



GLOBAL GIVE BACK CIRCLE
The Third Class
On this day of 2nd October, in the year 2016, honoring
Willy Chepkoech
*Class of Scholars to transition into Global Citizenship
Initiative Commitment, the Global Give Back Circle,
of Determined Determinists destined to change the world.*
Catherine Ngugi
Senior Programme Officer, KCDF

 GLOBAL GIVE BACK CIRCLE
The Third Class
On this day of 2nd October, in the year 2016, honoring
Irene Awino Odier
*Member of The Third Class
the 2016 Clinton Global Initiative
Member of a Partnership of
Lupat Lupa
Senior, Global Give Back Circle*

**2016
ISSUE**

My Community

A **KCDF** Publication Highlighting
Community Success Stories

Contents

Foreward 03

Success Stories

On the road to being a doctor from a community plagued by alcoholism	05
Thriving beyond a harmful cultural custom	08
Bringing hope for young mothers	10
Striving for excellence	12
From a humble background to good fortune	14
Born to champion the rights of those under-served	17
A man of the people with an economy background	20
The heroine from a small village in west pokot	23

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Produced by The Communications Department
Communications Manager: Melvin Chibole
Communications Officer: Natasha Murigu
Girl Child Program Coordinator: Catherine Kiganjo
Creative: Muchiri Njoroge



KCDF is Kenyan public foundation that supports community development initiatives across Kenya, through grant-making, capacity development, endowment building as well as resource mobilization. Our areas of support cut across diverse development issues that affect vulnerable and marginalized communities, such as Food Security, Education, Youth, Children, The Girl Child, Community Asset building, Policy and Advocacy among others, all in an effort to enable needy and marginalized communities to access their rights and realize livelihood opportunities.



The Global Give Back Circle is a once-tiny Clinton Global Initiative Commitment that has blossomed into the largest gender-based tertiary education and mentoring program for at-risk girls in Kenya through a Give Back Process propelled by the Kenya Community Development Foundation, USAID Kenya, a compassionate private sector, a devoted local community, mentors and the girls themselves.

The 'Circle' is designed for sustainability as beneficiaries learn how to become benefactors through the registration of annual Give Back Commitments that guide them on how to drive positive change and create measurable impact in their communities. Seven years of commitment-making has embedded a powerful Give Back Ethos among the girls, now young women, in the 'Circle.' They are making a significant impact in their communities and throughout Kenya.

Foreward



The United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal number five seeks to bring gender equality by increasing access to education for girls. There exists a gap in gender disparity when it comes to enrolment and transition from one level to the next for girls, more so in Kenya. Majority of the girls hardly access education that would help them tackle challenges they face in today's society such as social, cultural and health. The education system barely helps them realize their full potential and prepare them on the path of being active global citizens.

KCDF's girl child programme implements a transformational programme called the Global Give Back Circle which is an innovative education, empowerment and mentorship process for at-risk girls and designated vulnerable young men through the window of opportunity (WOO) in Kenya. The program with the support of the American people through USAID and private sector companies, has invested in the transformation of over 600 girls and 29 young men continue an educational journey that provides them with the opportunity to acquire quality education, life skills, work readiness exposure and financial support to escape the cycle of poverty and empower the next young generation by giving back to their societies. Additionally, each beneficiary is attached to a dedicated mentor who walks with them providing mentorship and guidance as they transition through their education and eventually their chosen career.

This newsletter aims at highlighting experiences of some of the beneficiaries who have graduated as well as those still within the program at tertiary level of education. To date, 281 students have graduated from the GGBC program. In this issue, we highlight the story of a young lady who underwent female genital mutilation (FGM) and how she uses her experience to speak out for the voiceless girls in her community exposed to this cultural practice. A young man in the program narrates his journey to being a successful lawyer and how his mentor has played a key role and how a young girl wants to help her community with her medical degree.

These beneficiaries have developed into benevolent young women and men, who through generous support treasure the gift of education and have engrained the power of giving back to their communities.

We are not able to highlight all the amazing stories of all the beneficiaries in this magazine but we invite you to read more by visiting our website on www.kcdf.or.ke and also find out how you can play a part in supporting the education programme.

Editorial Team



"Without my **mentor, Nare**, I would have dropped out of the course in **my first year** of studies and gone back home. She also did the same course as I am doing and she told me that first year normally is the hardest and that **if I could manage** I would be okay. Her **constant encouragement kept me going** until I stabilized."

~ *Anne Kangethe*

On the Road to Being a Doctor from a Community Plagued by Alcoholism

When Anne Kangethe joined the University of Nairobi for a degree in Medicine, she wanted to forget what she went through during her childhood, a community plagued by alcoholism which included her father. For the 21-year-old, living in a community where alcohol consumption was the norm and not knowing where the next meal would come from was her greatest nightmare. And to make things worse, the fact that she was a teetotaler because of her faith, made people think she was awkward.

