

# AMPLIFY THE VOICES OF YOUNG MOTHERS WITHIN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN KISUMU COUNTY, KENYA.



# INTRODUCTION



Young mothers' stories of resistance and activism are often rendered invisible in broader contexts of society, and young mothers themselves can be negatively affected by dominant cultural narratives that disparage them (Johnson, 2023; Vinson, 2017). We remain deeply conscious of the hardships faced by young mothers, particularly those with children under the age of three. It is widely documented that these women are among the most vulnerable to social-cultural injustices and economic hurdles (Miriti & Mutua, 2019; Worku et al., 2021). They are among the most likely to be pushed out of school, be excluded from critical opportunities to provide for themselves and their children, be sexually exploited as a direct consequence of their motherhood, and experience repeated sexualized and gendered violence (Nyariro, 2018; Odimegwu & Mkwanzani, 2016).

In our movement work, we meet young mothers who are girls, mostly aged 13-19 and who gave birth as teenagers. This age is critical for most young girls because even though they could conceive, they are still often in school and entirely dependent on

their caregivers for survival. In the rural areas where we find a high concentration of teen mothers, girls are often expected to figure everything out with very little information at their disposal. In the urban areas, there is an influx of information mainly founded on half-truths and misinformation. As a result, we have met girls whose innocence has been taken advantage of and thus thrust into early motherhood. Some have been engaged in the commercialization of sex because they had to meet basic needs like sanitary towels and food. At the same time, some have been coerced into engagement of sexual activity at times by the closest members of their families. As a result of the foregoing, most teenage mothers struggle with basic needs because their lives are full of contradictions. When the people who ought to have protected them became their abusers, the consequence of the abuse led to further abuse. The inaction of adults led them to conception, and afterwards, adults who had been passive their entire lives woke up and chased them away. Some parents sent them to have sex in exchange for food, only to turn around and be angry that they were not careful enough to prevent pregnancy. They should have used protection they knew nothing about.

We invite you to read these stories and hope that you not only get inspired by the young mothers' resolve, resilience and strength but that they inspire us all into action to do more to end sexual violence and exploitation!

Patricia Nudi Orawo  
Executive Director – STADA

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# A MESSAGE FROM THE YOUNG MOTHERS



We, the “Teen Moms Group,” have collectively joined this journey to raise awareness about hardships affecting women in our communities, including sexual and gender-based violence. In our movement, we acknowledge who we are as *ratego* (strong) with pride and unapologetically seek to make this world a better place for all women. Sharing our stories of struggle and resistance has sustained us in the face of the tremendous hardships each of us has gone through and continues to endure. We refuse to be deterred. Nevertheless, how can our stories serve as a reminder that even in the face of adversity, we can band together to make a difference in our communities.

The layers of traumatic experiences to be

peeled are too many, and most times, some “fall off the wagon,” some go right back into the abuse cycle, some stand, some stagger and rise back up after months, and some resolve to never go back. Our social movement is complex with very many layers, but at the core is the mental shift that takes place in most of us, the willingness to pick ourselves up again, the ability to look past the pain, to realize and accept that even the strongest people break, and it is okay to break.

A big part of the movement lies in psychosocial support, economic empowerment, and the ability for us all to create a safe space for all of us. It is one step at a time every day, and looking back, the movement has covered miles with many more to go. The willingness to never give up stands out, and that is what makes us strong. We broke but refused to give up! We tell our stories not just to revisit or replay the traumatic moments of our lives but rather to tell our stories of survival in ways that make us stronger. We hope our stories will be helpful to others in similar situations and resonate with our preferred motto, “*Stawisha Dada*” [thrive sister]





# METHODOLOGY

The young mothers' voices were collected through a series of engagement in Kobura, Alara, Nyabondo and Ogenya. We engaged in counter-storytelling to elicit and acknowledge the stories of survival and sustenance of young mothers in social movements responding to sexual and gender-based violence.

Our approach involved documenting stories of survival experiences. The telling and retelling of stories of survival and resistance in the face of hardship appeared to be a healing and reinvigorating process which affirmed young mothers' desire to create social change for themselves, their children, and their communities.



# CAUSAL FACTORS IN TEENAGE PREGNANCY

## Social Cultural Environment

- Peer influence
- Sexual abuse, exploitation, and coercive sexual relations
- Unequal gender power relations
- Early and forced marriage
- Parental neglect

## Economic Factor

- Poverty
- Absence of affordable or free education
- Humanitarian emergencies

## Personal Factors

- Inappropriate forms of recreation
- Use of alcohol
- Substance abuse
- Educational status

# KOBURA STORIES

*Interviews conducted on 29th July 2024*



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Amplify the voices of young mothers within social movements in Kisumu County, Kenya.



# LILIAN 23, KOBURA

*My name is Lilian Akinyi Atieno, and I'm 23 years old. I am one of the proud beneficiaries of the STADA Young Mothers program. Born as the third child in a family of ten, I've learned resilience from a young age. During my free time, I love watching movies and indulging in comedy to lift my spirits.*

After completing primary school, I attended St. Peter Nanga Secondary School, where my favorite subjects were mathematics and physics. I dreamed of becoming an engineer, but life after high school took a turn I didn't expect. My family struggled financially, as my father was the sole breadwinner, and my mother, being deaf, was unable to work. Poverty gripped our home, and it was difficult to meet even basic needs like sanitary towels. My parents could only provide food, and even that was sometimes scarce.

At 21, the pressure to live like my peers and have access to basic necessities overwhelmed me. I made the decision to enter a relationship with an older man, hoping he would help me meet my needs. At first, he did—he gave me the money to buy the essentials that I lacked, things as simple as sanitary towels, which had felt like luxuries at the time. But after two months, I realized I had missed my period. When I took a pregnancy test, the result was positive.

Seeing those two lines on the test brought a flood of emotions—fear, confusion, and a deep sense of regret. It felt like a nightmare I couldn't wake up from. I gathered the courage to tell my boyfriend, but his reaction shattered me. He denied responsibility and claimed he wasn't even sure if the child was his. With nowhere to turn, I had to break the news to my parents. Their response was painful—they told me to find the father and make him take responsibility.

