



**Toolkit  
for  
WHRDs**

# Stories of strength WHRDs paving the way

# Preface

Women Rights are Human Rights. This phrase is as fundamentally true and important today, as it was when it became a worldwide theme for women rights activists, starting from the end of the 1980s. Since then, many women have spoken up about their stories, about the inequalities and discrimination, the gender-based or sexual violence women suffer from globally.

Progress has been achieved: levels of female genital mutilation and child marriage have for example declined in recent years. Moreover, women's representation in political and decision-making positions is higher than ever before. However, much remains to be done. Women are still being discriminated in economic, political and social terms. For example, women have less access to basic needs like health services and are more likely to suffer from physical abuse. Therefore, all of us must keep up with our work towards a gender equal world. The Federal Republic of Germany strongly supports this matter, with declaring Feminist Foreign Policy and Feminist Development Policy guiding principles of its foreign and development policy.

There are two reasons why Germany did so. First, we believe that everyone has the same rights, regardless of their gender, their origin or other personal characteristics – this is enshrined in the International Bill of Human Rights. Therefore, a foreign and development policy that supports the realization of these rights is a matter of justice and principle. Secondly, gender equality is key for the achievement of the goals set in Agenda 2030: it makes societies stronger, more resilient. If women have equal rights and bear equal responsibility, there is less poverty, less hunger and more stability in the world. In other words, strengthening the rights, the resources and the representation of women and girls is to the benefit of us all. It is therefore our pleasure and our strong conviction to support Peace Brigades International and the Women Human Rights Defenders. We share the same vision of a future in which humans – irrespective of their gender - can live without discrimination, hate and injustice.

“With my highest solidarity and deep respect for your important work.”

**Sebastian Groth**

German Ambassador to Kenya, Somalia and the Seychelles





SEBASTIAN GROTH,  
German Ambassador to Kenya, Somalia and the Seychelles





ALBERTO FAIT  
Peace Brigades International - Kenya, Country Coordinator



# Foreword

Peace Brigades International (PBI) was founded in 1981 to undertake the task of peace-keeping, peace-making and peace-building, drawing inspiration from the philosophy and experience of the nonviolence movement. The mandate of PBI is to create space for peace and the defense of human rights. PBI and its volunteers arrived in Kenya in 2013 to provide accompaniment to Kenyan human rights activists at risk and support the creation of the first Social Justice Centers in Nairobi.

Since 2016 PBI Kenya actively engaged in countering violence against women and children by creating the Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) toolkit organizers' network, and working very closely with the toolkit organizers (TOs), a group of fifteen dedicated human rights activists who are living and working for their respective communities in the urban settlements of Mukuru, Langata, Kibera, Kawangware and Mathare. This book is a testimony of the journey made by the TOs, their communities and PBI Kenya from 2016 to 2023. It is a journey that has opened spaces for dialogue and collaboration among women, youth groups, traditional and religious leaders, institutions, legal entities, media houses and other actors who have provided contributions to the cause of fighting stigmas, prejudices and impunity surrounding sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in Kenya.

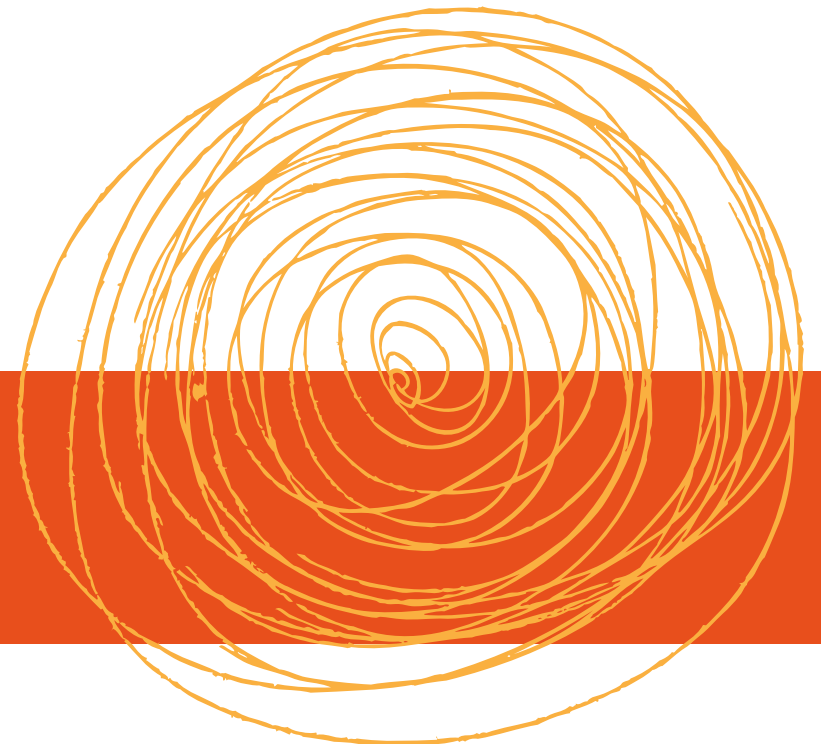
In this journey, the toolkit organizers (TOs) have gained credibility, reputation and recognition within their communities as champions in the struggle against inequality, abuses and violence affecting the most vulnerable within society, particularly women and children. The TOs will continue working to counter SGBV by supporting victims, raising awareness among communities, sensitizing the public and advocating at local and international levels.

PBI will continue supporting WHRDs working on SGBV by expanding the network beyond Nairobi. The human rights defenders, who are the protagonists of this book, continue with the struggle and will act as mentors for the incoming counterparts.

**“Together we have come a long way and together we will accomplish much more.”**

**Alberto Fait**

Peace Brigades International - Kenya  
Country Coordinator





# Asha Ali; Changing lives and stories for girls and women in Kawangware

Deep inside the informal settlements of Kawangware, Asha Ali Hussein emerges as a beacon of change, a steadfast defender of women human rights, and a driving force for the protection of children. For over two decades, Asha has transformed the lives of countless women and children, embodying the essence of empowerment against all odds, not only in Kawangware, but all across Nairobi.

Asha's human rights defence traces back to 2007, a pivotal year when she recognized the urgent need to address the plight of young girls forced into early marriage, having undergone the same.



ASHA ALI  
Human rights defender, Kawangware, in Nairobi



A profound “aha” moment, as she recalls it, compelled her to rally against these injustices.

“I discovered the plight of young girls being taken by a criminal sect for female genital mutilation and eventual marriage when I joined a children’s area advisory council for Dandora. These are children who were supposed to be in school,” Asha said. Her journey as a Human Rights Defender (HRD) began.

Asha said the realization reminded her of her own fate and pushed her to start defending the girls, not aware of what she was up against.

“One day in 2007, after I wrote an article on how the sect was endangering the lives of young girls, I was physically attacked by the sect forcing me to relocate from Dandora to Kawangware,” she said.

This did not deter Asha’s work and while in Kawangware, she continued defending women rights, though she proceeded with moderation until she found renewed energy and guidance through a partnership with Peace Brigades International in 2016.

The organization’s safety and security management trainings fortified her resolve and furnished her with essential tools to effectively champion change.

Since joining the PBI WHRD TOs’ network in 2016, Asha’s accomplishments resonate powerfully in Kawangware and the wider Nairobi. She has linked communities through referral of cases to the police, grassroots leaders, and national organizations advocating against gender-based violence. PBI’s

training extended Asha’s influence to championing child protection at the community level across Nairobi, under the Department of Children Services.