Despite the challenges and the temptations in her Kiambu neighborhood, her mother, a peasant farmer, struggled and managed to pay for her education because her father was jobless and had conformed to the life style of the larger community alcoholism.

Primary education was free and she attended Mary Leakey where she scored 373 points for her KCPE. Attending secondary school wasn't easy financially and often she would be home due to lack of school fees. The Hilde Back Education Fund stepped in to support her in high school. They paid half, while her mother struggled to pay for the other half. It's through the Hilde Back Education Fund that she got connected to KCDF through the Global Give Back Circle, a gender-based tertiary education and mentoring program for at risk girls who supported her through tertiary education.

Ann completed her secondary education scoring a mean grade of A and was enrolled for a Bachelor's degree in Medicine at the University of Nairobi. But her struggles seemed to have followed her to the university although she had one consolation, Global Give Back Circle (GGBC) was supporting her with her tuition and up-keep.

But she needed more than just school fees and upkeep. "Here I was from the poorest of the poor community, doing one of the best and most difficult courses at the university. The environment was strange to me. I had to share a room with those whose behavior reminded me of my community because their pride was in excessive consumption of alcohol. The first semester was difficult because I was coming face to face with dead bodies (cadavers) without being prepared for that and I had also been told that the lecturers were difficult people and that I would be harassed and eventually drop out from studies. I got scared and needed someone to talk to and encourage me because I was on the verge of giving up," says the soft-spoken girl. As if GGBC and KCDF knew that she would be going through a hard time, her scholarship attached her to a mentor.

Nare Bandavanayake a very resourceful and encouraging lady was at hand to listen to Ann and encourage her. "Without my mentor, Nare, I would have dropped out of the course in my first year of studies and gone back home. She also did the same course as I am doing and she told me that first year normally is the hardest and that if I could manage I would be okay. Her constant encouragement kept me going until I stabilized."

Besides, the life skills workshops organized by KCDF have helped her manage her finances better. Equipped with financial management skills which she has learnt from the workshops, she is able to budget well and even save some of the money. "I know how to take care of my expenses without being extravagant. I think before I purchase anything and I don't live beyond my means," she shares.

The impact has not only been on finance. The reproductive health talks at the workshops have taught her how to live like a lady, she says without elaborating. But most importantly, she has learned how to give back. “Without someone giving me, I would not be here and I would have dropped out of college and gone back to the life in the village,” she says.

As Kangethe works towards being a doctor, she has a burden for girls who think there is no hope because she knows the future is bright if you have someone to guide you. She currently mentors class six, seven and eight students around her neighborhood. “I mentor them on Saturday’s,” she says, “I have two class six, two class seven and two class eight students who I help perform better in school. Most of these children do not believe that a girl can go to campus and do medicine. They think it’s a course for boys. So, I encourage them, I tell them it’s not hard. And because most of them don’t love math, I encourage them to do it because math is everything. Especially when you’re coming to do the course, you must have an A in math and all those sciences.”

As for her community, she would like to educate them on the dangers of too much alcohol. When I look at myself, I can’t believe that I am doing a medical course. I am now the talk of Githunguri village where I come from because people never thought something good could come out of my village. Ann intends to help her community with community health issues. “I also want to raise women’s awareness on breast cancer because in my village very little is known.” she adds.

Her parents are mighty proud of her. Her father tells everyone who can listen that his daughter is going to be a doctor soon. Ann belongs to a church called Church of Remnants in Nairobi’s sprawling Dandora estate. She might not seem to see the impact the church has on her as a woman but there is a sense that her life revolves around the church and her destiny is shaped and tied to it.

For example, the church dictates what she wears. “We are not allowed to expose our skin, so I have to wear a headscarf that matches the long flowing dress.” She says. Her church also does not allow family planning or courting between boys and girls. The church will eventually pick her husband when the right time comes.

How does the church pick you a husband?

There is a man in church ordained to do that under the instructions of God, she says.

Has your husband been picked already?

Not yet.

At what age will your husband be picked?

At any age, it doesn’t matter. It could be 25 or 35 years of age.

Do you have friends who are boys in university?

No



"In truth, I feel sorry for people who do not know the **consequences of what they do** in regards to this practise. **I pity the ignorance."**

~ Hibo Yusuf Hussein

Thriving Beyond a Harmful Cultural Custom

When Hibo was 12 years old, a little girl growing up in Tana River, she was circumcised. She was circumcised by an old woman, as custom demanded. She was circumcised in the morning, with a razor blade she had been sent to buy from a nearby shop. She was excited to face the knife because being cut was a mark of honor in her community. Girls were proud to be cut. You weren't woman enough if you were not cut.

