



2017  
ISSUE

# My Community

A **KCDF** Publication Highlighting  
Community Success Stories

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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, enhancing capacity development, endowment building as well as local 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, Livelihoods, Environment, Community Asset Building, Policy, Research 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 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 (KCDF), 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. Eight 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

Girls continue to face cultural and financial barriers in accessing education. Often, they lack the support they need to learn and make a difference in their communities, families and larger society. Research has shown when girls are educated, they lead healthier and more productive lives. They gain the skills, knowledge, and confidence to break the cycle of poverty and help strengthen their societies. It is against this backdrop 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 800 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 genera-

tion by giving back to their societies. The program strives to attach each beneficiary 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. 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](http://www.kcdf.or.ke) and find out how you can play a part in supporting the education programme.

*Editorial Team*



"I want **people** to know  
my name".

~ *Virginia Mwangi*

# On the Road to being a Financial Analyst

“The biggest lesson I have learnt is the power of giving back.”

There is something about Virginia when you meet her for the first time. An abundance. Confidence. Drive. A fire. Yes! Definitely a fire. It oozes through even when she isn't talking.

Virginia is from Nyahururu, where she grew up. But she was born in the Rift Valley amongst the Kalenjin where they - a family of seven kids - were driven out by the 1992 land clashes. They grew up poor. Dirt poor. Her father worked as a casual laborer in construction sites Nairobi, her mother took on casual jobs. “She did anything legal, she'd farm, wash clothes, clean houses, anything, as long as it brought a cent or food on the table.” She adds.

She is the last born. The rest of her siblings haven't fared on too well. “They didn't go to advance their education as such. They all finished class eight and took to tailoring or became house girls. My brother came to the city to look for job opportunities. He is doing relatively well, he has a business of his own.”

Seeing her mother struggle with them taught her the strength of a woman. It also taught her one thing that has spurred her and placed her where she is; that poverty is horrible. And cold.

“It's the last thing I want to be in my life; poor. It scars you. When I think of poverty, I get out of bed and do what is needed of me. It's not easy.”

She sits still and intently looks at a point on the table. She illustrates the level of poverty they were in through a story of her earlier school days. “Back in school we were required to polish our shoes at all times but since my mother could not afford polish we would burn newspa-

pers then mix the ash with paraffin to make paste which we would use as shoe polish. It would make our shoes look like matt and other students would ask, ‘How come your shoes don't shine?’ and we wouldn't tell them what we did because we were embarrassed.”

She finished primary education after being sponsored by a Catholic Church in Nyahururu. After class eight the future looked bleak. “My brother who was very smart (he left a record of scoring 411 marks in his school) had tried to get into Starehe Boys Center but did not manage. My dream then was to break his record and I was confident I would given that I was always first in my class.”

“In class eight I started hitting 450 marks and every other student in Nyahururu came to know my name. I was leading in the district,” she says. “I hadn't heard of Starehe Girls' Center and I was pressured to apply for admission there, which I did.”

But when results came she had scored only 406 marks. She was devastated. “I went into hiding. It crushed my ego completely.” She laments. But as luck would have it she got to Starehe Girls through a sponsorship by Barclays Bank for the four years. She scored well in KCSE - an A-minus of 79 points, but she was disappointed.

Standard Chartered Bank, the private sector that sponsored her continued to walk with her and took her on as an intern after campus where she was being paid a stipend and managed to save for her university education. Virginia went to the University of Nairobi, Lower Kabete campus where she pursued a Bachelors of Commerce, Finance.

She recalls that in high school, and as a member of GGBC, she was exposed to a solid mentorship program. “There is normally a window after high school where you wait for a year to join campus? That’s a vulnerable window for young girls because most can fall by the way-side, and being in GGBC helped me bridge that quickly by filling my time constructively,” she says.

The KCDF program helped her a lot, she says. After high school, she joined a cohort of girls in school and were enrolled in taking IT classes to enhance their computer skills at the Starehe Girls center IT college.”

At the time of publishing this story Virginia was working for KCDF in the Accounts department having transitioned from working with Standard Chartered. The biggest lesson she has learnt is the power of giving back, she says. “I have a mentee. I have mentored her from high school. Can you believe that? She even calls me ‘mum’. She is a third-year student at Nairobi university. Her name is called Njerita Mwara. She’s also in the program. She’s at the University of Nairobi pursuing B. Com Marketing. She looks up to me so I must be morally upright. I help her navigate life as a campus student through sharing of my own experiences.”