Asha is also a member of the ‘Mulika Wabakaji’ network, a rallying call to seek out, identify and bring criminals of sexual violence to justice. Through the network, Asha imparts knowledge, equipping young women with skills that empower them to escape vulnerability and risks, to gather evidence in case of SGBV.

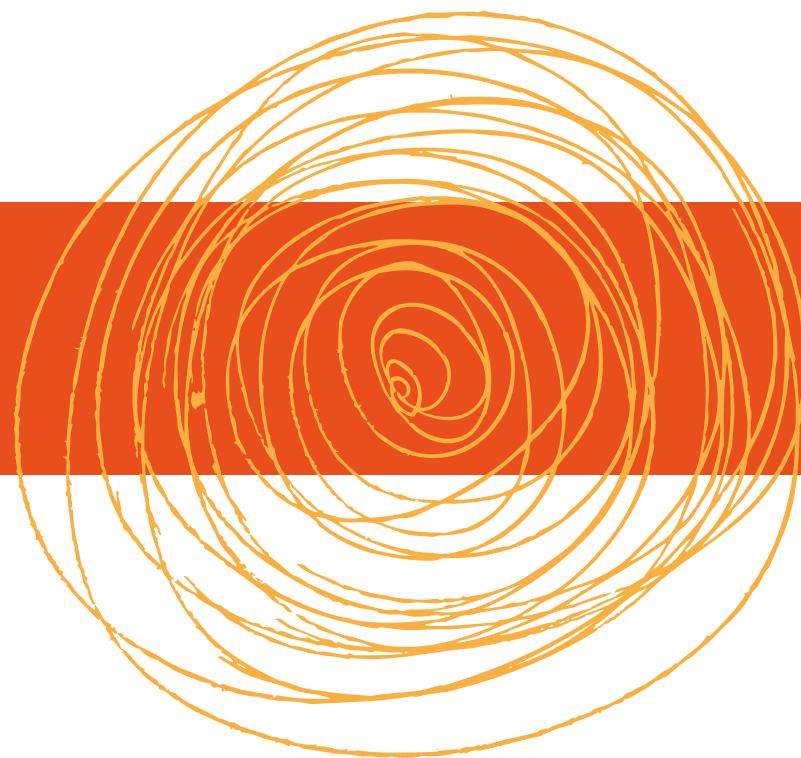
“We were also trained as paralegals; we were given skills on how to handle survivors of SGBV,” she adds.

Asha’s journey is a testament to the transformational potential of a single individual driven by the call of justice. Her key message to fellow HRDs resonates: “Let us be strong, let us fight for the women’s human rights, let us identify the cases on the ground and advocate for the rights of the girl child.”

She envisions a society where every child goes to school, no girl undergoes forced or child marriage.

Asha’s impact echoes far beyond Kawangware.

“Being a human rights defender is not a career, but a calling,” she asserts. She radiates resilience, continuing her advocacy even in the face of threats and adversities.





# Reviving Paused Dreams: Gertrude Iminza pushing teen moms to rise from the challenges of early parenthood

When she joined Binti United football club, Gertrude Iminza only wanted to advance her soccer skills. Though she was aware women issues affecting her community, she had never imagined herself being at the forefront advocating for change. Unbeknownst to her, the football club was started in order to utilize the power of sports to address social issues.

It was while in this club, that Gertrude, who had had her first child at 18, realized her passion for women's rights and empowerment. She started her advocacy by sharing knowledge, guidance, and support with her peers on how to navigate challenges of early motherhood and child marriages.

Gertrude's journey reached new heights when she joined the TOs' network in 2020. "When I joined PBI, in less than two years, I have attended diverse trainings, gained skills in several things that have made me venture into different fields of human rights advocacy," she says.

PBI equipped her with critical and analytical skills, knowledge, and empowerment to further her work as a HRD. She says she is now able to critically assess and escalate cases of human rights abuses and violations when they arise.

With the gained confidence, she passionately facilitates discussions, empowers others, and shares her knowledge in town hall meetings.

But Gertrude's journey has not been without challenges.

"As HRDs we face many challenges in the community. Insecurity tops my list. When the community realizes that you want to fight patriarchy, they fight you back," she explained.

The patriarchal grip in her community often resists the change she seeks to bring but her determination remains unfazed. She courageously tackles backlash, forges ahead, and stands strong as an advocate for women's rights.

"We are all human. We are not fighting men. We need to work together for a just society for all," she asserts, recognizing the need for broader support.

Her proudest moments are when she witnesses women speaking up, standing tall, pursuing leadership roles in the community and stating their position on key issues.

"My pride is seeing women seeking elective positions, even when they don't win," Gertrude adds.

As Gertrude's journey with PBI comes full circle, she reflects on her growth as a WHRD.

"PBI has made me a more effective and efficient HRD," she adds.

She stresses the importance of self-care and situational awareness, understanding that her own security is paramount to her continued impact as a human rights defender.

As she looks into the future, Gertrude's legacy transcends her individual efforts. She envisions a community where young girls and women are united against gender-based violence, both men and women are aware of their rights, and stand up for each other, asserting the need for collective action of WHRDs to cause desired change.





GETRUDE IMINZA  
Human Rights Defender, Kawangware, Nairobi.





**“Children have no ability to consent to Marriage or sex... and so many girls are still at a risk of forced and child marriages.”**



ASHA ALI  
Human Rights Defender, Kawangware, Nairobi.











TUNUKIWA  
CHAGUA BEI YAKO

20/- 20 mins

EDITAR OCHIENG  
Human Rights Defender, Kibera, Nairobi.

CO-OPERATIVE  
BANK



# Being Editar Ochieng: Defying Patriarchy and Liberating Women

In Kibera, Editar Ochieng's name is synonymous with women's rights. She is not just a human rights defender but a feminist activist and a social justice advocate. Her journey into the world of human rights activism was inspired by a profound motivation – the liberation of women in Africa.

For Editar, the struggle to empower women and combat patriarchy is deeply personal. Having survived sexual violence herself, she understands the immense challenges women face daily.

**“Women have been enslaved for a long time, and patriarchy has refused to understand women and treat them as human beings,”** Editar passionately asserts.

In her work, Editar volunteers for the Feminist Peace Rights and Justice Center and collaborates with various organizations globally. With support from PBI Kenya, through capacity enhancement of the TOs, Editar has been equipped with the knowledge and skills to navigate the complex web of human rights issues in her community.

One of her notable achievements has been establishing an office that empowers women economically, giving them independence and the ability to escape violence. Through partnerships with organizations like the United Nations

Populations Fund (UNFPA), Defenders Coalition, and Young Women Leadership Institute, she has transformed the lives of survivors of gender-based violence.

But not everybody sees Editar as a women human rights defender. Some see her as home-wrecker, an immoral woman and a threat to masculinity.

Editar narrates how she has endured threats, arrests, and attempts to silence her work, often from the very community she strives to empower. Some perpetrators and family members oppose her efforts, but she remains on course. According to Editar, concerted efforts and multi-sectoral approach in addressing human rights issues.

**“We are not losing hope whatsoever. We will only stop when individuals, regardless of gender or background, enjoy their universal human rights, free from oppression and inequality,”** she said.