Depression set in. I felt abandoned, judged, and completely alone. Thoughts of ending my life or aborting the pregnancy crossed my mind more than once. But in my darkest hour, a friend told me about the STADA Young Mothers group, and I decided to join in 2022. It was the best decision I've ever made.

In the group, I found hope and solidarity. I met other young mothers who had faced similar challenges—some with two children, others with their own stories of loss and hardship. For the first

time in a long while, I felt like I belonged. I had a safe space to share my pain, my fears, and my dreams.

Nine months later, I gave birth to a beautiful baby girl, but my joy was short-lived. Just two weeks after her birth, my baby passed away. It was the hardest moment of my life, but STADA was there for me. They gave me comfort, counseling, and a shoulder to cry on. I no longer felt alone—people cared about me, despite the circumstances I found myself in.

A few months after that devastating loss, I started volunteering at the STADA community library. After five months, I was offered a job as a young mothers' coordinator for the Kobura, Ogenya, and Nyabondo regions. It was a turning point in my life, and now, I speak with confidence and pride about the transformation I've experienced.

STADA made me who I am today. From a discouraged and isolated young mother, I have grown into an empowered woman who understands her role and power within the community. My journey is one of growth and transformation, and I look forward to sharing it with other young mothers to inspire them. Having a child at a young age is not the end of the world—it's a new beginning. With strength, resilience, and the right support, we are all destined for greatness.

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# MARY 21, KOBURA

*My name is Mary (not my real name), and I'm 21 years old. I am a mother of one and the only child in my family. In 2024, I became a part of STADA Kenya's young mothers' group. Singing is my favorite way to pass the time, a small joy I hold onto amidst life's challenges. I only went as far as class eight in school, and my favorite subject was science, taught by the amazing Madame Elizabeth. I used to dream of becoming a nurse one day, but life had other plans.*

After completing primary school, I couldn't continue to secondary school because my grandparents, who I was living with at the time, simply couldn't afford it. They were struggling to take care of me, and there was no money for school fees. My dad had completely distanced himself from me ever since he and my mom separated when I was in the sixth grade. He has never supported me. My mother moved to Nairobi, leaving me in my grandparents' care, and since then, she hasn't been involved much in my life either.

By the time I reached class eight, I felt utterly stuck. I was a dropout with no future prospects, and it broke my heart to see my age-mates heading off to school while I stayed behind, helping with household chores. Life at home was hard, and in my desperation, I turned to a boyfriend for support. He helped me with things I couldn't afford, like sanitary towels, and I thought I had found a way out. But seven months into the relationship, I discovered I was pregnant.

When I told my boyfriend about the pregnancy, he

denied responsibility, claiming the child wasn't his, and cut all ties with me. When I shared the news with my grandparents, they told me it was my problem to deal with on my own—they wanted nothing to do with it. My mother remained silent about the whole situation. I had no choice but to keep the pregnancy; abortion was never an option for me.

In 2020, I gave birth to my baby boy, who is now four years old. Motherhood has been an uphill battle, especially with no support from my family or the father of my child. I struggled alone, but in 2024, I joined STADA Young Mothers, and my life began to change.

The group gave me something I hadn't had in a long time: a sense of belonging. Meeting other young mothers, hearing their stories, and sharing my own has given me strength. Through our connection, I've found motivation and new reasons to keep going.

STADA Kenya has given me hope. Soon, I'll start a course that will allow me to learn new skills and eventually support myself and my son. My dream is to give him an education and a better life than I had. Though I didn't finish school, I still believe my dreams are valid. With hard work, patience, and belief in myself, I know I will make it. I'm incredibly grateful to STADA Kenya for giving me the chance to turn my life around, and for the support that's helped me realize that my story isn't over.

Thank you, STADA Kenya!



# FAIMA 21, KOBURA

*My name is Faima (not my real name). I am 21 years old, a mother to a beautiful six-month-old baby, and the eldest of seven siblings. I love singing, something that gives me peace in the chaos of my life. I joined the Kobura Young Mothers group earlier this year as part of the new cohort, and I'm hoping this is where my life starts to change.*

Currently, I am homeless. I rely on casual jobs, "vibarua," and the kindness of well-wishers to support both me and my son. My journey into this life began when my mother, who was also a child herself, gave birth to me while still in the eighth grade. In line with African traditions, my grandparents refused to allow her to raise a child in their home. They forced her to marry an old man who already had two wives, and my mother became his third.

My mother had no choice but to abandon her education and her dreams. Growing up with a stepfather wasn't easy. He never saw me as his own and made sure I knew it. I was treated differently from his children, and as I grew older, things only got worse. When I reached the eighth grade, my mother passed away, and from that moment, life took a downward spiral. My stepfather's mistreatment intensified. I was beaten without cause, denied food if I couldn't finish chores, and neglected when I needed help with school. After completing primary school, he didn't want to send me to secondary school, but eventually, he did.

My admission to secondary school was only possible with the bare minimum—just the admission fee and one school uniform. As I grew, my uniform no longer fit, and I had to borrow old ones from other students. Worse, I was sent home because my school fees hadn't been paid, and my stepfather made no effort to help. I had to hustle on my own for over two years, working odd jobs, and barely managing to stay in school. By the time I was in Form Two, I was exhausted.

In desperation, I reached out to my aunt, hoping she could help me. But instead of offering support, she suggested finding me a husband as the only solution. Despite my disappointment, I was too tired to fight back. My aunt arranged for me to marry an older man who already had a wife, just like my mother's fate. History was repeating itself.

I found myself married to a man old enough to be my father, with a first wife old enough to be my mother. I was terrified and hopeless, and soon the first wife took advantage of my youth, mistreating me and forcing me to do all the work. I couldn't take it anymore and one day, I decided to leave and return to my stepfather's house.

When I got back, things only worsened. My stepfather's anger turned into cruelty. He regularly denied me food and threatened me. In a state of hopelessness, my health started to deteriorate. Desperate to survive, I made the decision to do the unthinkable. I began sleeping with men, sometimes up to four in a day, just to make enough money for food and basic needs.

*I began sleeping with men, sometimes up to four in a day, just to make enough money for food and basic needs.*



At first, the money was good, and I saved a little in hopes of going back to school. But soon, I found myself in a situation I hadn't planned for—I was pregnant. With no way of knowing who the father was, I decided to hide the pregnancy from my stepfather, fearing he would throw me out. Eventually, though, he noticed. Instead of supporting me, he threw me out of the house and burned everything I owned.