Virginia also tutors primary and secondary school children in the estate she lives in.

“At first, I saw it as a business opportunity, I asked the children to speak to their parents who agreed.” She says. “But the funny thing: when they came for tuition for the first time, I saw it as the right give back thing to do. I’ve been tutoring them for free. I leave work, get home at about 7pm then tutor them for one or two hours because you know, they are many.”

She is convinced she is good at teaching. “I can really teach you a concept and you’ll get it. That’s why I got first class honors!” She laughs. On top of all that she is doing, she mentors university students in Elburgon where her parents now live. There are school dropouts in that region, kids who resort to early marriage.

Her mentor is called Mary Cobey. She lives in the US. “She’s very inspirational and given that she’s young, she’s not the kind that will look at you like a child. I relate with her very well”

“I want to be a financial analyst. Finance is funny. Some things sound like myths, especially when you read about those big investors like Warren Buffet. I want people to know my name.”



**"I'm where I am** in life because of the **generosity of people** who don't even know me. I **want** to do that for **someone else.**"

~ *Edith Amondi Babu*

# Breaking the Glass Ceiling

**“I saw poverty and I always wanted to run away from it.”**

Edith doesn't remember her mother or father. She knows where she's from, though, a place in Homa Bay County called Kanyipiri. She remembers the person who raised her: her grandmother. She is told that when her parents died, when she was only six months old, she spent some time at an orphanage.

When she became aware of her surroundings, she found herself in her grandmother's care. Life was tough. There was not much to eat. Or to wear. The sun in Homa Bay shone harder on those with little. Or nothing, for her case. “In primary school, I remember white people would come to visit me, referred by the orphanage and they would bring biscuits which I would later sell to get money for food,” she says.

“I saw poverty and I always wanted to run away from it,” she says. “It made me work hard. I wouldn't want anyone to live that life, to be honest. My grandmother told me of stories why she took me away from the children's home, and these are not stories I want anyone to ever be able to go through or tell.”

Edith doesn't know how her father looks like. She knows how her mother looks like, though. Her grandmother showed her a picture. She laughs says she doesn't look like her, even though her grandmother insists they resembled. “You don't know what you are missing when you never experienced it,” she says of her departed parents. Starehe Girls opened its doors for her to pursue her secondary education. Finally, a light at the end of that gloomy tunnel. Starehe Girls Center came with KCDF and through the GGBC program, Edith was paired with a mentor from Germany. So now she is learning German to ease communication. She also had a Kenyan mentor, Susan Karimi, who works with National Oil Ltd.

“She's now the mother figure in my life. I tell her everything, we share almost everything. We meet, talk, like you would with a mother I assume. I think that was the most important thing I was missing in my life when I was with my grandmother because you know, a grandmother will not really tell you as it is but now my mentor, I think she makes me look like her child, she tells me the do's and the don'ts, ideas....” she beams.

She has learnt a lot from Susan; about work. “She always tries to get me into a working program and internships. She never wants me to be idle.”

Edith gives back too. She came together with ladies who work at Narok County and they mentor young girls. “I work with girls in Compassion International. These are girls who have been taken in in a rescue center, girls who have either escaped FGM or early marriages in Narok County. We train them, talk to them, mentor them, teach them life skills, and try bring religion into their lives because you know without God, you can't make it.”

Edith also works with mentally challenged children in the slums. “In the past I've worked at Ronald Ngala Primary School in Dandora where we've done a feeding program and also manage their a beadwork project that can help them sustain themselves and their families by giving them a livelihood.”

She wants to start a charity organization. She says it's the only thing she wants to do because it's that that has saved her from poverty. She is now studying International Relations at University of Nairobi, and has taken up part time modeling. (She's quite tall).



"I count myself **lucky** to be **among the few young men** benefiting from this program that was ideally designed for girls."

~ *Elly Onyango*

# Overcoming Hurdles

*“In college, I didn’t consider myself lower than other students from better backgrounds, the program raised my self-esteem.”*

Elly who hails from Asembo, Siaya County never met his father. As a young adult, he inquired about his whereabouts but was told that he died. His mother unfortunately passed on when he was just five years old. He remembers her vaguely.