But then she grew older and she realized that it was wrong. That her community keeps doing the wrong thing under the old banner of tradition and culture. And she wants to stop it. She is a Law student at the University of Nairobi now, and she wants to use the law and activism to stop it.

Central to this, is the Global Give Back Circle, who she met through USAID and has sponsored both her university education. GGBC has transformed her vision.

How has your experience with GGBC been like?

It has been a wonderful experience. It's the best thing that has ever happened to me because when I finished high school and I scored a B minus which depressed me because I knew my family could not take me to parallel university therefore, I stayed home until I was awarded a scholarship in 2011 and started my school in 2012. I was home for almost a year, taking care of my grandmother who was ailing from cancer.

Were you assigned a mentor?

Yes, her name is Hannah. She's from the US. We talk a lot about everything. Over and beyond the mentorship, we normally have GGBC life skills workshops thrice in

a year. We interact with other beneficiaries and learn a lot about financial management, reproductive health and work readiness. We are also required to give back and I have been involved in the fight against FGM and child marriages in the Northern part of Kenya. I went to my former primary school –Tetu Primary and other schools and that had been shut down due to terrorism and talk to the girls so that they could get back to school. In 2014, I attended a girls' summit that was going on in the UK, London and there I met people from all over the world talking about FGM.

FGM is a big part of your culture.

It is and you don't question it even though you don't know where its coming from. And because I'm Muslim, 'they' normally say it is a sin not to undergo FGM. That it is a requirement. Yet, it has nothing to do with religion. I grew up knowing it's part of my religion until when I was about to head for the girl's summit. I had a conversation with one of my uncles who is good with religion and I asked him, "What do you think about FGM?" and he answered, "Do you know that thing is not in the religion!?" I was shocked. All I could think at that time was, "How can you tell me this now when all my life I have believed it is religious?"

Was the FGM summit an eye-opener?

Yes. I was amazed how global this problem is. Even in the UK, they still do it. Some people take their children back to Africa for it to be done. It is quite rampant in Nigeria and Sierra Leone. So many young girls die in the process. I have a sister- my elder sister who is now in South Africa, she went through a hard time. The effects were so bad she had to undergo corrective surgery. You can

imagine how giving birth is also a problem. It just brings a lot of complications.

How is your activism going?

I go to high schools, primary schools, mostly girls' schools in Garissa. We have conversations with the students. When I go to visit my mother in the village I engage her women groups and friends. I talk to my cousins. I have had conversations with administration officials and the Sheikhs around here and so we decided that we will be approaching the issue bit by bit

How does your father feel about FGM?

My father does not support FGM. He wasn't around when I was cut. He was furious when he found out that I had been cut. My mother was okay with it. She was just like, "It's a normal thing because this is what we do." The person who carried out the act was a close relative therefore, it was not going to be an issue when it is a relative who did that to you. When I started bleeding, the doctor came, I was checked for several days then we moved to Dar es Salaam.

When you think about it, what emotion do you have? Is it anger, disappointment?

In truth, I feel sorry for people who do not know the consequences of what they do in regards to this practise. I pity the ignorance.

Do you remember the pain?

Yes. It was very, very, very painful. Like, in the back of my head, I can feel the razor thing going like, the sound it makes when you're cutting something. Every time I hear about FGM that's the first thing that comes to my mind. Like someone cutting your hand and you are looking at it with no anesthesia or anything. You can feel the pain and still hear the sound of it. It is unforgettable.

What does your mother think about your activism?


She is now very supportive of what I am doing.

Are you making successes?

Yes. I am. In Nairobi, people used to be scared so they used to transport their children to Garissa, Wajir and Mandera during the holidays to do this thing. It has since reduced. Garissa used to have a lot of cases at the hospital, that has reduced. I have cousins who have not gone through it and I always think, "This is good progress!" because having gone through it, I always share with them my experience. The other thing about culture is that you must be consistent because it's a barbaric thing that has been there for years that's why, for the four years I've been with KCDF and GGBC I have never changed my give back commitment. That is one thing I will never change.

Has FGM fueled you? Is it a fire?

Yes. It's given me purpose. It's given me a reason to make a mark in the world.



“The **aim of this group** is to **help the young mothers** realize that beyond being a parent, there's **more to achieve.**”

~ *Mercy Otinga*

Bringing Hope for Young Mothers

Mercy grew up in Butere, Kakamega County. When she was six years old her father passed away. “At that age for me it wasn't a big deal. Actually, I think I was very happy because I didn't get to go to school! But then afterwards you start realizing the significance of that loss and then that is when reality starts kicking in.” shares Mercy.