I had nowhere to go. My aunt refused to take me back because I had run away from the marriage she had arranged. With no other options, I sought shelter with neighbors, moving from house to house, working for food and a place to sleep. During this time, I met a kind woman who offered me her kitchen to live in. She helped me with food, clothes for my baby, and even covered my hospital bills when I gave birth.

Three months after my son was born, I started doing casual jobs to support us. But I knew I had to find a more permanent solution. That's when I heard about STADA Kenya and their support for young mothers like me. I was eager to join, and since becoming part of the group, I've felt a renewed sense of hope.

We meet weekly, and during our gatherings, we share stories, learn about mental health, and sometimes receive free sanitary towels, which has been a big help. I'm looking forward to starting the technical courses they offer so I can gain the skills to support myself and finish my secondary education. I know I can do it. Despite everything, I still have dreams. I'm young, and I believe with hard work and determination, I will achieve them.

Thank you, STADA Kenya, for giving me a second chance at life.



# CHRISTINE 27, KOBURA

*I pursued a college certificate, and I am currently furthering my studies.*

My name is Christine Akello, I am 27 years old, a mother of one, and a proud beneficiary of STADA Young Mothers. I joined the group in 2021 after hearing about it from community members in my village. STADA has been a major part of my transformation, helping me grow from a young mother at 21 to a confident volunteer and employee.

I completed my primary school education at Alendu Primary School, then attended Bishop Okoth High School, where mathematics was my favorite subject. After high school, I pursued a college certificate, and I am currently furthering my studies.

Since joining STADA, my life has changed significantly. The skills and knowledge I've gained through the program have empowered me to take care of myself and provide for my son. With the salary I now earn from working at STADA, I am able to send my son to school, something that brings me great pride and fulfillment.

STADA's support and the opportunities it has provided have shaped me into the person I am today, and for that, I am deeply grateful. I pray that this incredible empowerment spreads to other parts of the country and even beyond, to touch more lives just as it has touched mine.

Thank you, STADA, for being a beacon of hope and transformation in my life.



# OGENYA STORIES

*Interviews conducted on 24th July 2024*





# LUCY19, OGENYA

*Interviews conducted on 29th July 2024*

My name is Lucy Atieno (Not her real Name). I'm 19 years old, a mother of one, and the third-born in a family of six. I enjoy dancing, traveling, and running. I attended Mtwala Girls in Form 1 and later transferred to St. Vincent Muhoroni, where I completed the rest of my secondary school. My favorite subjects were English and CRE. I once dreamed of becoming a police officer, but that changed when I became a single mother at 19.

At 19, I imagined I'd be pursuing my dream, but life took a different course. After secondary school, I moved to Nairobi in search of a job to raise money for my education since my parents couldn't afford to send me to college with my siblings still in school. While staying with my aunt in Nairobi, I found a job, but it didn't last two months before I was let go. I had to return home because living in Nairobi without a job was tough.

Back home, I entered a relationship with a man from a nearby town, Awasi. He was supportive, giving me advice on many things. After a while, I secured another job in Nairobi and left him behind for work. Three months later, I discovered I was pregnant. I didn't tell my boss at first, but six months in, I couldn't hide it anymore. My boss found out and was very understanding. I informed my boyfriend, who seemed indifferent but promised to help.

My boss was incredibly generous during my pregnancy, even buying all the necessary baby supplies. After giving birth, I moved back home because I couldn't manage both work and a baby. I also wanted my boyfriend to meet his child, but he eventually disappeared, and we lost contact. Although my mom was initially disappointed, she has been a great support, making sure my child and I don't go without the basics.

Life as a single young mother hasn't been easy. I've had to use my savings, initially meant for college, to buy things my child needed. This forced me to start over from scratch.

During all this, I joined the STADA young mothers' group in early 2024 through the coordinator, Magdaline. We meet once a week, sharing stories and receiving guidance and counseling from STADA. They

also provide us with reusable sanitary towels that last a year. STADA has been instrumental in giving me hope. They've even offered us the opportunity to learn skill-based courses, which are about to begin.

I am looking forward to these courses because I want to learn, employ myself, and eventually return to my dream of continuing my education in plant operations. My goal is to support myself, help others, and make a difference in my community, just as STADA Kenya has done for me. Once I am helped and find success, I will pass it forward to create a better community.

To the executive director and the entire STADA team, I thank you and appreciate the great work you're doing.



*Life as a single young mother hasn't been easy. I've had to use my savings, initially meant for college, to buy things my child needed.*

# STACY 13, OGENYA

*My name is Stacy (not my real name). In my free time, I enjoy watching TV, but I don't like traveling since there's nowhere for me to go. I attended Kanyagwal Secondary School until I dropped out in Form Two. Geography and English were my favorite subjects, and Mr. Okello, our Geography teacher, was my favorite.*

I aspired to pursue a career in agriculture before I had to leave school in 2023 due to pregnancy. Now, I live with my mother, who sells groceries at a nearby market. I'm the fifth of seven siblings; some are already married, while others are still in school.

I met my boyfriend when I visited my aunt in Nyakach. He was 23 at the time and worked at his father's garage when I became pregnant. We're still in touch, and he sends me a monthly allowance of 2,000 Ksh, which I use to provide for the baby. He came to visit when the baby was born, and sometimes I take the baby to see him in Nyakach.

My mother wants to send me back to school, but she's currently supporting three of my siblings, who are still in school, and she's the only one covering the costs. When I heard about the courses that STADA Kenya plans to start for young mothers like me, I was really excited. STADA Kenya previously provided us with reusable sanitary towels, which many of us still use.

We meet twice a month for lessons, brought together by our team leader, and the STADA team frequently visits to offer their support.