“I remember her last moments when she was hospitalized,” he says. “I remember the days we would go to visit her in the hospital - my aunt and I. I recall our journey to Nairobi from the village. I was a young boy then, very young, but I remember fragments of this. My memory of her is limited to how long she spent in the hospital and how occasionally I would go to visit her.”

His mother passed on and he - the only child - was taken in by his aunt - the mother’s sister. A single mother, the aunt would sell mitumba (second hand) clothes at the Gikomba market, one of the largest markets, to sustain them. “Thankfully, in 2002 when I was in class three, the free primary education policy by the government came to pass so the school fees burden was lifted.”

Elly attended Heshima Primary School in Shauri Moyo, Nairobi County from 1999 to 2006 scoring 364 marks in his Kenya Certificate of Primary Education which earned him an admission to attend Aquinas High School from 2007 to 2010.

Elly was a member of Scars to Stars Foundation during his high school years, an organization that deals with young adult orphans. It is through the Scars to Stars Foundation he learnt of KCDF.

“Scars to Stars Foundation was more of a support group when I joined,” he says. “What we basically try to do is link up with other organizations and government institutions

*that have opportunities, so once you’re in the program and they know more about you and your need, they’ll try to address that need. When I was linked to GGBC through KCDF I got a scholarship to attend university.”*

The process provides girls and boys through the window of opportunity (woo) from disadvantaged backgrounds, many of them orphans, the opportunity to acquire quality education, life skills, work readiness exposure, mentorship and financial support to escape the cycle of poverty and empower the recipients in giving back to their societies. The programme has supported over 700 girls and 28 boys.

It was a much welcome reprieve, getting a scholarship as he was at odds ends with school fees after finishing high school. His aunt wasn’t in a position to pay for his fees as her income from her business was not enough and they were living from hand to mouth. He did some odd jobs to get by before joining the Technical University of Kenya in 2012.

“I enrolled for a diploma course in Environmental Resource Management. It was a three-year course from September 2012 to April 2015. I finally graduated in December 2015.”

With some savings at hand, Elly went to driving school and got a driving license. He is now looking around for an opportunity to further his studies. He appreciates how far he has come and the hurdles he has had to jump over. “Yes, it’s been God’s work. Actually, what I promised myself when I got the scholarship is that I’ll just give it my best because it was more of a second chance that God gave me.”

He says he hasn't had mentors so far but rather people he looks up to. In church there is a gentleman who mentors him. "You can call it a silent mentorship because he may never know that I look at him as a mentor. But I look up to him and I emulate what he does."

GGBC has also instilled in him life's lessons through the life skills workshops that they often conduct. "What has been the most useful to me? Financial literacy workshop, through it I have been enlightened on how to save and do some small business that earns something. After campus, I got to pursue elementary driving which I sponsored myself through. So, it was something that I had planned for. The workshop has also taught me to monitor my expenditure."

Elly admits that he's at a much better place in his life now. He has a better shot at life. "I would like to basically grow my career. I have studied Environmental Resource Management but I want to also be dynamic and open minded and that the course that I did in college is just an opening to the job market out here. I would like to deal with matters of climate change, agriculture and environmental issues."

GGBC has built his confidence. "I count myself lucky to be among the few young men benefiting from this program that was ideally designed for girls." He says. "In college, I didn't consider myself lower than other students from better backgrounds, the program raised my self-esteem."

What does he want to give back? "I'm actually giving back at the organization that helped me secure an education - The Scars to Stars Foundation - I'm also keen on mentorship. I'm doing it in different platforms under the MENTENDA (Men Taking Action) Initiative. I'm mentoring the young adult orphaned boys. My presence inspires them; I give them hope, I tell them that if I can do it so can they. I'm more of a mentor because I think I lacked it for some bit of time and I've seen myself struggle to discover some of these things."

MENTENDA is an initiative run by KCDF is a mentorship and role modeling initiative bringing various partners to nurture and mentor young men positively and is inspiring the society to move from inertness to action on the pressing challenges facing the boy child in Kenya.



KCDF  
people giving and working together



PEPFAR

Window of Opportunity  
*For Kenya's Young Men of Honor*

On this day of 2<sup>nd</sup> October in the year 2016, honoring

**Morris Njogu Ann**

*As a Member of The Third Class of Scholars to transition into Global Citizenship  
the Window of Opportunity Program opened up to 27 young men through the Global Give  
Back Circle Program in partnership with UNICEF*

*As a Member of a Brotherhood of Bravest Change Makers*

Linda LAMBAT  
Founder, Global Give Back Circle

Catherine Egidio  
Senior Programme Officer, KCDF

"Your background does not matter at all. If you say, **I'll make it**, then you will."