Editar sees a promising future for the next cohort of TOs. She urges them to pursue their goals with bravery and tenacity in their pursuit for justice. She assures them that the support network and knowledge gained through the program will guide them on their journey.

“

**My motivation is women liberation especially in Africa. Women have been enslaved for a long time and patriarchy has refused to understand women and to treat women as a human beings... even now in this millennium women still report cases of specifically sexual and gender based violence and it worries a lot... Because when perpetrators are doing that - they are doing that to shut our dreams as women... the only way to liberate Africa is to liberate a woman,”** Says Editar







JUNIA  
Human Rights Defender, Kibera, Nairobi.





# Junia: An Anonymous Hero in the Fight for Human Rights

Though known to most residents of Kibera by name and deeds, very few of those who know him know his face. Junia says the move to be known only by name and deeds is intentional; to ensure his security as a human rights defender.

Born and bred in Kibera, Junia, a small-bodied child watched the violence meted against women helplessly. He had witnessed too many scenes of vice and deeply abhorred the manner in which violence against women had been normalized.

“Perpetrators faced no consequence unless the violence resulted into something more serious like death. Often, women were blamed for the violence,” Junia noted.

As he grew up, Junia began speaking against violence, tackling one case after another. He avoided visibility during his work to shield himself from attacks.

“Junia’ is my shield against those who would threaten me for the work I do in my community,” he explained.

Security is paramount in the world of activism, and his alias helps protect his identity while still allowing him to be a trusted member of the community and source of help for those in need.

As a leader in Kibera Social Justice Center, a movement of passionate human rights defenders, Junia believes in solidarity. He knows the burden of the work can be overwhelming, especially in terms of security, so he values the strength of collaboration and partnerships.

Junia’s journey with PBI began in 2020 when they recognized his potential to be a male champion advocating for women’s rights and against sexual violence. Through PBI, he has received invaluable training and opportunities. Last year, he was nominated by PBI Kenya for a six-month research fellowship at Dundee University in the UK where he honed his advocacy skills and expanded his global network.

Junia’s work led to the formation of a gender-based violence working group in his community, providing essential support and referral structures for survivors. He facilitated numerous town halls and community initiatives, which raised his profile and contributed to the visibility of his work and that of the WHRD TOs.

As part of sustainability of the WHRD TOs network, Junia has taken lead in establishing and running a community based organization that was birthed through the network.

“Through PBI, I have learned vital skills in monitoring, reporting, and documentation, that has enabled me be a more effective human rights defender,” he said.

Junia’s message to aspiring HRDs is one of persistence, resilience, and goal-oriented action. He emphasizes the importance of building relationships and networks, which have been instrumental in his journey. Junia’s mentorship of young activists has not only minimized risks but also multiplied the forces for justice.





Photos from a CGHRD Kenya Meeting in Nairobi's Mathare Area









# Silent Revolution: Lilian Awour's inspiring path as a Human Rights Champion

In the heart of Kwa Kariuki Village in Mathare Sub-County, a quiet force for human rights named Lilian Awour Onyango has been tirelessly working to uplift her community. Lilian's transformation from an ordinary resident to a fervent advocate for women's and girls' rights is a testament to determination, collaboration, and the pursuit of knowledge.

Lilian's advocacy began in 2016 when she rallied her community to address a critical issue: water shortages. Unknowingly, she embarked on the path of a human rights defender, leading demonstrations against water diversion and earning a reputation as a courageous leader.

Beyond water rights, Lilian, along with allies Rachel and Jecinter, recognized systemic injustices faced by women, particularly in leadership roles and cases of gender-based violence. This realization led to the establishment of the Coalition for Grassroots HRDs-Kenya (CGHRD-K) in 2016, a collective effort to combat these issues and provide a safe space for reporting GBV cases.

Their efforts bore fruit as former Nairobi Governor Evans Kidero initiated a clean water project, addressing the community's initial concern, and organizations provided water

drums. Realizing her strength in advocacy, Lilian jumped onto the next issue that had been bothering her for years; violence against women, a vice she withstood in her teen years. During her childhood, Lilian struggled with menstrual hygiene. Her commitment extended to ensuring girls had access to quality sanitary towels, supporting schools, and distributing sanitary towels to eliminate stigma. Her dedication to ending GBV resulted in a significant reduction in such cases in their community.

A turning point came when PBI Kenya recognized Lilian's impactful work. PBI's training equipped her with essential skills, transforming her approach from spontaneous activism to focused, effective advocacy. Lilian learned the importance of allies, including the police, and the power of social media in amplifying her efforts.

Reflecting on the growth of the WHRD TOs network since 2016, Lilian emphasizes that human rights advocacy is a journey of continuous learning. She encourages future organizers to approach their work with open minds, ready to learn, grow, and build on the foundation laid by those before them.







LILIAN AWUOR  
Human Rights Defender, Mathare, Nairobi.





VICTOR OWUOR  
Human Rights Defender, Mathare, Nairobi.

## Brushes of Activism: V-Slim's Artistic Journey in Human Rights Artivism

Since time immemorial, art has been used as a potent tool for activism. Victor Owuor, known as MC V-Slim, knows this too well and over the years, has seamlessly merged art and activism in a mission cause change in his community. His unique brand of “artivism” aims to uplift the community by championing human rights.

Initially, V-Slim was a celebrated entertainer drawing crowds in his neighborhood. However, the stark realities of Mathare

prompted a transformation from a popular figure to a committed human rights defender (HRD). Witnessing the community's struggles, lack of accountability, and a need for information, V-Slim recognized his role.

In 2017, during a tense election period, V-Slim joined CGHRD Kenya, exposing atrocities despite official denials. Seeking safety, they partnered with PBI Kenya, enabling evidence collection and V-Slim's role as a toolkit organizer.





V-Slim's impactful murals serve as "talking walls," transcending language barriers to convey messages of equality and social justice. Despite challenges, he persists in bridging the arts gap, empowering the youth, and combating crime through mentorship.

Motivated by a vision for a better Mathare, V-Slim sees art as a means to convey life's struggles and the importance of equality. Collaboration and solidarity, he believes, are crucial in the human rights fight.

For aspiring defenders, V-Slim advises dedication, passion, and community service, acknowledging the challenges. As his time with PBI concludes, he remains committed to supporting the next generation, emphasizing the program's impact on his human rights work. He recommends it wholeheartedly to those seeking to make a difference.





CHRISTOPHER OMOKE  
Human Rights Defender, Langata, Nairobi





## Standing Up For The Vulnerable And Downtrodden: Christopher Omoke's Take

Before he moved to the city, Christopher Omoke had seen so many painful stories of violence against women. After he settled in Kibera, he knew that it would be a good place to start his advocacy and call for change. All he hoped for, was to change a few people to see that human rights are fundamental for all human beings. But the problem was deep rooted, and Omoke could not look the other way when he witnessed a violation.

Omoke opted to collaborate with other people who were championing the same course. He joined Lady Soweto Gender Defenders, one of two men in the women's group, to advance his mission and foster equality. The group addressed gender-based violence and human rights violations in the community, with Omoke serving as a lifeline for numerous victims.

“For one to engage in the work of defending human rights, it is important to have a personal drive and motivation. It is important to be able to also distinguish between all the good, and the bad that are happening within your community so that you're able to focus on the vice,” he insists, his eyes lit with conviction.