Life became tough. Her mother was a teacher taking care of the three children and often they would be chased from school due to lack of school fees. In 2002, free primary education was effected and that changed their lives a whole lot. It became easier.

Mercy's mother remarried and Mercy was shipped off to a boarding school in a different county in Bungoma. The school was called Nzoia Sugar Company Primary School. It was one of the best schools back then. “I performed well and joined Starehe Girls' Center. So actually,

Starehe for me was a very good opportunity because I got to meet people from all over the country, all of them as smart as you or smarter than you.” quips Mercy. Mercy's mentor is called Bernadette and she is from the US. “She is really nice. She is a lawyer by profession and one of the best mentors I have had so far.” shares Mercy.

Mercy is 24 years old and a mother. “I got pregnant when I was 22 years old. There is so much expectation from you and so when I got pregnant I was viewed as a failure. My friends from high school avoided me like I had a disease. I felt I had failed everyone.” shares Mercy.

She is a member of a group called Amira Africa. A group of young parents like her. Girls who are mothers at a tender age who need the push to achieve their dreams. Mercy completed her counselling studies at Kenyatta University and is employing it within the Amira Africa group as her give back commitment. “The truth is that if you're a parent between 18 to 22 years, you attract a lot of negativity. The group was formed by a lady called Fiona Okadia, she's brilliant. The aim of this group is to help the young mothers realize that beyond being a parent, there's more to achieve. There are better things ahead. Being pregnant and keeping the baby at a young age isn't the end of your life.” she adds.



"I want to **engage** a lot in **transforming** the Kenyan **healthcare**.
What is lacking out there for society is **information**. Other than the financial bit of it, **there's prevention.**"

~ *Lavender Otom*

Striving for Excellence

Lavender is a 24-year old final year medical student studying medicine and surgery. She grew up in Kisumu from a very humble background. Her mother was a nurse. Her father passed on in a road accident and after that, her mother was expected to be inherited as is the tradition in Nyanza. Her mother refused. She was kicked out of the homestead. But even before that the village accused her of killing her husband. Because nobody just dies in a road accident, especially a wealthy man. The village elders wanted her to leave her two daughters behind but she refused and she moved out of the village to start a fresh life as a single mother of two daughters. It was tough.

Lavender's life began.

Must have been tough, your mother, a government nurse starting out with two young girls..

It was. When we left my mother was young. She was 25 years old when she lost her husband. I'm 24 years now, I don't even know if I could have handled it. My mother was bright, she did very well in her exams but where she came from she couldn't afford tertiary education. At that time the government was offering free certificate nursing training and so that's how she became a certified nurse. Her job earned her a meagre KES 3,000, not nearly enough to support two children, pay rent and school fees. Those were tough times by the way. But what I admired about my mother was that she was very strong.

I remember that period, it was 1996 to 2000 and HIV had peaked so much in Nyanza and people were just dying everywhere. People would torment her by saying, "You're a single mother, you're working night shifts and you're leaving your kids in the house..." But my mother had no alternative. We had to be left in the house when she went

for night duty and my sister and I had to learn to stay in the house and sleep the night off. "There's no way these kids are going to turn out to be anything in society. You have two girls and you're never there." others would say. My mother had to work many jobs to raise us up. She would do some locum jobs in some clinic to make ends meet. There were probably times when she slept hungry. So there were a lot of vulnerabilities but my mother is tough and firm.

My sister and I were sponsored by an organization called OLPS – Our Lady of Perpetual Support. They paid for my primary education where I scored quite well and was able to join Starehe Girls Center. My mother was relieved.

How was Starehe for you?

It was life changing when I went to Starehe Girls. I saw how everyone had done so well. There was pressure to produce good results. We were given lots of books. I was from a background where I never possessed a lot of textbooks, the food was good and the rules weren't that strict. We also used to meet very important people in Starehe Girls. You meet these influential women and they share with you their stories, some of them have stories just like mine, so it was inspiring. I scored a straight A in my final exams. I was number 70 nationwide.

That must have changed everything for you?

It did. We lived in Russia quarters, in Kisumu which is predominately occupied by doctors and nurses. That place has a record of girls dropping out of primary school. It's also known for early pregnancies. After my record performance, I got many girls who would come and ask me, "How did you do manage?" I enjoy mentoring, so I got

many mentees as a result. I remember the year after that we had three girls qualify and go to Starehe Girls Center. I now look at my mentees from that estate and I'm proud to say that I have so many girls who have gone to university and come over the holidays and say, "I got an A- in KCSE." It is life changing. Lavender's mother is also a champion. She finished her diploma, started and completed her degree in Nursing at Great Lakes University and has signed up for a post graduate. "It was hustle financially but that woman can save." adds Lavender.