~ Morris Njogu Ann

# Striving for Excellence

“Through KCDF, I learnt to give back to my community.”

My name is Morris Njogu Ann. Yes, Ann is my surname. It's my mother's name. People get surprised that I'm called Ann. They ask to see my ID. My mother was a single parent, she passed on in 2003. So, I took her name up to preserve her legacy, she was a great lady.

She passed on when I was in class four. I studied in Nyeri for both my primary and secondary education. In 2012, I was admitted to Moi University, Eldoret, and studied Finance, Banking option. I completed my bachelor's degree in 2015. Currently I am on internship at a company called FloraHolland, a Dutch company that exports flowers to the Netherlands. I've been there since February 2016.

My childhood was not smooth, I can tell you that. I was brought up by my uncles and aunts from my mother's family, they were six. Three brothers and three sisters, they have been my mums and dads. I currently, live with one of my aunt's in Kiambu. Time to time, I get to visit my grandfather upcountry in Nyeri.

How did I go through education? Well, luckily primary was free therefore eased the burden of fees for my guardians. After my Kenya Certificate of Primary Education examinations, I was admitted to Kagumo High school. While there I found a sponsor through an organization called Edumed Trust who paid my secondary school fees and after I completed my fourth form they referred me to KCDF in 2012. Around that time, I got an admission letter to Moi University, Eldoret. My school fees and upkeep were paid in full by the Global Give Back Circle (GGBC).

Through KCDF, I learnt to give back to my community. At school where I was studying, I volunteered at the health center which is within the university. I learnt how to bal-

ance my studies and volunteer time. During the short holidays, I would mentor primary school children and help them with homework and generally talk to them about life experiences.

The process offers life-based training programs that would equip us with skills to help us navigate the outside world. This happened twice a year and touched on finance, health education and work readiness such as good interview skills.

My mentor is called Joe Githinji. He used to work in Oracle Consulting but now has runs his own firm. He has taught me about finance. Taught me how to manage my upkeep well and make sure that it lasted until the end of semester. Sometimes he would come to the life skills workshop with human resource practitioners and teach us how to write our CVs and conduct ourselves during interviews.

Ultimately, how do I intend to give back when I make it? I will focus on helping the needy boys and girls in small towns upcountry who are largely forgotten. Kids who don't have access to information about these kinds of programs.

The lesson I have learnt so far is that life is what you view it as. Your background does not matter at all. If you say, “I'll make it”, then you will. Also, don't let setbacks define you.



"My dream is to be a **life changer**, to be the kind of person who **impacts someone's life.**"

~ *Dominic Ndawa Kavemba*

# My Dream is to be a Life Changer

“I love that I’m finally giving back my skills and time and giving someone else an opportunity like I was given.”

I come from Kitui County, a place called Mwitika. I don’t remember my father. He and my mother separated a long time ago. I don’t know him. I have never met him. People always ask me if I’m curious about my father. I must say that growing up without a father has had some effects on me. There is a time you need a father around you because there are some things you can’t share with your mother. My mother wasn’t around for a long time as it were. I stayed with my grandmother when I was in primary school but it got too expensive for her so I was taken to a children’s home in Ruai, Embakasi which was a boarding school facility. It was like a rehabilitation center. It had all manner of street children and the like.

Living with the street children in the home toughened me up. It was a rough life. I’m a small bodied young man, but the school toughened me so much and gave me authority. In that school nobody handed you anything, you had to fight for it. I may be small, but I could talk and the big guys would listen. There were time some boys would come into school with weapons. The environment was just tough and the punishments in the school would equally be tough. That hardened me.

I was a brilliant student, always top of the class. In class six, the school developed a program which would see three top students sponsored to high school. I knew I had to make it to the top three because I knew when I complete my primary school, getting a sponsor for my high school education would be a great challenge. I therefore put focus on reading hard and managed to score 368 points out of the overall 500. Unfortunately, I missed a chance in the coveted top three spots. However, I managed to join a high school in Kitui. I had

culture shock, transitioning from a city school to a village school. The weather was brutal and the discipline level in the school was horrendous. I just wanted out! It wasn’t a place for me. My aunt convinced me to stay on and having no options, I did scoring a C+ in my KCSE exams.