# SHEILA 17, OGENYA

*My name is Sheila Ochieng, and I'm 17 years old. I completed school up to Form Four, where my favorite subjects were English and Physics. My class teacher, Mr. Joel, was my favorite teacher. In my free time, I enjoy playing football and writing songs, and I've even joined a local football team.*

In April 2023, when I was 16, I discovered I was pregnant by my boyfriend, who wasn't a student. We met when I was living with my aunt in Ahero. He was much older than me, and at the time, I didn't realize that our relationship wasn't appropriate. Looking back, I feel like he took advantage of me. When I told him I was pregnant, he went silent and stopped communicating. My aunt confronted him and told him that if he didn't take responsibility for the baby, he could be arrested, as he was 20 and attending a polytechnic at the time. Since then, he has shown some responsibility by occasionally sending small amounts of money for the baby's upkeep. My baby is now seven months old.

I come from a family of seven siblings. Sadly, my mother passed away, and we live with our father. When my dad first found out about the pregnancy, he was understandably upset, but he eventually calmed down. Now, he fully supports me and my baby. Growing up, I dreamed of becoming a journalist, but I didn't perform as well as I had hoped in school, finishing with a D+ in my final exams. Despite this, I still believe I can pursue journalism. However, my dad is currently paying school fees for two of my siblings who are in polytechnic, so I'm uncertain about my next steps.

In February this year, I joined STADA's Ogenya Teen Mum's Group. STADA has been a tremendous help to me, particularly in providing psychosocial support when I felt like my life was falling apart. They've also provided us with reusable sanitary towels, which are essential, as many girls feel pressured to find boyfriends to provide for these basic needs. At our group level, we've been taught how to carry ourselves with dignity and how to live harmoniously within our community.

As a young mother, I want my son to have the best life possible. I never imagined I'd become a mother at such a young age, but now my focus is on ensuring he gets the best education. I've realized that it's up to me to make that happen because his father is no longer involved in our lives.

I'm incredibly grateful to the STADA team for their support on this journey. They've even planned for us to undertake courses, which I believe will change our lives and shift how society views us. I'm hopeful for the future, both for myself and for my son.





# VELMA 16, OGENYA

My name is Velma Achien'g, and I'm 16 years old. I'm sharing my story in the hope that it will shed light on some of the challenges young mothers face. During my free time, I like to relax with my baby. I completed my primary education at Ogenya Primary School in 2023. While in school, my favorite subjects were Social Studies and Mathematics, and I admired my teacher, Mr. David. I currently live with my dad and my stepmom after losing my mother several years ago. We are four siblings, and I'm the youngest. My eldest brother works in Nairobi, and the rest of us live with my dad, who is a fisherman and the main provider for our family. My stepmom, who is differently abled, doesn't have children of her own but loves and cares for us deeply.

I couldn't join Form One after primary school because I had to stay home to care for my baby. With my stepmom's condition, she couldn't help, and my father's work made it difficult for him to assist. Since I became pregnant, continuing my education has felt like an impossible dream. I always wanted to be a beautician, fascinated by everything related to beauty, but now, with the changes in the curriculum to CBC, starting Form One next year feels overwhelming.

I became pregnant when I was 15. My boyfriend, who had also finished primary school, couldn't join Form One due to financial struggles, as he is an orphan responsible for his siblings. When my dad found out I was pregnant, he was furious and wanted to have the boy arrested. I couldn't bear to tell him the truth, knowing my boyfriend was struggling to provide for his family. Before that, I had confided in my stepmom and even considered abortion because of our dire living situation. I also sought advice from women in the village, and some suggested dangerous methods like drinking Jik, concentrated tea leaves, or herbs to abort the baby. I felt lost and desperate, but my stepmom urged me not to do anything that would harm me or my child. She promised to talk to my father, even though he is known to be harsh. Thankfully, with her help, my dad eventually calmed down.

My boyfriend was 17 when he got me pregnant, and I didn't know much about the legalities surrounding underage relationships. I just knew that life became difficult for both of us.

I joined the STADA group in 2024. They provided us with reusable sanitary towels, which have been a relief, and the group has also been a source of emotional and social support. What I really hope for now is an opportunity to pursue my dream of becoming a beautician by enrolling in a salon course through STADA's support. Life has been tough for us since my mom passed away when I was just five, and my dad has worked hard to raise us. I want to change our story and help my family, especially my dad, who has been through so much.

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# DAISY 19, OGENYA

My name is Daisy (not my real name), and I'm 19 years old. I currently live with my dad, and every day I make and sell samosas to help support us. Life in the village is a daily grind, and I don't really have time for hobbies. Growing up, I dreamed of becoming a nurse, but those dreams feel far away now. We were displaced by floods in Nyando, which forced us to move into a displacement camp (IDP). I sell one samosa for 5 shillings, and on a good day, I can make a profit of around 60 shillings.

I left school in 2020 after sitting my Class 8 exams. I scored 268 marks in the KCPE, but I couldn't join secondary school because my dad couldn't afford it. We are a family of four siblings, and I'm the second-born. My mother separated from my dad a long time ago when we were still young. She now lives and works in Rongo, Migori County, and visits us occasionally. Another reason I couldn't continue with school was that I got pregnant, and there was no one to stay home and care for the baby.

My boyfriend, who was 18 at the time and a year ahead of me in school, was the father of my child. I was 17 when I found out I was pregnant in 2021. We both attended Ogenya Primary School, and when my dad found out, he was disappointed, but eventually, he accepted the situation. He believed that a baby is a blessing and didn't pursue legal action against my boyfriend. Though we talked about the baby, the father doesn't support us financially, and I've decided not to date again. I don't want to risk having another child when I'm already struggling.

In January 2024, I joined a support group through STADA. We've had some helpful sessions on self-care and life skills. They've even provided us with reusable sanitary towels, which has been a huge relief. Without having to worry about buying pads, I feel less vulnerable to boys who sometimes take advantage of girls in our situation. The group has also been a space for me to think about my future. One of the courses they're offering is hairdressing, and I'm really interested in it. I believe hairdressing is a skill that can quickly turn into a career, especially because women get their hair done all the time.

I'm incredibly grateful to STADA for the support they've given us. Without them, I don't know where we'd be. Their help has made a real difference in our lives, and I hope that by pursuing hairdressing, I can start building a better future for myself and my baby.