Despite challenges and scepticism, including from his own family, Omoke's transformative journey was supported by collaborations with organizations like PBI Kenya, Amnesty International, and Kenya Human Rights Commission. Progressive training equipped him with advocacy, counselling, and activism skills, enabling him to provide solace to his community.

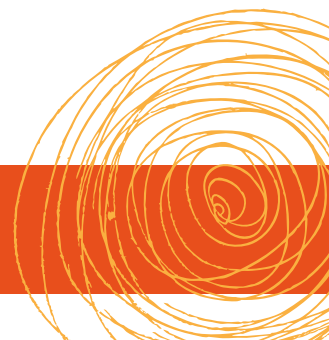
“Why do you insist on standing up for other people? If couples are having domestic disputes, leave them alone to resolve it themselves,” said Omoke about his family's opinions.

Yet, it was the grateful hug of a survivor that made his family understand the profound impact he was making. “I wish you knew from which pit this guy pulled me! He is the reason I am alive,” he recounted a survivor's testimony.

His partnership with PBI, initiated in 2016, further refined his skills and broadened his horizons. Omoke emphasizes personal growth, citing training on community living and accessing help as pivotal. The collaboration facilitated meetings with human rights defenders from diverse backgrounds, fostering the exchange of ideas and experiences.

“I have seen a lot of personal growth. I got training through PBI on how to live within my community and the right channels to get help in case of anything,” says Omoke.

As the PBI first cohort program ends, Omoke stands as proof of the transformative power of training and collaboration. With empathy and a calling to help others, he encourages youth and men to join the fight against sexual and gender-based violence. At an advanced age, he remains dedicated to advocating for women's rights, urging younger generations to stand up for a harmonious and just society for all.







GRACE PAPA  
Human Rights Defender, Mukuru, Nairobi





## Empowerment Unveiled: Grace Papa's Story of Resilience and Progress

Grace Papa's unwavering commitment to uplifting her community over two decades ago as a community health volunteer and a member of the Kenya Red Cross.

Her journey as a HRD began in the early 2000s, driven by the stark injustices witnessed during post-election violence in Kenya. Grace served as a bridge between the suffering community and limited healthcare facilities, offering first aid, calling ambulances, and comforting the traumatized.

In 2016, a transformative moment occurred when she encountered PBI Kenya and was introduced to human rights advocacy and gender-based violence (prevention by Brandon, a PBI Kenya board member.

As a HRD, Grace faces challenges, including threats from GBV perpetrators. In defilement cases, abusive fathers exploit their breadwinner status to evade accountability. Despite these risks, Grace remains undeterred, placing the safety of vulnerable women and children at the forefront.

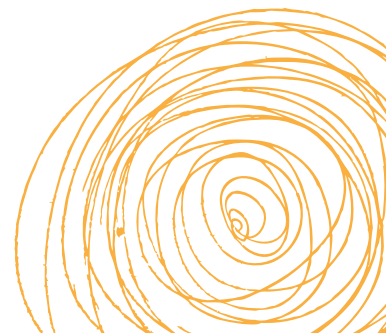
A significant achievement is her impact during the COVID-19 pandemic, where she raised

awareness about GBV, human trafficking, early marriages, and child exploitation. By empowering her community, she successfully reduced the prevalence of these issues, leading to significant drops in child trafficking cases through her informal school for young kids.

Grace's motivation is succinctly expressed: "It comes from my heart." Her profound compassion drives her tireless work, refusing to stand idly by when she can make a difference. Her unwavering commitment to helping others is her guiding principle.

Through her partnership with PBI, Grace gained valuable training and resources, enhancing her capacity for human rights work. Her advocacy skills were honed through town hall meetings and media work, making her an effective human rights advocate.

As the first phase of PBI's toolkit program concludes, Grace envisions the future of human rights defenders in her community. She aspires to continue mentoring and training the next generation of HRDs, urging PBI to expand its reach to include a broader mix of age groups for sustainable efforts.





# From Tragedy to Triumph: Beatrice Khavere, The Child Rights' Activist

Beatrice Khavere's foray into human rights advocacy sprang from personal tribulations, rooted in a family environment lacking equality. Undeterred by the challenges obstructing her educational pursuit, Khavere refused to let circumstances shape her destiny, stating, "I gained newfound energy and a strong belief in terms of defending people when I sensed their rights were being violated."

But the true crucible of her commitment to human rights arose amid tragedy, following her husband's fatal road accident in 2007. Faced with cultural pressures, including the contentious practice of wife inheritance, Khavere had to stand up for herself.

Khavere came to know about PBI Kenya in 2016 as the organization sought human rights defenders to support. Recollecting the moment, she notes, "They wanted volunteers as women human rights defender under the PBI umbrella." Joining PBI Kenya as a Women Human Rights Defender Toolkit Organizer, she seized the opportunity to augment her knowledge and skills, particularly in advocating against gender-based violence.

Amidst the challenges faced during her years as a Human Rights Defender, security threats loomed large, especially working within the precarious environs of Mukuru's informal settlements. Adopting safety precautions, Khavere explains, "The first thing is to avoid bringing survivors to your home because that will later compromise

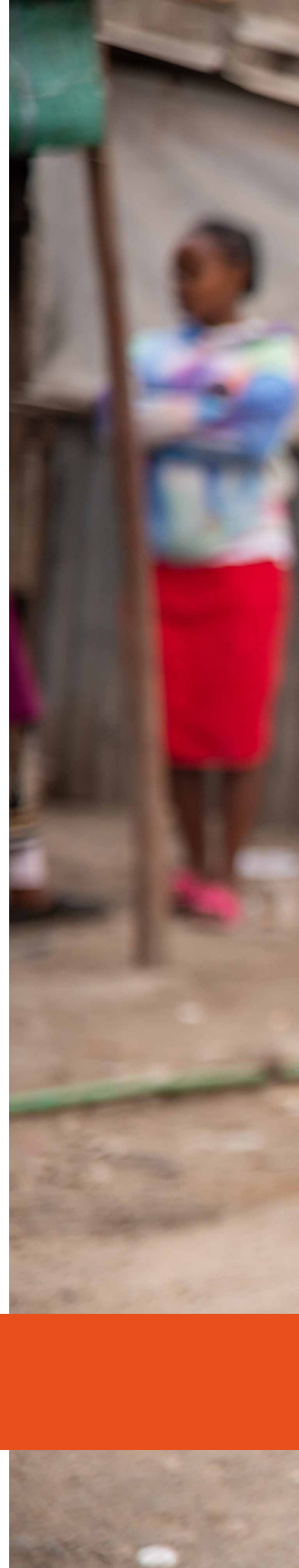
your safety - this is common with intimate partner violence cases."

Despite the hurdles, Khavere's work as a human rights defender bore fruit, notably in cases involving neglected children. Her collaborations with law enforcement resulted in the rescue of vulnerable children, a source of particular pride and fulfillment. She describes these instances as her "best moments."

Her partnership with PBI as a Toolkit Organizer further enriched her journey, providing essential risk assessment and psychosocial support. Reflecting on this, she notes, "It has helped me to assess my risks and develop security plans for mitigation, which ultimately contributes to my security."

