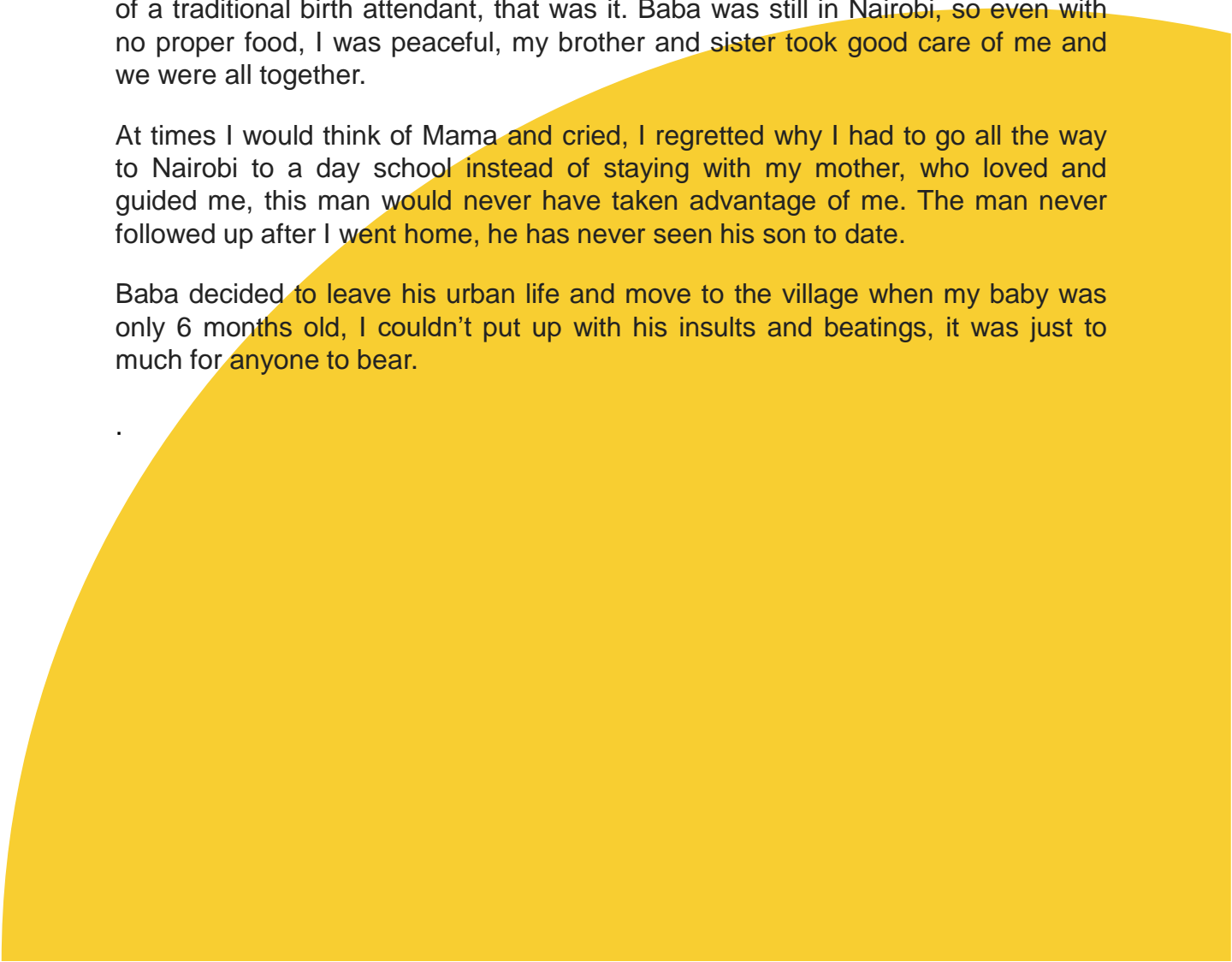
I started monitoring my pregnancy, it was true, I could feel the movements in my stomach, I couldn't even tell the man that I was pregnant and he continued having sex with me whenever he felt like, even when dad was around because Baba trusted him so much.