How I came to learn of KCDF is through a friend of mine when I was still in high school, but before anything happened after completing high school, I was tutoring in a new secondary school for KES 4,000. I then applied for Higher Education Loans Board (HELB) and joined Kenyatta University where I am studying Environmental Planning and Management.

Through KCDF I got in contact with GGBC through the Window of Opportunity (WOO) which accommodates around 28 young men. GGBC is currently supporting my education fees and upkeep. Through USAID support, I have been exposed to the life skills workshops and I am looking forward to being assigned a mentor since I never had a father or a male figure in my life. I’m looking for someone who can not only give me direction in life socially, but also professionally.

My dream is to be a life changer, to be the kind of person who impacts someone’s life. I’m currently giving back at Imani Children’s Home, they have two units - one in Kayole and the other in Malindi. I have been to both centers and I love that I’m finally giving back my skills and time and giving someone else an opportunity like I was given.



"I'm so **grateful for KCDF** and **GGBC** because without them I wouldn't have **gone to university** and I wouldn't have made it to where I am right now."

~ *Cetrine Sitati*

# On the Path to Giving Back

“The experience at GGBC has set me on a path of giving back doing voluntary service in Hospitals.”

Cetrine is lithe with a sharp smile. She's studying Clothing, Textile and Interior Design at Egerton University. She loves all things to do with interior decor. She's an artsy girl. In her room back in university, her room is adorned with beautiful curtains and carpets, some of which she often makes herself.

“I grew up in Webuye, went to school in Webuye primary and then high school went to Starehe Girls Center” she adds. She says she misses the food in Starehe. “When you're in high school you think it is, hard but wait until you get out here!” she laments. “I learnt to be disciplined in Starehe, that time it was all about discipline, unlike now.” She hasn't had great luck with her mentor, she is quick to add, when asked how mentorship has shaped who she is. Nonetheless the experience at GGBC has set her on a path of giving. She has done voluntary service in hospitals, like in one hospital in her hometown. She also helps pay for her sibling's education since their parents separated.

## **You think your sister is going to make it?**

She thinks about this like a parent would. “She's completing high school this year but she's not as good with her studies. But I am hopeful she will complete her studies and join a college to pursue what she wants.” Stress stains appear on her forehead when she speaks of her sister. She's become a parent before she is a parent. When she is asked if she is happy she breaks down into tears; holds her head in her hands and cries.

## **What's making you sad?**

“The unrest that is at home.”

She can't go home now, because of the state of their home. She lives with her auntie in Kibera. It's tough seeing her parents go through what they are going through. She is focusing on opening a business in Nyeri where she did her internship. “I like the place. It's a bigger town as compared to where I am right now in Nakuru. I was thinking of starting a shop for soft furnishings like curtains. The place I was doing my attachment was owned by a single mother who inspired and influenced me a lot. She sells curtains at wholesale and the business is doing really good.”

She is clear on what she wants to do and why. She wants to help her mother and her siblings and she knows she can only do this if she focuses on opening a business and excelling at it.

“I'm so grateful for KCDF and GGBC because without them I wouldn't have gone to university and I wouldn't have made it to where I am right now.” she says with what seems like a brave smile.



"I try to **encourage** the girls in the village to **aspire** for a **better life**. That it's **possible**."

~ *Phoebe Oloo*  
(On the Left)

# Aspiring for a Better Life

“I’m not usually afraid to say where I came from because that is the place that influenced who I am today.”

I’m from Busia in Nyanza. I was raised in the shanty in Kangemi. There’s the village part of it called Kibagare. I’m not usually afraid to say where I came from because that is the place that influenced who I am today.

I started school in the same village. There’s a big school there called St. Martin’s. The sisters used to take in the poor or orphaned children and sponsor them. Orphans were boarders and children with parents like me however from disadvantaged backgrounds, were day scholars and we paid some little school fees. We used to pay from KES. 200 or KES. 100 per term. When I reached form one, I received a sponsorship availed for those pupils who were performing well and I was lucky to be among them.

My father is a bicycle repairman with 13 children. My mother is a housewife. When my sponsor pulled out when I was in form two, I stayed at home. It was a humiliating experience then to be chased from school because I was the head girl.

I stayed home for one year without going to school, then the following year –that I was supposed to now join form three, I was called by a friend at home and was told, “You’re needed by sister.” When I went to school I was told that I was one of the lucky students to be taken up for sponsorship by GGBC. That was in 2011.