How does GGBC come in?

In Starehe Girls. The Global Give Back Circle showed up when I was in Form 3. Linda Lockhart, the founder, was starting a project to mentor girls as they transition out of high school. I was chosen amongst the second lot and we were told, "Write an essay of standing on top of a mountain and visualize your life three years from now -write what you want to be and how you see yourself three years from now."

That time I wanted to be a chemical engineer and so I wrote this very nice story and I read it out to them and they took pictures and informed me that they were going to try look at my interests and match you up with mentors –people who can make you think bigger than you already do and hopefully mentor you through the journey as you transition out of school to university and to your career. I was then attached to a mentor. My mentor was called, Mercy Gardiner* she used to work for Microsoft as a manager for East, West and Central Africa region. Additionally, it was through GGBC that I worked for Equity bank who were in partnership with the program to give girls an opportunity to transition into the work environment. So, GGBC and KCDF has always been there.

What stood out for you with GGBC?

The life skills workshops. They trained us on so many things like financial literacy, reproductive health and work readiness. They teach you how to be disciplined as well as the importance of giving back to your community.

How are you giving back?

I have done numerous projects since I have been in GGBC since 2008. Initially I used to do more of mentor-

ship in high schools. When I was in Equity I partnered with the Provincial Director of Education through the bank and we went through the whole province giving motivational speeches to students, sharing our stories together with a few friends who were working at Equity then and it was life changing. Then after that we had a Big Sister/Brother society, it's an organization that was started by the alumni of Starehe boys and Starehe girls. I was part of that organization and its mandate is to give back across the country; we mentor and we do leadership training. I've been training prefects in Starehe boys and Starehe girls for many years now.

What's next for you?

Firstly, finish medical school. Thereafter, I want to engage a lot in transforming the Kenyan healthcare. What is lacking out there for society is information. Other than the financial bit of it, there's prevention. I'm interested in communicable diseases so I see myself running projects to empower people on prevention then after that look at HIV healthcare.

From a Humble Background to Good Fortune

Stella grew up in Kericho, family of seven, six brothers, only girl. Being the only girl had its advantage. She was the princess. They lived in a humble stone house at the foot of a hill. Her parents were manual laborer's, working in farms. They all attended public schools. She wasn't very aware how life was, although she knows her parents struggled to make ends meet.

"Then they separated," she says. "I remember my mother leaving home many times and my father would have to take care of us. He was never really in the right state of mind to take care of children and go out to bring the bread." she adds. She was sent to boarding school in Bomet, a school called St Mary's, when she was in class three, so she wasn't exposed to the madness that ensued when her mother would leave. Stella passed her Kenya Certificate of Primary Education exams scoring 404 marks out of 500 marks.

Starehe Girls then came in.

"Being in secondary school taught me to treat everyone in a decent way," she remarks, "but most importantly I learnt that whatever I had gone through at home, whatever I considered problems paled in comparison to the kind of stories I heard from other girls. I concluded that I didn't have any problems. At all. I'm blessed."

Starehe Girls Center taught her that everyone has something useful to contribute. The quiet people, she notes, are always easy to dismiss yet they are the ones who normally would surprise you with the knowledge they hold.



"I **lacked confidence** when I came here because all students are very bright but by talking to Susan and listening to her, **my confidence levels grew** "
~ Stella Serem

It's in Starehe Girls that she got to learn about the Global Give Back Circle after a workshop was organized by the school.

"I was lucky that in 2010 on 14th July –that happens to be my birthday, I was linked to a mentor," she says. "She's called Susan Vandalsa. She's from New York."

Through high school Susan held her hand but over and above that she turned to be more. "She was able to really give me that motherly love that I lacked at some point in my life," she says. "When she wrote my first letter, I remember that she signed it 'with love from your US mom'."



“My mentor taught us **humility** and **strength**. He used to tell us that the moment you have the **advantage of education**, you have a burden to **rescue your society**.”

~ *Kipkemoi Sang*

Born to Champion the Rights of those Under-Served

Kipkemoi has on a lovely suit. He also has a good head of hair. He's tall and confident and he has great eye-contact. He's from Bomet County, Sotik Constituency and he just turned 26 years old. Oh, and he has a job, a contract with an organization called Kenya Law as a legal assistant. Nothing fancy, a lot of research and pushing paper. He's making his bones because he's on his way to becoming a successful lawyer. Everything you know so far about Kipkemoi isn't even his story, that's just the person he's becoming. But who was Kipkemoi before he started wearing suits and combing his hair like that and speaking so well with confidence?