As the first phase of the PBI toolkit program concludes and preparations for the second phase begin, Khavere underscores the necessity for ongoing capacity enhancement for TOs. Envisioning her role in the next phase as a mentor, she emphasizes imparting the true essence of human rights work, prioritizing passion and service over financial gain.

Beatrice Khavere's narrative epitomizes the unwavering dedication of human rights defenders striving for positive change in their communities. Standing tall amid adversity, she exemplifies resilience and unwavering commitment to the cause of justice.







BEATRICE KHAVERE  
Human Rights Defender, Mukuru, Nairobi







## Balancing between Personal Security and Defending Human Rights: Francis Sakwa's strategy

In Nairobi's Mathare settlement, Sakwa Francis, a passionate human rights advocate, stands out amid poverty and challenges. Using a pseudonym to protect his family, Sakwa is a powerful force for change.

Sakwa's activism started in 2006 when he witnessed human rights abuses in Mathare, including violence and injustice. Extrajudicial killings, rampant violence, and the plight of women and girls subjected to abuse were regular occurrences in Mathare where he grew up. He emphasizes that the environment itself compels residents to become activists, saying, "The situation forces you to become a human rights defender."

Despite facing arrests early on, Sakwa found support from PBI Kenya which provided crucial assistance and security training. He admits that though his early activism was fuelled by a deep sense of injustice, it initially lacked structure and posed a great security threat to him. This resulted in quite a few arrests and court proceedings against him. It was in this pivotal moment that PBI Kenya came into his life. PBI accompanied

him to courtrooms, police stations, and provided vital security training.

He notes, "PBI has assisted me in becoming a more organized activist."

Balancing activism with personal life and navigating diverse beliefs within the human rights community poses challenges. Sakwa acknowledges the difficulty, stating, "Balancing professional work and family becomes a challenge."

With PBI's support, Sakwa gained skills in conflict transformation and security, enabling more strategic activism. He envisions a future role as a mentor, passing on knowledge to the next generation, and encourages newcomers to embrace diversity within the human rights sphere.

In Mathare and Nairobi, human rights work is vital for bringing hope, sharing information, and holding those in power accountable. Sakwa hopes for a future where human rights defenders remain at the forefront of justice and change.





SAKWA FRANCIS  
Human Rights Defender, Mathare, Nairobi



# Defending Dignity: The Unfazed Spirit of Judith Adhiambo

In Nairobi's Lang'ata area, where the struggle for justice intersects with the daily lives of its residents, Judith Adhiambo Ochieng has emerged as a guardian of human rights. A woman of unfaltering commitment, Judith is not only a human rights defender but also a paralegal and a passionate advocate for women's rights. Her journey from the slums of Kibera to the forefront of the battle for justice is a testament to the indomitable spirit of those dedicated to uplifting their communities.

Growing up in Kibera, Judith witnessed the stark realities of gender-based violence (GBV) and human rights violations on a daily basis. Initially, she accepted these injustices as normal, but her interaction with civil society organizations opened her eyes to the fact that GBV was a violation of human rights. The 2017 post-election violence served as a catalyst, prompting Judith to take action. She recognized that documenting these violations could bring about change, leading her to co-found the Lang'ata Legal Aid Center (LLAC).

As a human rights defender, Judith's life is fraught with challenges and risks. Her work often places her in the crosshairs of those who feel threatened by her advocacy. Yet, she persists, driven by her firm dedication to justice. Her experiences have given her insights into the complexities of GBV cases, forcing her to navigate delicate situations where she champions the cause of victims who may later turn against her. Despite these challenges, her resilience remains strong.

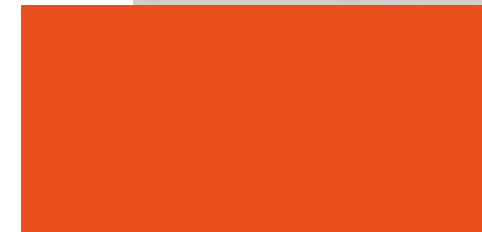
“One of the most significant challenges faced by Judith and LLAC is the constant threat to their

safety. Handling cases of GBV can lead to retaliation from those implicated, putting the defenders' lives at risk. Relocating the organization due to threats and ensuring the safety of volunteers are ongoing struggles. Financial constraints are another hurdle, as LLAC operates on a shoestring budget, relying on volunteers and pro-bono legal services.”

Despite these obstacles, Judith and LLAC have achieved remarkable success. They've trained and graduated 21 paralegals to serve the community, partnered with universities, and opened their doors to advocates offering pro-bono services. Legal aid clinics have reached out to the vulnerable, ensuring that they have access to justice. Their impact extends beyond their immediate community, creating a ripple effect that empowers others to stand up for human rights.

“Through her partnership with Peace Brigades International, Judith learned that being a human rights defender is an ongoing journey with no defined endpoint. The toolkit provided by PBI has strengthened her capacity, enabling her to lead LLAC effectively. It has also emphasized the importance of building a network of community organizers to create a unified front in the fight for justice.”

Judith's story is a testament to the resilience of human rights defenders who, despite facing grave risks, continue to champion justice and dignity for the most vulnerable in society. Her unshakable spirit serves as an inspiration, and her work with LLAC continues to make a profound impact on the Lang'ata community, ensuring that the voices of the marginalized are heard and their rights protected.







JUDITH ADHIAMBO  
Human Rights Defender, Langata, Nairobi



TUZIDI KUDUM

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RUKIA GODANA  
Human Rights Defender,  
Mukuru, Nairobi





## Rukia Godana: A Fearless Voice for Justice in Nairobi's Mukuru settlement

A survivor of female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage, Rukia Godana, shares that her harrowing experiences fuelled her determination to see a world where people respect human rights.

Her story as a human rights defender began from witnessing the pervasive injustices that plagued her community in Mukuru – extrajudicial killings, rampant sexual and gender-based Violence (SGBV) and child negligence.

Rukia, as a Borana and Muslim woman, feels compelled to challenge barriers for women in her community, expressing her goal to “break the cycle of discrimination and systemic disenfranchisement.”

Reflecting on her journey, the HRD notes, “The injustices I witnessed in Mukuru drove me to be a human rights defender.” Her commitment runs deep, rooted not only in observations but also in cultural perspective. Coming from the Borana community where women’s voices are rarely heard, Rukia created a niche for herself where she is widely known to speak for women.

Rukia mentions receiving valuable training that honed her advocacy skills while working with different organizations. But it is her partnership with PBI Kenya that started in 2021 that ‘transformed’ her work as a human rights defender, expanding her knowledge and boosting her confidence.

“PBI not only expanded my knowledge but also boosted my confidence. I became a trainer on SGBV and gained confidence in engaging my community

on issues affecting them,” she said. “This raised my visibility and my Borana community began appreciating the work I do.”

Acknowledging the challenges of her role, Rukia notes that intimidation and threats from both state and non-state actors became her *no*lens *volens* companion.

“You cannot avoid the threats as a HRD. You only learn to be secure and work around it. I once almost gave up on this course sometime back when I was following up on a defilement case. I received threats to my life and was publicly humiliated by a compromised investigating officer during a community dialogue forum,” she recalled.

Even amidst challenges, Rukia’s accomplishments shine. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she rallied to support pregnant girls who had been chased away from their homes. Rukia expresses her happiness when called to attend cases or provide guidance, stating, “I’m also happy when I’m called to go attend to a case or offer guidance on what to do regarding a case.”