# MAUREEN 18, OGENYA

*I was immediately interested because the teachings focused on self-care and avoiding unplanned pregnancies—something I wish I had known more about earlier.*

In my free time, I often find myself resting and reflecting on my life

My name is Maureen Adhiambo, and I'm 18 years old. In my free time, I often find myself resting and reflecting on my life. I attended Kanyagwal High School until Form Two, where my favorite subject was Business Studies. I had a deep connection with the subject and enjoyed learning from our business teacher, who made everything easy to understand. Growing up, I dreamed of working with the Meteorological Department, but that dream was cut short when I had to drop out of school after becoming pregnant.

At the time, I lived with my parents, and we struggled to meet basic needs. Life was tough, and I started dating a boy who helped me with things like sanitary towels, lotion, and even some nice clothes. He would buy me necessities like underwear, pens, and snacks and occasionally gave me pocket money. He was 21 and worked as a motorbike repairman in Ahero, where I lived. Unfortunately, during our relationship, I became pregnant. When I told him, he promised to support the baby.

When my parents found out, they were disappointed, but they encouraged me to keep the baby and not consider abortion. Looking back, I didn't even realize that I was underage and that I had been taken advantage of. After the baby was born, my boyfriend disappeared from my life. He never followed through on his promise to support our child, and I lost contact with him after he lost his job. I haven't heard from him since.

In 2024, I joined a support group led by STADA Kenya. I was immediately interested because the teachings focused on self-care and avoiding unplanned pregnancies—something I wish I had known more about earlier. Now, we meet twice a week for discussions and lessons, and it has been incredibly helpful. One of the things I'm most grateful for is the provision of reusable sanitary towels. This has relieved a lot of financial stress since we no longer have to worry about buying pads every month.

STADA is also planning to enroll us in skill-based courses, and we're all excited about the opportunity to learn something that can change our lives. I'm thankful to STADA Kenya for thinking of us and walking with us through this challenging journey. Their support has given me hope, and I look forward to building a better future for myself and my child.



# ELIZABETH 15, OGENYA

My favorite teacher was Mr. Chris, who made math fun and easy to understand.

My name is Elizabeth Auma, and I'm 15 years old. During my free time, I help my mother sell mandazi at the nearby center. I used to go to Ogenya Primary School, where I enjoyed mathematics. My favorite teacher was Mr. Chris, who made math fun and easy to understand.

Unfortunately, I had to drop out of school in class 7 in 2023. I live with both my parents here in Ogenya village. My father is a fisherman, and my mother makes a living selling mandazi. Growing up, I dreamed of many things—I wanted to be a businesswoman, a nurse, or something that would allow me to make a better life for myself.

I gave birth to my son when I was 14, and he is now 8 months old. His father, my boyfriend, is currently in Nairobi. He didn't finish school either, dropping out after class 8 because his family couldn't afford to pay for his education. He's 18 now, and though we still talk, our relationship has been shaky lately. There are times he sends a small amount of money to help with the baby's upkeep, but it's not consistent. I try to manage with what my mother contributes, but it's tough.

We are a family of six siblings, and I'm the second-born. My older sister is also a teen mom, and we both live with our parents. My sister and I got pregnant around the same time, which was hard for my parents to handle. They were deeply disappointed, but they have tried to support us in the best way they can.

Despite everything, I still have hopes for my future. I plan to go back to school in term three to sit for my class 8 exams, as I have already registered for KCPE. I try to study whenever I can, so I don't fall too far behind. Some days, I manage to go to school, but when my baby is sick, I must stay home and take care of him.

When I first got involved with my boyfriend, he promised to take care of me, providing for my basic needs like sanitary towels, body lotion, and pocket money. I didn't realize the path I was headed down, and now that I have a baby, everything is different.

Joining the STADA group has given me a sense of peace, been a great source of support, ensuring we are mentally okay and providing us with reusable sanitary towels. Recently, they announced that they will be starting a vocational school where we can learn skills like hairdressing and dressmaking. I'm looking forward to it, as teen mums like me are given first priority.

I've been thinking a lot about how I can support my baby, knowing that my parents are struggling, and we have put such a burden on them. Learning a trade could be my way out, a chance to provide for my child and still pursue the dreams I once had.



# FAITH 18, OGENYA

My name is Faith, and I'm 18 years old. In my free time, I enjoy reading storybooks. I dropped out of Kanyagwal Secondary School in the first term of 2024. My dad, a local fisherman at Lake Victoria, had been paying my school fees, while my mom sells mandazi. You might have heard this from my sister, who was here earlier, as we both got pregnant around the same time.

During my time in school, I loved English, and my favorite teacher was our English teacher. Growing up, I always dreamed of becoming a nurse, and that dream hasn't changed. I plan to return to school in the third term, and I've already spoken to my dad, who has agreed to pay my fees, though it's a bit of a struggle for him. Both my parents were very disappointed when they found out about our pregnancies, but they talked to us about staying safe and disciplined while in school.

The father of my baby lives nearby and doesn't have a job. He's 22 years old and a student. When I told him I was pregnant, he didn't deny it or ask me to have an abortion. He asked me to keep the baby and take care of it. Occasionally, he sends money for the baby—around 500 or 1000 shillings—and he visits frequently. The pregnancy wasn't planned, and I didn't know much about unprotected sex at the time. We are still dating and meet occasionally.

I joined this group after Maggy invited me to be part of it, so I could benefit from the teachings provided to other girls. The group, supported by STADA, has been a huge help, especially with providing us with sanitary towels, which I still use. What I really need right now is support with my school fees, as my dad is struggling to cover the costs.

*Growing up, I always dreamed  
of becoming a nurse,  
and that dream hasn't changed*



# CARREN 18, OGENYA

*My name is Carren Atieno, and at just 18, I've already lived through more than many people might expect. I'm the second-born in a family of eight, and as you can imagine, life at home is busy. My younger siblings are still in school, and the youngest is just an 8-month-old baby. Between school runs, household chores, and babysitting, my free time is often spent resting—because I truly need it! I attended Ombaka Secondary School, where my favorite subject was English, and my English teacher was someone I deeply admired. Back then, I dreamed of becoming a teacher myself.*

I live with both my parents, but my life took a sharp turn when I dropped out of school in Form Two after becoming pregnant. I had fallen into a relationship with a boy from our village, a local fisherman. At the time, I was 17, and he was 20. The relationship ended when I got pregnant because he wanted me to abort the baby. He even offered money for it, but I couldn't go through with it. That marked the end of our relationship. Looking back, I realize that I got involved with him because he provided me with things I desperately needed—basic things like sanitary towels and sometimes even trendy clothes that my mother, struggling as she was, couldn't always afford.