"I grew up in a family of seven, and I'm the fourth born, the only son. My story is basically me growing with girls and a father and it was not really easy." He says. His mother - now retired - was a preschool teacher. She was his first teacher before he joined the village school around their place, Kimase Primary School -where his mother was also teaching. His father was a driver back in the city. His father would come home occasionally, but for the most part it was him, his sisters and his mother.

"I struggled to find my space amongst the women, I was under siege!" he laughs lightly. "But this experience strengthened me because I wanted to find my space. My mother is a no-nonsense woman and at some point, I thought she hated me. She punished me hard when I erred, she used to tell me, 'I want you to be a man.' Even with house chores, there was no separate tasks for the girls and myself. I would cook for my sisters - especially the young ones when my elder sisters were not around. Therefore, I didn't lack anything. All these skills I got them from my upbringing."

He was born in Kawangware but they moved back to the village when he was two years old. Once in a while he would come back to the city to visit his grandmother who lived in Pumwani.

"My father was a very gentle man," he says with a private smile. "He was the kind of guy who wouldn't force you to do anything. I would be so sad when he would go back to the city."

In class six he moved to a school called Sotik Primary School for his class seven and class eight education where he met totally different type of people. When in class eight his father was struck by a stroke and was brought home because he couldn't work. They weren't well off; the hospital bills would pile up because of their inability to pay. His mother was struggling to make the money. They also couldn't afford to hire someone to take care of him at home while his mother went off to work. A decision was reached; Kipkemoi had to stop school and stay at home and take care of his father.

"I registered for my Kenya Certificate of Primary Education and then proceeded to stay home and reading at home for my KCPE exams," he says. It was not easy but he recalls how his class teacher called Margaret Chepkorir would bring his past exam papers to revise. He studied at home and took care of his sick father, it wasn't easy. When KCPE exams came, he had failed before he started.

"You know, my teacher Margaret Korir used to encourage me a lot. She kept me going." He says. He sat for exams and scored 280 points out of 500. He wanted to repeat but who would take care of his father? "My mother persuaded me to join secondary school and I did, a school in Kericho county called Poiwek Secondary School. It was a day school somewhere in Ainamoi. I could stay at my grandfather's house. The school was far from his place and I had to walk for three hours, up steep hills and down rivers, to get to school. It was gruesome!" he shrieks.

"It was so rocky, the hills and there were no roads. We would set off at 4am, and literally run all the way, our

school shirts in our bags. That life toughened me. Secondary school was very tough.” he adds.

On Valentine’s day, his father passed on. Kipkemoi was devastated, lost and anguished. He moaned him for a long time. “My father drunk quite a bit,” he admits, “But he never neglected his parental responsibility, he was still a very good father.”

Then in 2008 post-election violence happened and he couldn’t go back to his school because the principal called David Kimutai Too vied for an MP seat and was assassinated and hell broke loose. He was moved to a boarding school - Tarakwa High School where upon completion, he scored a C plain in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education examinations. Not knowing what he would do next he gave free-lance journalism a shot, apprenticing as a rookie photographer for a local correspondent.

Enter GGBC

His grades would not allow him into Law School therefore, he joined a diploma program at Mount Kenya University after his mother sold a small piece of property they had in Nairobi. This was after many unsuccessful fundraising attempts in the village that yielded nothing. His mother struggled with the decision.

“I couldn’t pay for my final exams in university and my mother didn’t have any money,” he says, “However, a very good friend of mine - and classmate - called Catherine Malinda talked to her mother. Her mother works with USAID and she deals with grants. Her mother literally rescued me and paid the balance of KES. 4,000.” He completed his exams and kept contact with his friend’s mother. He then reached out to and see if she would help him pursue his Law degree and she connected me with the Global Give Back Circle under USAID in partnership with KCDF through the window of opportunity (WOO) and just like that my life changed.”

GGBC paid his school fees but also offered training life skills on financial management, entrepreneurship, healthy living and hygiene as well as mentorship. “They’ve taught us a lot of things. Things that we wouldn’t have learnt from class. And, you know, personal development basically. Little things like doing your CV, writing cover letters, those little things that no one will ever teach you in class.” He adds.

His mentor is the former Chief Justice Willy Mutunga. “On the 4th of April 2012, I together with other boys were invited to his office for the first time to meet him.”

He learnt a lot from the CJ, he says. They would sometimes go to watch the admission of the new advocates, or do lunches with him.

“He taught me about humility,” he says, “Humility and strength he used to tell us that the moment you have the advantage of education, you have a burden to rescue your society. He looks at education as a gift to the society, not to an individual. He changed my mind set. From looking at my own life, succeeding alone to succeeding with others - beyond myself. That once you’ve found people to help you in life, you need to give back.”