Rukia envisions herself as a mentor, expressing her key takeaway from the PBI toolkit: a “deepened understanding of case management, safety measures, and the importance of knowing my allies.” She emphasizes the power of grassroots activism and serves as an inspiration for change, working tirelessly to build “a more just and equitable society for all.”





CATHERINE WANGUI  
Human Rights Defender, Kibera, Nairobi





## From Survivor to Defender: Catherine Wangui's Journey of Resilience

Catherine Wangui's journey from a survivor to a champion of justice is a remarkable tale of courage and resilience. Cate, as she is affectionately called, drew her motivation to become an HRD from personal experience.

"I was a victim of the 2007/08 election violence in Kenya, an ordeal that left me terribly scarred," she narrated.

However, it was witnessing the violations suffered by her close friends that informed her desire for knowledge and tools to fight for justice. But first, she needed to heal from her trauma.

Cate joined an organization called Kibera Women For Peace and Fairness, which focused on reconciliation and healing after the election violence.

"Initially I harbored so much bitterness. My involvement in the organization gradually helped me see the importance of forgiveness and individual responsibility," she said.

Collective healing taught Cate the benefits of synergies and collaborations and they together, they embarked on a journey to end the cycle of tribalism, bitterness, and injustice.

"It was through this journey that I met PBI Kenya, who offered training to some of our members," Cate mentioned, "This training not only equipped me with valuable skills but also allowed me to find my voice as an activist, focusing primarily on the rights of women and girls."

She emphasizes the importance of advocating for the voiceless and how it fostered recognition of her work beyond the country.

"PBI recognized my work and nominated me to attend a speaker tour to France and Germany in 2019. The tour connected me with international human rights actors," she said, "The follow up to this speaker tour made me get an invitation to participate in a peace forum in Dakar in 2022".


Cate acknowledges that her work as an HRD did not come without its challenges. She faced threats, navigated complex cases, and intimidation. But her commitment to justice was resolute.

"One of my most significant achievements was securing justice for a young boy who had been sexually abused by his teacher," she proudly shares. "I mobilized fellow HRDs, took the victim to the hospital, and ensured the perpetrator faced legal consequences."

Cate credits her involvement with PBI for bringing positive changes to her work as an HRD. "PBI's training and support helped me and my colleagues develop our skills, capacity, and confidence." With the guidance of a local facilitator, Florence, who understood their HRD community's dynamics, they became more effective in their work. This empowered them to address issues like gender-based violence and promote peace within their community.

"As the first cohort of the toolkit organizer program comes to an end," she reflects, "we have become a cohesive and empowered group, better equipped to address the unique challenges of our community."



A woman with short dark hair, a nose ring, and red lipstick is sitting in front of a vibrant, multi-colored patterned background. She is wearing a green t-shirt with white text. The text on the t-shirt reads: "IF YOU DONT FIGHT FOR ALL WOMEN YOU FIGHT FOR NO WOMEN". There is a small circular logo on the right sleeve of the t-shirt.

**IF YOU DONT  
FIGHT FOR  
ALL WOMEN  
YOU FIGHT  
FOR  
NO WOMEN**

JECINTER AGUNJA  
Human Rights Defender, Mathare, Nairobi





## Navigating Challenges with Purpose: Jecinter Agunja's Pursuit of Justice for Mathare residents

In the challenging landscape of Nairobi's Mathare informal settlement, Jecinter Agunja stands out as a beacon of purposeful dedication to her community, leaving a lasting impact. Reflecting on her journey into human rights advocacy over a decade ago, Jecinter attributes her transformation into a formidable advocate to her collaboration with PBI Kenya.

Motivated by the belief that she can make a difference in one person's life, Jecinter expresses, "What motivated me is the fact that you can change one person." Her commitment to becoming a Human Rights Defender stems from a profound understanding that winning a case for a sexual assault victim can create a ripple effect of positive change within her community. She firmly believes in the power of small changes leading to significant transformations in the future.

Acknowledging the challenges of being a human rights defender, Jecinter notes, "The job doesn't pay as much." Many in her circle pursue additional education to secure their futures, recognizing the financial limitations of the job. Moreover, facing internal challenges, Jecinter recalls a time when her community misinterpreted her support for LGBTQ community as supporting immorality and encouraging youths to join the community, emphasizing the risks associated with her line of work.

Despite the hardships, Jecinter's passion remains unwavering. "You need passion to do this job," she asserts.

Even in the face of adversity, she understands that change often comes at a price and is determined to pay it, even in part, if she has to.

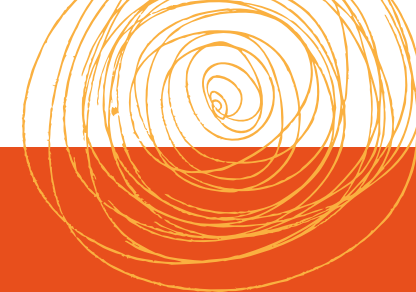
Through her collaboration with PBI, Jecinter gained invaluable knowledge and essential skills in areas such as referral pathways, psychosocial support, and advocacy strategies. The training emphasized the importance of following due process, leading to significant results with sexual assault perpetrators receiving substantial prison sentences. Completing the first phase of the PBI TOs Network, Jecinter earned a scholarship, allowing her to re-enroll in an adult education program, successfully completing high school level education and currently pursuing a course at KCA University—a fresh start to an academic journey paused by the challenges of growing up in the ghetto.

Reflecting on her transformative journey, Jecinter emphasizes, "The PBI toolkit training enables one to think in another angle," highlighting the strategic and informed approach necessary for effective human rights advocacy. Looking ahead to the next cohort, she wishes for committed HRDs from related areas of advocacy to ensure a coordinated approach to program implementation by the TOs and an improved completion rate for all TOs.

Jecinter's impact reaches beyond the borders of Mathare, resonating with those who share her vision for a more just and equitable world.



# Endings and Beginnings: Toolkit Organizers' Experiences and Lessons



Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) play a crucial role in advocating for gender equality, social justice, and human rights. Often, WHRDs participate in projects and initiatives to amplify their impact. In the realm of human rights and social justice, WHRDs play a pivotal role in challenging and reshaping the status quo. Their commitment to the advancement of women's rights, social equality, and justice is often marked by their active involvement in various projects and initiatives.

The path of a WHRD is seldom linear, and sometimes, they find themselves facing difficult decisions in their professional and personal life, such as exiting the Toolkit Organisers network. In this article, we delve into the experiences and lessons learned by WHRDs who have contributed greatly to the TOs network in the past.

## **Maria Mutauta**



Maria Mutauta's journey began with a fierce commitment to justice, stemming from her early triumph in a national essay competition addressing violence against women. Her quest led her from her homeland of Kenya to the Philippines, where she fought for civilian protection amidst conflict. Upon her return to Kenya, she

championed feminism and sought justice for victims of extrajudicial executions and violence against women. One of Maria's key learnings was the power of networking and collaboration. She envisions a revival of global grassroots human rights defender groups to facilitate cross-country cooperation. Her story stands as a testament to the tenacity of human rights defenders, demonstrating that the pursuit of justice requires continuous reflection and adaptation.