At the time, I didn't understand that what had happened to me was more than just a mistake; it was a violation of my rights. I thought I was in love, not realizing how wrong it was. The worst part is that he doesn't support our child now, and my parents have been left to pick up the pieces. My mother works hard to support us, doing a small hustle with a solar company in Ahero, while my father, once a fisherman himself, is now at home recovering from a minor surgery that prevents him from doing any heavy work.

One day, our group leader, Maggy, approached my mother and suggested I join a local support group for teen mothers. My mother, always looking out for me, gave her blessing, and since then, my life has changed in ways I never expected. Being part of this group has given me a new perspective on life. The teachings and support I've received have helped me see that, while I may not return to school, there's still hope for a future.

My dream now is to start my own small business, and perhaps, in time, join a vocational school to pursue hairdressing—a passion of mine. What I wish for the most is financial support to kickstart this dream.

To the young girls still in school, my advice is simple: focus on your studies and abstain from sex. The responsibility of caring for a child is more than you might realize, and I hope you can avoid the challenges I've faced.

*The teachings and support I've received have helped me see that, while I may not return to school, there's still hope for a future.*



# NYABONDO STORIES

*Interviews conducted on 23rd July 2024*



# SHEILA 19, NYABONDO



***My name is Sheila Atieno, and I'm 19 years old. I have one child, and I got pregnant when I was 17. In my spare time, I like to spend time with my grandmother and learn from her. My mother passed away, and I now live with my stepmother, who has other children, making them my siblings, although I was born an only child.***

I attended school in Migori County for both primary and secondary school, but I dropped out in Form Three. After my mother's death, I stayed with my aunt. My father works as a senior government official in Nandi County and was the one paying my school fee.

My daughter is named Mary Millicent, a name she shares with my stepmother. I became pregnant unintentionally due to peer pressure. One day, my aunt accused me of something I hadn't done, and out of frustration, I went to a bar with some friends. Among the boys we met was a close friend of my boyfriend. This happened during the December 2022 holiday. After we all had sodas, everyone paired up, and I ended up going home with my boyfriend's friend.

We had unprotected sex, and the next day, I went back home. My boyfriend never asked me about it. I found out I was pregnant when we were closing school for the first term. I had been feeling unwell, so the matron took me to the hospital, where the pregnancy was confirmed. I was shocked but decided to keep the baby, as I believe children are blessings. Abortion never crossed my mind.

When my aunt and father found out, my aunt was furious and wanted me to abort, but I refused. My father was also angry and told me that school was the only connection we had left. I stayed in school for the rest of the term, but when my belly started showing, I couldn't return. I went back home to stay with my stepmother since my aunt wouldn't take me in. Eventually, I gave birth.

Living with my stepmother has been difficult. She never liked me, even when I was a child after my mother passed away when I was nine. My father is polygamous, with three wives. My mother was the second wife. The first wife is still alive but works in Kisii and doesn't stay at home, so I now live in her house. She has two grown children who have already graduated from university.

Although I live in the first wife's house, my father is the one who supports me. He doesn't like doing it but feels obligated. I struggle to raise my child because my father only helps when he feels like it. He usually buys basic food items like cabbages and dagaa, though sometimes he does better and provides enough supplies to last the whole month, including pampers and sanitary towels.

I don't have the contact information of my baby's father. I didn't have a phone at the time, but my friends informed him about the pregnancy. I've heard he tried to look for me, but I wasn't interested. He was still in Form Four at the time.

In school, my favorite subjects were chemistry, English, math, and agriculture, and I was an average student. I've always dreamed of becoming a cook, and I still believe I can achieve that goal. I've been out of school for almost a year, and my father doesn't seem interested in sending me back. That's why I'm grateful to be part of the teen mums' group.

I'm looking forward to joining the vocational school to study food and beverages. I'm happy and appreciative of the support we've received from STADA.

Even if I don't get a chance to go back to school, I still want to pursue my dream in the hospitality industry.

# MERESA 21 , NYABONDO

***My name is Meresa Awino, and I'm 21 years old. I live with my father, as my mother passed away. We are six children, and I'm the youngest. During my free time, I enjoy reading the Bible.***

I attended Lwanda Primary School and later joined Guu High School in 2022 for Form One, but I unfortunately dropped out in May of the same year. Since primary school, I've always had a passion for science subjects, and my favorite teacher was Madam Rose, who taught Mathematics and Physics. Growing up, I aspired to become a nurse.

I had to leave school because of financial difficulties, as my father struggled to pay my fees due to his unemployment. After being out of school for a while, with no hope of returning, I entered a relationship with a boy from my neighborhood, which eventually led to my pregnancy that same year. When I informed him about the pregnancy, he denied being the father and refused to take responsibility. He later left for Nairobi, and we have not been in contact since.

When my father found out, he was very angry and told me that I had brought this problem upon myself. I moved in with my elder sister, who is married and lives in Ahero, until I gave birth. Afterward, I returned home to live with my father. My sister occasionally sends me basic supplies for the baby, but most of the time, I struggle to provide for my child. I became pregnant when I was just 18 years old.

In May 2023, I joined the STADA teen mum group, where we meet weekly for life skills teaching. During one of the sessions, we were also informed about an opportunity to attend vocational courses in Kisumu, with options in Food and Beverage, Hairdressing, and Dressmaking. I was thrilled because I saw this as a chance to improve my situation and support my child. I've chosen to pursue the hairdressing course, and in the future, I hope to open my own salon and employ others.

*I had to leave school because of financial difficulties, as my father struggled to pay my fees due to his unemployment.*





# CAROLINE 25 , NYABONDO

*My name is Caroline Awino, I'm 25 years old, a mother of one, and the third born in a family of eight. In my free time, I enjoy listening to music. I had to drop out of school after completing Class Eight due to financial challenges. My favorite subjects were Science and CRE, and my favorite teacher was Madam Lucy, who taught us English. I scored 250 marks and was offered a place in Form One at a school in Nairobi, but I couldn't attend due to a lack of school fees.*



After dropping out, life became difficult. It was hard to watch my peers continue with their education while I stayed behind. Eventually, I decided to move to Nairobi to find work so I could help my parents with household expenses and support my younger siblings who were still in school.