“He would share with us his experience as a leader and also his frustrations as a chief justice. When he’s down he would share with you. He wasn’t shy to be vulnerable. We used to discuss everything, from politics to law and he really helped me shape my career and understood my strength.”

His star rose. He found himself in South Africa in a Law Moot Court, together with other students, competing in a space with other law students from other universities.

How does he give back? “I used to go to Kabete Juvenile Prison and talk to the boys in prison, empower them and tell them there is life after prison and all that and probably prepare them to see life in a different perspective, beyond criminal activities. At the moment, I fellowship at All Saints Cathedral where I do most of home visits. I also give my time to Thogoto home for the elderly.”

He is also in the boy’s mentorship program called MENTENDA Initiative where he also gives back.

“My mother is a very proud person because I’ve really come through a lot. She’s supported me, she’s cheered me on and she’s really a very strong woman,” he says, “and now I support her a lot because she sacrificed a lot for me.”



“When you have **knowledge**, you **own part** of the **world**. I have knowledge that's number one, which is the **key to anything** that I wish **to achieve.**”

~ *McDonald Shiundu*

A Man of the People with an Economy Background

Tell us a little about yourself

I was born in Western Kenya and my academic journey started way back when my father was able to pay for my education—he had a job at that time, that is. I went to nursery school but somewhere along he lost the job so from 1993 I had to stay at home due to lack of fees. I stayed out for seven years and I was staying with my aunt who had a shop. I used to nick KES 20 from her drawer to keep and when it got to KES 1500, I told my aunt, “I don’t want to stay with you. I must go back to my parents.” I went home and gave my mother the savings. I then told her I wanted to go to school, that was then year 2000. My mother then took me to school, and I was enrolled straight to class three.

Reaching class five luckily the then President Mwai Kibaki introduced free primary education which answered our prayers. I scored 390 out of 500 marks in my Kenya Certificate of Primary Education. I was called to a boarding school but I could not join because of the fee amount. I still have the letter to date. My grandmother was a member of a certain NGO in western called SAIPEH (Support Activities in Poverty Eradication and Health) who introduced me to the organization and through them, I secured a scholarship to a day school. From there SAIPEH in partnership with KCDF paid for my fees until I completed Form 4. Knowing my background and the struggle we were in with my mother, I studied hard and scored A- in my final exam. Afterwards, I was introduced to a programme run by KCDF known as the Global Give Back Circle which took over and catered for my university education in Kenyatta University. I completed in 2015 with a degree in Economics.

How has this program helped you in terms of mentorship?

My mentor is called Michael Murungi. He works with Google Kenya and is the former CEO of the National Council for Law Reporting (Kenya Law). We’ve been working together since the year 2011.

Did you choose your mentor or they were just picked for you?

I was assigned to him.

How often do you meet him and what do you guys discuss?

Because school was a bit far, it was somehow difficult to meet regularly but we used to call each other and email frequently. He knew everything about me. Sometimes he would invite me to his home on weekends to share a meal with the family, sometimes even spend the weekend. We used to meet frequently when school was out.

What are your conversations centered on?

My mentor is always interested in knowing what my dreams are and what I’m doing towards achieving them and how he can help.

What did you like about him?

He’s a very determined man. He will always go for what he has set his mind to. I also like his heart for humanity – service to humanity. He’s compassionate and kind.

What's the most important lesson you have learnt from your mentor?

He always tells us to be who we are because you never know who you are unless you do what you are doing better. And to always be positive.

What did you learn about yourself through your mentor?

I was able to discover who I am. I discovered that apart from going to school, I like talking to people. I'm a people's person. I always volunteer at MENTENDA initiative (Men Taking Action) that deals with issues facing the boy child and so throughout the nine months of my internship at KCDF, I realized that I want to engage in MENTENDA which is a service to humanity as compared to my school background in investment. I did economics but right now I'm sort of drifting.

What is your talent?

My talent is talking to people. I can talk. And I have a passion for leadership.

What life skills do you have?

The skills on mentorship, financial literacy, reproductive health and work readiness which I learnt through GGBC, I am employing them within MENTENDA. I am using the same skills I acquired because I am telling young men in high school how to become better men, telling them how to choose friends wisely and the influences of those friends to their lives. We also talk on career development and many other relevant things that affect us young men today.

You think you are a better man?

Today I'm not only a better man, but I'm a rich man.

Where are your riches?

In my knowledge. When you have knowledge, you own part of the world. I have knowledge that's number one, which is the key to anything that I wish to achieve.

How are you planning on giving back?