However, her path was fraught with personal struggles, particularly alcoholism, exacerbated by the emotional toll of her work, which made her quit the program. She candidly shared, "I didn't seek help, and I don't know whether those guys at the TO program knew I was struggling." Her story is a stark reminder of the challenges

that WHRDs can face in coping with the immense pressures and emotional burdens of their work. It underscores the crucial lesson that self-care and support systems are not just a matter of physical health but also mental and emotional well-being. Maria's journey urges us to destigmatize discussions surrounding addiction and mental health in the context of human rights advocacy. It highlights that compassion, understanding and accessible resources for WHRDs struggling with addiction are essential to ensure their personal healing and continued dedication to the cause of justice and equality. This experience drove Maria to her current mission, which is centred on addiction awareness and recovery, utilizing her True Addiction Podcast as a safe space for those battling addiction.

## **Rahma Wako**



Rahma Wako, fondly known as Mama Rahma, dedicated herself to seeking justice for survivors of gender-based violence. Her motivation arose from personal experience as a survivor, with a goal of eradicating gender violence within her community. The Toolkit Organizer program bolstered Rahma's profile and empowered her to facilitate access to help and justice for GBV victims and survivors, including the successful resolution of a case involving a speech-impaired victim.

During her tenure in the program, Rahma's participation in Dialogue Mtaani (town halls) raised awareness about various forms of injustice and their appropriate channels of redress. Her participation in the speaker tour 2019 in the UK is a key highlight in her life as a WHRD as it expanded her perspective on human rights. Mama Rahma is a proud award winner of the Mathare Heroes Award 2015 and the HRD of the Year 2016.

She cites financial challenges as one of those faced by HRDs since they are volunteers without formal employment, grappling with balancing between earning a livelihood and fulfilling their responsibilities within the program. Even though she left the TOs network, Rhama is still doing human rights work in a different





capacity and is currently the convener of Kiamaiko social justice centre. Her decision to redirect her efforts towards another area of human rights work is a valuable lesson in flexibility and adaptability. It highlights that WHRDs possess a broad spectrum of skills and knowledge that can be applied to various causes, and that their commitment to human rights transcends specific projects. Her aspiration for the program's future is its expansion into regions such as Isiolo and Marsabit, where Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) remains rampant.

### Kevin Otieno



Kevin Otieno is known as a dedicated HRD who devoted his life to combating Sexual and Gender-Based Violence within his community. Kevin's motivation as a human rights defender stemmed from a profound desire to safeguard the vulnerable, nurtured by his mother, a HRD herself. His impactful work did not only raise awareness about the often-silenced issue of SGBV but also provided referrals to survivors. Kevin's journey as a HRD has not only been about the profound impact he has had on her community but also the invaluable personal and professional growth he gained. He became a more confident, courageous, and effective HRD.

However, his journey took an unexpected turn as he grappled with financial expectations that went unmet. The disparity between his aspirations and the project's financial reality became a considerable source of frustration and stress. Ultimately, Kevin had to make the difficult decision to leave the network, recognizing that his financial stability was paramount and is currently engaged in employment. While this was a challenging choice, it was also a reminder of the complex realities HRDs often face, where passion meets the harsh constraints of financial sustainability. Kevin's experience highlights the importance of ensuring adequate resources and support for HRDs to continue their vital work, acknowledging that the financial

In conclusion, the stories of Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) who have passed through the Toolkit Organisers network offer profound insights into the challenges and resilience of those who stand up for justice and human rights. These WHRDs, who embarked on the path of activism and advocacy, faced circumstances that required them to make difficult decisions. Their journeys, though marked by adversity and obstacles, are a testament to their dedication to the causes they hold dear. Their experiences underline the importance of acknowledging and addressing the specific challenges faced by HRDs. As we continue to support and empower these remarkable individuals, we must recognize the need for more flexible and adaptable programs that account for the unique situations they encounter. We thank Maria, Rahma, Kevin, and Jacqueline for the profound impact they left on the TOs network.

well-being of these dedicated individuals is integral to the success of human rights initiatives.

### Jackline Kwamboka

Jackline Kwamboka is a WHRD, who like many others, committed herself passionately to a project aimed at advancing women rights. She participated in the Toolkit Organizers network until 2021.



Jackline started her journey as a community health volunteer where she attended a number of trainings and has increased her knowledge and skills to help others. The trainings extended to gender-based violence which was then very common in her community in Mukuru. Jackline and her team organized

awareness forums, mobilized the members of the community and made them aware of their rights. "We empower people by advising and encouraging them to stand up for what is right. We might not be able to provide financial support, but we offer knowledge," Jackline noted in an earlier interview. The greatest challenge she encountered as a WHRD was not always being taken seriously. "Some people believe that we are not honest with them, because we are not getting paid," Jackline once said in an interview. She also faced financial challenges and would once in a while be forced to dip in her own pockets in order to follow up on a case.

As a woman, she felt unsafe working at night, because she didn't want to give chance to 'bad things' to happen to her. "Human rights activists receive threats to stop following up on a case. These threats can come from people who have been bribed by the perpetrator. Despite these challenges, I stand firmly," she noted. Jackline expressed her delight in joining the Toolkit for WHRDs in 2016. "When women want to become leaders, they are often told by men that they cannot. We are told that we have to follow the traditions. But I say no, we should speak out!" she asserted.





FLORENCE MWIKALI  
Program's officer, PBI-Kenya.

## Empowering Heroes in Nairobi: Florence Mwakali speaks on PBI's Impact

A quiet but powerful revolution has been taking place, nurturing the defenders of human rights and aiding them in protecting the vulnerable. Meet Florence Mwikali Kitheka, the Project Officer for the Women Human Rights Defenders Toolkit Organizers project at PBI Kenya.

Florence joined PBI in August 2019, inheriting a project initiated in 2016 to support Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) advocating for the rights of women and girls in Nairobi's informal settlements. Her motivation was clear – she sought to make a difference in the lives of those struggling for justice. PBI's distinctive approach, focusing on empowering HRDs to do their work, resonated deeply with her.

“PBI's mandate is to increase the civic space for the work of human rights defenders who face challenges and risks because of their efforts in defense of human rights. This project mainly focuses on ensuring safety and security of WHRDs, capacity enhancement through training, and connecting them with essential networks, for the effectiveness and efficiency of their work,” Florence explains.

### **Impacts of the project on HRDs lives and work**

The TOs have improved their security through mutual support, exchange of best practices, and security trainings. The consistent monthly network meetings (over 80 meetings since 2016) have provided a solid foundation for sharing security incidents, analysis, and protection strategies.



The Toolkit Organizers Network held over 70 Town hall meetings, reaching over 7000 people. A town hall is a community meeting where members meet to discuss issues, share information, and make decisions on issues that affect them. This has led to increased acceptance of TOs' work in their communities, increased recognition that continues to promote their safety and security. In the town halls, community members and TOs exchanged knowledge and became more aware of handling survivors of SGBV, access to justice process, referral pathways, and legal instruments for SGBV, particularly the Sexual Offences Act. Through the project, WHRDs were able to develop resources for effective community education, such as a simplified version of the Sexual Offences Act, making it more accessible to HRDs and the community.

Over 10 trainings have been offered based on identified capacity gaps, such as access to justice for survivors of SGBV, legal instruments (national and international), SASA - a community engagement model for violence against women and girls, movement building and monitoring, documenting, and reporting human rights violations (MDR). WHRDs have applied new knowledge and skills in their work, contributing to improved efficiency and effectiveness. They have been active in sharing their knowledge with others within their locality.