Baba would insult me, he said that I was a prostitute like my mother, that was my saddest moment in life. I gave birth in the village, not in the hospital, with the help of a traditional birth attendant, that was it. Baba was still in Nairobi, so even with no proper food, I was peaceful, my brother and sister took good care of me and we were all together.

At times I would think of Mama and cried, I regretted why I had to go all the way to Nairobi to a day school instead of staying with my mother, who loved and guided me, this man would never have taken advantage of me. The man never followed up after I went home, he has never seen his son to date.

Baba decided to leave his urban life and move to the village when my baby was only 6 months old, I couldn't put up with his insults and beatings, it was just too much for anyone to bear.

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## Marriage connections

It is a norm in my village that when a young girl becomes pregnant, she is introduced to several men who are interested in marriage, two of them came, they had identified some unfortunate men who would do with a wife with a baby outside wedlock. Mostly they are men who are unfortunate in one way or another, have been left by other women, a little abnormal or just something negative.


I refused to go with these men who made Baba really mad at me, he didn't want to see me in his home with my baby.

I decided to go for domestic work in a home that accepted me with my baby. I did all the house and farm work, really tiresome, but I was peaceful and got food for myself and my baby. I earned only 3000 Kes per month, I saved 1000 every month and spent the little I had on my baby.

### **The myth**

I was there for over 7 months, until my baby was round 1 year 2 months old, I had not received my periods at all since I had my baby, I hadn't had sex with any man either but nobody told me that this was normal. So I decided to talk to a young woman, who advised me to have sex to activate my hormones so my periods would come. She told me that I can end up being completely barren if I delayed my periods so much. She went ahead to ask me if any man can accept to raise my child if I cannot give him one of his own.

This was really worrying, I was already a mess with my boy and here I was faced with barrenness, I had to decide. This woman got me a man, another married man who would unlock my womb, he had to be a stranger and because my baby was a boy, I had to have sex 4 times, if she was a girl, then I would do it 3 times and yes for 4 consecutive days, I had sex with this older married man. I had not little feeling for this man, infact I hated everything I did with him but I had to be safe as I dreamt of going back to school and building a better future for myself and my baby.



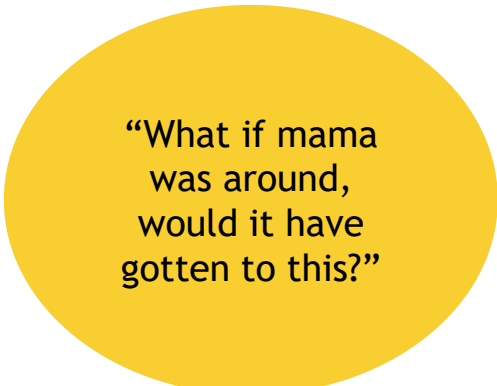
4 months after unlocking my womb, my periods had not come, I was feeling funny, I started suspecting that I was pregnant, I was too scared to go for test or even to accept the situation – but yes I was pregnant. I prayed and fasted for this pregnancy to disappear, I used all traditional methods I had heard of to terminate the pregnancy, but no, it grew to term and at 7 months, I was relieved off my duties, because I was “tired”. I had nowhere to go, with a little boy on my lap and pregnant, I cried, I missed Mama.

### **Baba**

Baba attacked me physically when he noticed my pregnancy, he beat and kicked me, he lay on to of me on the ground chocking me, my little brother came along and attacked him from the back, he felt down. He was quiet for some time and we thought he was dead, so we ran to the Chief’s camp to report what had happened. The Chief was motherly, she cancelled both of us and sent people to check what had really happened. Baba was ok, they brought him in and talked to him, they warned him and ordered him to take me back and take good care of me. It was hell, but I survived, he never beat me again, but never provided for me and my younger siblings until I had my other baby boy – Yes 2 boys, 19, unmarried, uneducated but with home.

I do odd jobs to survive, I am very hopeful, Ramogi FM and Polycom have been my centre of refuge whenever, I am low. I ask myself always, what if Mama was around, would it have gotten to this? I miss Mama!

Jullie B



“What if mama  
was around,  
would it have  
gotten to this?”