In Nairobi, I lived with my aunt while working. After a few months, I entered a relationship with a man from the coast who also lived and worked in Nairobi. I believed the relationship had potential, but I ended up becoming a single mother at 19. A few months into the relationship, I found out I was pregnant. To make matters worse, I discovered that he was already in a relationship, and his girlfriend began to verbally abuse me. He, too, turned on me and pressured me to have an abortion. However, I stood my ground and decided to keep my baby, leaving the relationship behind to start fresh.

At four months pregnant, I could no longer work, and living in Nairobi without an income became too expensive. I returned home to my parents and eventually had to reveal my pregnancy. While my parents were initially disappointed, my mother was incredibly supportive throughout the process. My father was reluctant at first but eventually came around.

In due time, I gave birth to a healthy baby boy, who is now five years old and attending school. My parents, especially my mother, have been a great help, making sure my son's basic needs are met, despite her modest income from working at a local hotel in Nyabondo. I also take on casual jobs in the village to support my son.

Currently, I'm a member and beneficiary of the STADA KENYA young mothers' group in Nyabondo, which I joined in March 2024 after hearing about it from a fellow young mother. Since joining, I've received valuable advice on navigating motherhood and had the opportunity to connect with other young mothers to share our experiences. This has given me hope and motivation to keep striving for a better future for my child.

I aspire to pursue a short course in beauty therapy and eventually open my own salon, where I can also employ others. I'm determined to work hard and provide my son with a good education so that he can have opportunities I didn't. I don't want him to struggle like I did—I want him to have the best life possible.

To STADA, I sincerely appreciate the support you provide to young mothers like me. You are giving us hope, and I pray you continue to receive the resources needed to change the lives of many more girls in similar situations.

*After a few months, I entered a relationship with a man from the coast who also lived and worked in Nairobi. I believed the relationship had potential, but I ended up becoming a single mother at 19*

# SHARON 25, NYABONDO



*My name is Sharon (not her real name), and I'm from Nyakach. I am 25 years old, the eldest of five children, and the mother of a six-month-old son. In my free time, I enjoy sharing stories with my friends.*

I attended St. Hilarius Secondary School and completed my secondary education in 2021. My favorite subjects were Christian Religious Education (CRE) and History, in which I scored a C-. My favorite teacher was Madam Winny, who taught CRE.

After finishing school, I stayed at home with my father, who remarried after my mother passed away. Living with my stepmother created a difficult environment, and I often found myself in conflicts with both her and my father. Eventually, I ran away to live with my 21-year-old boyfriend for two weeks.

After that time, my father came and took me back home, though I didn't realize at the time that I was pregnant. A few months later, I discovered my pregnancy and decided to keep the baby. I have since given birth to a healthy baby boy, who is now six months old. Although my boyfriend knows about the child, he has never taken any responsibility or shown interest in helping with the baby.

Following the birth of my son, life became increasingly challenging. My father didn't offer any support, and the only person who helped me was my brother. The situation was tough, and I felt overwhelmed and alone, which eventually led to depression. It wasn't until I joined the STADA young mothers' group in Nyabondo that I began to find hope. Mary, the group coordinator, introduced me to the group, and since joining, I've received counseling and guidance from STADA.

The group has provided a space to interact with other young mothers, share our stories, and encourage one another. Through this support, I've regained hope and am determined to pursue my dream of studying catering, a course I've wanted to do for a long time.

I'm excited about the opportunity to take this course with the help of STADA, and I'm confident that it will change my life. By gaining new skills, I'll be able to support myself, provide for my son, and ensure he gets a good education.

To STADA, I want to express my gratitude for giving us these opportunities. I hope you continue to help other young mothers like me.

# ACHIENG 18, NYABONDO

*When I informed my boyfriend about the pregnancy, he accepted it and promised to take responsibility, but to this day, he has not been involved in our son's life.*

My name is Achieng (Not her real name), an 18-year-old mother of one from Koguta, Nyakach. In my free time, I enjoy reading storybooks. I attended St. Martin Primary School for my primary education and then joined Guu Secondary School for one term before transferring to Lwanda Secondary School. Unfortunately, I had to drop out before completing the second term due to a lack of school fees, which was KSH 4,500 per term. My mother couldn't afford it anymore since my father had retired, and she relied solely on farming to support our family.

When I dropped out of school, I already had a one-month-old son, whom I gave birth to at 17 while I was still in Class Eight. I became pregnant after a relationship with a man from Homabay, who I believe was around 25 years old. We met while I was visiting my grandmother, and after dating for a year, I got pregnant.

When I informed my boyfriend about the pregnancy, he accepted it and promised to take responsibility, but to this day, he has not been involved in our son's life. My parents were deeply disappointed and didn't pursue him for support. Instead, my mom has been helping me care for my son, who is now 8 months old.



When I dropped out of school earlier this year, my parents thought it was too soon to leave my one-month-old baby at home. It was hard for my mom to manage everything since she had to spend most of her time farming to provide for the family. They also couldn't afford to pay my school fees, and I was told I'd have to wait until one of my siblings finished Form Four before I could return to school.

Although it was painful to leave school, I understand the challenges my family faces. Realistically, I don't think they will be able to send me back. My dream of becoming a journalist, like TV host Trevor Ombija, feels out of reach now. That's why I'm considering taking a hairdressing course to help provide for my son and his education. I'm hopeful this will happen because STADA has made opportunities like this possible for me and other young mothers.

The team from STADA regularly visits us to offer encouragement, guidance, and counseling. They've also given us the chance to take skill-based courses free of charge, which are about to start. I'm excited about learning new skills and benefiting from this project. This group has given me hope.

I look forward to a time when I can support myself and give my son a good education. I don't want him to face the same challenges I did.



# YVONE 20, NYABONDO



My name is Yvone Atieno, I'm 20 years old, and I live in Kamgan, Nyabondo, Nyakach Sub County. I live with my mother, who works at a slaughterhouse in Sondu. In my free time, I enjoy helping her with farming. My father passed away when I was young, and I'm the youngest of nine siblings. Unfortunately, four of my siblings have also passed away, while the rest are living in Nairobi.