It was a relief to be back to school. I never had to worry about school fees. I finished my form four and got a C+ and joined the IT college inside the school supported by GGBC. There I learnt basic IT skills which I will always be grateful for. It was just like a miracle to me because I had not seen a computer in my life. I took the opportunity to

apply to various colleges and I was admitted at Kenya School of Monetary Studies pursuing Finance.

My journey since my childhood has been somewhat a miracle. When I go back to Kibagare village where I come from, people look at me like an angel, a miracle because many girls my age never amount to much. The environment does not allow them to thrive.

I have a mentor, she’s called Lizzy Lahey and she’s the Assistant Program Manager at GGBC. She’s has journeyed with me since I was in form three, sharing my struggles and influencing me. I am fortunate to talk to her every day, even on WhatsApp! Having finished my studies, I am currently working at an insurance company. Of course, I’m giving back after all GGBC has given me. Together with some girls from my former school, we formed a group that frequently visits slum children in Deep Sea, Westlands. We often do this on Saturdays and have formed a WhatsApp group called ‘Human for Humanity’ for this kind of humanitarian works. The whole point of these visits is to talk to the children and encourage them to be hopeful of a different life.

My father is still in the village. He managed to build a house there and lives with my mother and two of my siblings whom I help send to school. The rest of us have transitioned out of the home. To be honest, I’m like a jewel to my father. He prays for me constantly in everything I do. he tells me often. I am 23 years old and try to encourage the girls in the village to aspire for a better life. That it’s possible.



"I think **most girls** really do **get encouragement** from hearing **your life story** because it's not very **different** from **their life story**."

~ Irene Odiero

# Rising from a Humble Background

“I was encouraged and it also made me believe that I would be anything I wanted to be.”

## Who's is Irene?

I grew up in Kisumu. A place called Manyatta. I'm the first born of four children. My dad died when I was about four years old. My mom - a small scale businesswoman - was the sole breadwinner. My childhood was marked by a lot of reading and a lot of games too. My mother - a disciplinarian - was so much into academics. She had targets; you were not allowed to be anything less than number one. That was very tough because I wasn't the brightest student in the class. It proved really hard to maintain that through the years. I scored 411 out of 500. But she wasn't there to see those good grades because she died when I was 12-years old.

## To find yourselves as orphans and you being the first born must have been tough.

Yes. It was a very trying moment for me because she was my rock that I leaned on. But this is the reason that I was also motivated to work hard in school. Being a first born and being a girl, so I also had to make sure that they were comfortable and do the house chores just for them to be in school in time and stuff. I could say I spent a lot of my time doing house chores as opposed to studying which I used to do when my mother was around. My grades dropped initially. Going to Starehe Girls' Center helped a great deal because, really, my future depended on doing well. And then getting into Starehe because I knew I would get a sponsor who would take me through secondary school.

## It must have been an eye opener.

Yes. Very, very different. With all these brilliant students from all over the country. And being new in Nairobi of course. Life in Starehe was comfortable. And competitive. It wasn't the same environment I was used to. Where I was used to being the best student and all accolades were on me. Here I had to compete with students who scored like 450, and I had 411. Starehe made me feel normal and common. The biggest lesson at that school was the nurturing. And also freedom. In Starehe, the thing that struck me most is the fact that there were no school rules. The school rule was; anything that is contrary to common sense is against the school rules. It really gave me a sense of having more responsibility for myself, for my actions and everything. There I was made the student leader and that molded and nurtured my leadership within the school. And the teachers there were like second parents. It was like a second home. The moment I went to Starehe, I didn't really get to miss my home as such. Because it felt like it was home, there were very caring, they were always there to support, to guide, to mentor, to coach. It felt like a haven for me. Based on many interactions with former students there and of Starehe Boys, I was encouraged and it also made me believe that I would be anything I wanted to be.

## Then GGBC came in?

Yes, 2009. I was in form four. I was merged to a mentor, Margie French, she's from New York. I think that was

one of the biggest blessings that I had during that time. Because not having had a mother for a while, Margie represented the mother figure in my life. She made me realize how much potential I really have. She pushed me to be better and to tackle challenges. She helped me with making decisions. While in Starehe I also had the chance to give back at a children's home. I also mentored girls at St. Martin's Kibagare, just after Kangemi; coach them on academics – because I was just fresh from form four – and guide them on life. After that I mentored a girl at Enosain Kakenya Center of excellence. It's girl-child empowerment program.