I do give back. I'm involved in MENTENDA initiative on a voluntary basis. Also, back at home we are constantly coming up with community based initiatives: How would we ensure that we take care of the environment? We mentor men and women to be good people.

When you look back at your life, what surprises you the most?

What surprises me is where I am today. It's nothing short of a miracle and I thank God. I come from Wanga –The Mumias generation, the family where they believe that a prince should not go to school and he will be provided for. Why go to school when you are a prince? We have few educated people because we believe in that dogma. My parents didn't go to school. My father is a jobless alcoholic and my mother a housewife. The odds were against me in ending up here. But I have. That surprises me.



"Very **few girls** get to go to **University** and I'm **among the few** who have managed to **break that barrier**. Therefore, it's something to be **proud of**."

~ *Selestine Todosia*

The Heroine from a Small Village in West Pokot

You should see Selestine walk in her village in West Pokot County, a small village called Cheptuya. She walks with her head held high up. She is one of the very few girls from the village who has attained education. Her peers get married at 16 and start families soon after. Even earlier. She's the last born of a family of six.

Selestine was raised by her father when her mother passed on when she was 12-years old. Paying school fees was a problem and her uncle helped them quite a bit. She was later called to Starehe Girls Centre where after she got a scholarship to attend secondary for the four years. The scholarship was under EFAC (Education for All Children) Scholarship. She finished secondary school and then joined the University of Nairobi to pursue Nursing. She's currently in her first year.

"I'm some sort of a hero in my village," she laughs, a sterling laughter. "Very few girls get to go to University and I'm among the few who have managed to break that barrier. Therefore, it's something to be proud of."

As an outlier, she inspires other younger girls to be like her. They ask her how she managed to do it because it's sort of impossible for them. The men are afraid of her. "At this age, I should be having children. No one wants to talk to a girl who is educated because they think maybe I will be more superior to them. But then there are those who have been educated so we are at par. But still, I intimidate them."

How did she get into the Global Give Back Circle program? "While at Starehe Girls Centre we were introduced to GGBC and then asked to apply to join the program," she says. "As early as Form one, we began getting inducted into the program. You had to do community service which I loved because it exposed me to more elements of life."

The program has been very useful. There is a mentorship component where older and accomplished professionals hold their hands through school and life. "My mentor is Erin Zuerzloff. She's from Seattle, USA. Our mentorship happens mostly over email and Skype whenever I can get access to the internet."

She has been with her mentor - Erin - since she was in Form Two and they discuss various issues that span from education to social life. "Through Erin I have learnt that I can do anything. She gave me her word that I can do anything by the strength of Jesus Christ. I believe her. She also helped me nurture my talent. I didn't know that I could write poems so one time I said I think I know how to write then she told me, "Can I see one of them?" She loved it and encouraged me to write more. Since then I have been writing poetry and it's amazing to discover a talent I enjoy. Also, she helps me write my CV and cover letters whenever I'm going for interviews."

Her greatest challenge remains peer pressure, she says. University life can be a bit hectic with different forces pulling you in different directions. "Doing the right thing can sometimes be hard with all these pressures that we experience in school," she sighs. "I actually discussed partying and how to balance that with education with Erin recently and she told me to be careful about it and my timing. Meaning I should do it at the right time."

Is she giving back her talent and time to help others like her? "Yes. When I was in high school I used to work in a hospital- Kapenguria District Hospital. I used to do simple work like help with typing of the letters and helping with weighing the babies who are attending the clinic. Also, after Form Four I worked in a high school. I taught computer skills in Nasokol High School in East Pokot and I talked to the girls about life in general and I encouraged them."

She tells the girls of her village to be focused. To be brave and to pursue their dreams. She also recognizes that her area isn't wealthy and most of these girls have financial problem that stands in their way of a good education. She encourages them that as long as they work hard, someone is seeing their hard work and will help them.

Does she think she can change the mindset of the girls in West Pokot? "Yes I do. My next commitment is during my next holidays -that are upcoming- to talk to the girls about not giving in to the option of getting married but to opt for education. Because, they are desperate and that's why they're opting for early marriages, but that never helps them."

Her biggest dream now is to complete her studies and work with the World Health Organization. So far she has achieved more dreams than she had anticipated. She's in the right path and she sees a longer path full of opportunities ahead. "The world is my oyster" she says with that bright smile.

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The Executive Director

Kenya Community Development Foundation | Morningside Office Park, 4th Flr, Ngong Rd
PO Box 10501-00100 Nairobi, Kenya | Telephone (+254 020) 3540239/8067440/01/02
Office Cell (+254) 722 168480/736 449 217 | Fax +254 20 8067440
Email info@kcdf.or.ke | Website www.kcdf.or.ke