I attended Nyagweno Primary School and studied up to class 7. I enjoyed mathematics while in school, but I had to drop out after I got pregnant at 15. Later, I had my second child at 19, and my third child, who is now 2 months old.

The father of my first child works at Nyabondo Hospital, and he helps with the school fees. The father of my second child, who works in the matatu sector, doesn't provide any support, and we don't speak. I occasionally see him in Sondu, but there's no communication between us. As for the father of my third child, he's from Baringo. When I told him I was pregnant, he gave me 500 shillings to get an abortion, but I didn't want to go through with it. I lied to him, saying I had aborted, so he didn't know I had the baby. I sometimes see him at the Sondu market, but we also don't talk, and I later found out that he's married.

When my mother found out about my third

pregnancy, she was very upset and stressed. After my first pregnancy, I couldn't return to school because my older brother was sick, and I was helping my mother care for him until he passed away.

Being at home with three children has been one of the hardest experiences I've ever had. My mother has been supporting us, and it breaks my heart to see her take on this burden, especially since she's not well herself. The only extra income we get is from selling bananas from our farm. People in the village talk badly about our situation, saying my mother isn't a good woman because I have three children. During my last pregnancy, there was so much gossip that I stayed indoors until I gave birth.

Mary came to our home and told me about this group, and I knew right away that I wanted to join. I've been coming since the group started, and I'm one of the founding members. I'm so grateful to STADA for the life skills training I've received, which has helped me stand my ground and say no to men who try to approach me now. I'm particularly interested in taking a hairdressing course.

I once thought my dreams were over and that I would never be able to help my mother with the grandchildren, especially since she's also unwell. But now, I feel hopeful again, and I believe I can change my story.

# CHRISTINE 19, NYABONDO

My name is Christine Odhiambo, a 19-year-old mother of one, and I am the third of five children from Nyamaroka, Nyakach. I attended Lwanda Primary School and later joined Agai Secondary School for my secondary education, but I had to drop out in Form 3 after becoming pregnant. I had always dreamed of becoming a teacher when I grew up. I enjoy spending my free time with my grandmother, who shares life lessons with me through storytelling.

I became pregnant after entering a relationship with a 25-year-old man from Homabay, who was working in our town temporarily. During his stay, everything seemed fine, and he assured me he loved me and wanted a future with me. However, when I told him I was pregnant, he didn't want anything to do with it. He left our town shortly after to return to Homabay, and I never heard from him again.

Both my father and grandmother, who I live with, were disappointed, but I am grateful for their support throughout my pregnancy. Nine months later, I gave birth to a baby girl. Things became challenging since we rely solely on my father, who earns a living by working on other people's farms.

When I was feeling desperate and ready to give up, I met Mary, the coordinator of the Nyakach young mothers' group. She introduced me to this group in February, and it gave me a sense of belonging. Before joining, I often felt hopeless and alone at home. There were times I wished my biological mother was around to help me navigate this phase of my life.

Through the group, I've learned so much during our weekly meetings, particularly about motherhood. I'm also excited to start a skills-based course soon, as promised by STADA. This opportunity will enable me to support myself and possibly others; while ensuring I provide the best education for my daughter.

I want to acknowledge the incredible work STADA Kenya is doing to empower young mothers and girls. May you continue your great work, and may God bless you.





# JUDITH 24, NYABONDO

My name is Judith Achieng, and I'm 24 years old. I am the eldest in a family of four, and in my spare time, I enjoy playing football with my siblings. I attended Kabondo Primary School and later Guu High School. While at school my best subject was geography, I scored an A- during my KCSE Exams. I always dreamed of becoming an engineer, and even though life has taken some turns, I still hold onto that dream.

Currently, I live with my parents here in Nyakach. To support my two children, I sell mandazis because my mother refuses to help with taking care of them. My journey to becoming a mother has been a challenging one.

At 24, I have two children, both a result of sexual assault. The first incident happened when I was raped by a boy I saw frequently while selling mandazis. After the assault, he disappeared, and I later found out I was pregnant. When I told my parents what happened, they refused to believe me. They accused me of being in a relationship with him, dismissing the trauma I had during that time.

The second assault occurred a year and a half later, and this time, it was a relative. It was my cousin who raped me. When I reported the incident to the chief, he told me it was a family issue that I should resolve at home. My cousin left the area after the incident, but I was left behind to care for two children with no financial support and very little help.

Even though life has been far from what I envisioned, I still hope to return to school one day and pursue my goal of becoming an engineer. But for now, I would love to be a part of the team that STADA Kenya will be training on different skills. I will take hairdressing as a skill to build on. My wish is to provide for my children so well that they will never feel any gap.

*The first incident happened when  
I was raped by a boy I saw  
frequently while selling mandazis.*





# AFTERWARD

STADA is privileged to bring forth stories, co-written by young mothers, about their experiences, strengths, and hopes to spark conversations about the presence, agency, and needs of young mothers and their children. We acknowledge, honor, and showcase the experiences of young mothers in social, economic, and political movements. Based on the anecdotal and lived experiences of members of our team we are also informed by the knowledge of young mothers' resourcefulness, potential power as a collective, and the imperative of addressing the injustices they face. Not only do they need support to build their capacities to care for themselves and their children, but they also deserve opportunities to critically challenge the systemic harm they face, to build networks of support, to collectivize to meet their needs, and to enhance the platforms through which their concerns can be voiced and addressed: to build their power.

We found that the young mothers had not been passive recipients of the injustice and gender-based violence they had faced in their journeys. They had taken and continued to act in the face of hardship and difficult experiences, employing strength, tenacity, and the utmost determination to influence and drive the change they hope to see in their lives and societies. Sections of this publication were written collaboratively with the participants and represent a collective voice of the young mothers. These women had become mothers in their teens or early 20s and had been engaged in individual and/or collective activism through local community-based organizations.

The telling and retelling of their stories of survival in the face of significant hardship and discrimination has provided testimony to the desire shared by all the young mothers to create different outcomes for their children and their communities. These young mothers in Kisumu are on a path to restoring their dignity and becoming persons, they can be proud of.



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We thank all the young mothers who courageously shared their stories with us, so that we could be vessels for their stories to contribute to the lives of many other people.

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