I think most girls really do get encouragement from hearing your life story because it's not very different from their life story. Now I'm an employee at Unilever in the custom-

er marketing for oral care and deodorants, I give back by teaching children in primary school how to brush their teeth and how important oral health is to them.

### So what's the big plan?

I'm in Unilever Future Leaders Program, a three year program and I'm concentrating in trying to learn as much. This program gives the graduate trainees an opportunity to really go through different departments within the organization. I want to understand fast moving consumer goods and how all these different departments really motion to make this company a great company. Eventually in the next five to six years, I want to be the first female director.



"There is so **much**  
**one** can offer to  
**make** the next gener-  
ation **better.**"

~ *Alice Wanjiru*

# Hope in Despair

**“I think I inspire positivity not only with my own personal story but also how I view life.”**

Alice is a fourth year at the Technical University of Kenya, studying Biochemistry. She attended Starehe Girls Center where she got into the GGBC program.

## **Where did you grow up and how was your childhood?**

I grew up in Githurai 45 from up to the age of eight years. My mother - a single parent - passed on when I was only eight years. A kind lady took me in at her children's home called God With Us in Maziwa, Githurai it became my new home and I attended a local primary school. I did a great deal of learning at that home, it shaped me. I'm grateful because I was among the blessed ones, or the lucky ones, because she treated me as her child.

## **How was it in the children's home at the beginning?**

It was challenging, because she's running the children's home with minimal support. It was a small home of about 15 children but still tough to run without donor help. I think she sustained it because it was her calling. She's a strong woman, she's overcame a lot.

## **How was the experience of Starehe Girls?**

It was a great school that molded me to be who I am today. It was more than just excelling academically (she scored an A-) it was about life beyond school. GGBC was also a great eye opener, and the biggest lesson I got there was to foster a sense of responsibility: What am I doing for myself and for my society? Because poverty isn't an excuse. There is so much one can offer to make the next generation better.

## **Talking of poverty, what do you think is your wealth?**

I think my wealth is in my soul. It speaks to people. Whenever I get into a room, and I speak to people – I

like speaking - they listen. I love when I go places and train people, talk to them, mentor them. I think I inspire positivity not only with my own personal story but also how I view life. I'm currently giving back through Discover Me initiative, a group that we started with my friends. We mentor students and give them the skills we were given in GGBC. I also do my personal give back. I send some contribution to the Twakutukuza Trust Fund to help support people with cancer.

## **Tell us about your mentor?**

She's Ann Power. She lives in Canada. She's a wife, a mother, and she works in government. We've never met but we communicate via emails, Facebook, and she's like one of my many mothers I have. She's my role model, from far. She helps me when I'm having challenges in life, gives me new perspectives and insights. I write her an email with a lot of questions and she'll tell you, "what do you want to do?"

## **What are you planning with life?**

I'm in my last year – fourth year - and it's very challenging time because I need to excel. To be honest I'm not sure where life will take me because I also have other interests apart from Bio-Chemistry. I'm a compassionate person and I think that's skill I can use to help humanity. I'm thinking about being a tutor, or a teacher. I think I can shape a generation through that.

## **Are you happy now?**

I haven't reached the optimum which is when I realize what I want to do for this country, for this world. Because I haven't gotten there yet. My passion is to bring change.

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Equity Bank	Standard Chartered Bank	Safaricom
USAID	Ernst & Young	Safari Park Hotel
Microsoft	Citibank	Sarova Hotels
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation	Intel	
ZEP-RE Reinsurance Ltd	Deloitte Ltd	Bamburi Cement
Master Card Foundation	PwC	

## Others

<b>KDN</b>	- Internet at Starehe Girls' Centre	<b>Microsoft</b>	- IT Labs
<b>Eaton Electrical Ltd</b>	- Give Back Awards	<b>Oracle Edge Consulting</b>	- Life Skills Training
<b>Citi Bank</b>	- Mentor Events and Life Skills Workshop	<b>Safaricom</b>	- IT Labs & Mentor Events
<b>PwC</b>	- Mentor Events	<b>Sarova Hotels</b>	- Accommodation





**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](mailto:info@kcdf.or.ke) | **Website** [www.kcdf.or.ke](http://www.kcdf.or.ke)