Improved communication channels between WHRDs and the international community, strengthened collaboration, legitimacy, and improved relationships have been fostered through linkages, networking, joint activities, and partnerships.

Strengthened relations between the PBI team and the TOs have contributed to trust building, improved communication, and boosted morale for the TOs.

TOs, community members, and PBI have created 40 murals, which serve as forms of information, education, and communication. There has been constant engagement by the TOs through social media, increasing the visibility of WHRD Toolkit Organizers network and their work, expanding the support network (locally and abroad through online engagement), and raising awareness levels on SGBV and women's rights.

They have received six psychosocial support sessions, leading to improved HRDs' physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. These sessions have refueled, re-energized, and improved team connectedness.

In 2021, the current cohort of Toolkit Organizers initiated a campaign to increase the conviction rate of rape and defilement,

which ignited the interest of other like-minded partners who later formed a consortium of over 20 partners working on Human and Gender Rights as well as peace, security, and development.

Connecting HRDs with international actors has contributed to raising their profiles and increasing solidarity beyond borders, continuously exposing them to opportunities for material, financial, and technical support.

Not only did the Toolkit Organizers become more efficient and effective in their work, but they also gained visibility and recognition for their tireless efforts. The establishment of their own community-based organization for sustainability is one such moment.

### **Challenges and Achievements**

The journey was not without challenges. The HRDs often faced threats, intimidation, and attacks. Because the TOs are volunteers, economic hard times have posed challenges to their survival since they have to balance between their volunteer work and livelihood. The wrong perception that working with international organizations means the transfer of funds has raised expectations of the communities they serve. However, despite these challenges, there are very notable milestones in the journey of WHRD toolkit organizers. Florence is continually inspired by the resilience and courage of women human rights defenders who, in the face of adversity, amplify their voices to bring about positive change for themselves and their communities.

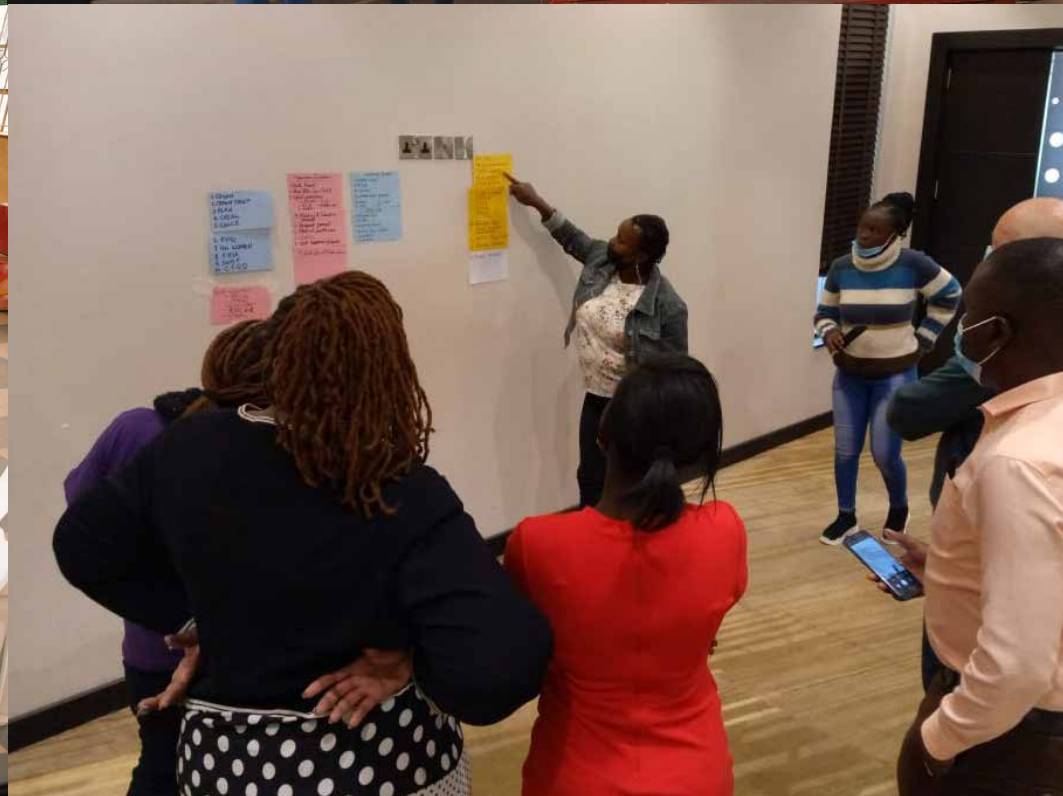
### **Key Learnings and the Road Ahead**

Florence envisions a future where the network expands into multiple counties, supporting a greater number of WHRDs. "Now that the project is expanding to Kilifi County, tailored learning is essential because the areas have different contexts, and we, therefore, need to make the project responsive to the needs and challenges faced by the incoming WHRD TOs. There is a need to continue prioritizing the security of human rights defenders, including digital security. Addressing the mental wellbeing of WHRDs is imperative because of the emotional toll their work has on them. Adaptability is key, and our programs should continue being flexible in responding to evolving challenges."

"As we embark on the second phase of the project, we are fueled by the progress and gains we have made and inspired by the road ahead. Our dedication to the cause remains unwavering, and we will build upon the foundation we have already laid. We will harness the lessons learned from the first phase to make our support to the HRDs even more effective and sustainable."



# Toolkit organisers in action...









THAYU S.S.

KOMESHA DHULUMA ZA



### **Walls Speak... for longer**

Striking murals, powerful statements against sexual and gender-based violence. Each brushstroke tells a story of resilience, unity, and the collective call to end violence against women.



KIJINSIA MTAANI







NAOMI BARASA  
Board Chairperson, PBI-Kenya



## Way Forward

# Nurturing Champions of Change: Naomi Barasa's Journey

In a world often overshadowed by darkness, systemic patriarchal unfairness, and where the struggle for justice can seem relentless, there emerges a guiding light named Naomi. Her journey with PBI dates back to the year 2011 as she was among the people inviting PBI to Kenya after she identified a gap in the protection of human rights defenders working in the country. , Naomi has transformed the lives of countless human rights defenders whom she has been involved with from her early beginnings: a testament to the profound impact that one individual, armed with knowledge and personal drive, can have in illuminating the path toward justice and human rights.

Motivated by a relentless hunger for justice, Naomi felt compelled to take action. She recognized that her role extended beyond mere sympathy and observation; she needed to be a catalyst for change. Her journey into the realm of HRDs began as a quest to stand beside the marginalized, discriminated, and oppressed. In her own words, "It takes each one of us to build change." She developed of the toolkit of women human rights defenders.

### Learning Through the Experiences of HRDs

The implementation of the first phase of the PBI toolkit has been a crucible of transformation driven by the experiences of the HRDs. She understands that their journeys are deeply personal, with lessons learned through trials and tribulations that leave indelible marks. "One of my highlights when I look at them is growth and attitude," Naomi acknowledges. HRDs, some burdened by apathy and self-doubt, continue to emerge as proactive champions who recognize the power of collective action.

### Building a Sustainable Movement of HRDs

The project has been running since 2016, supporting 15 WHRDs. However, the project has now expanded geographically to Kilifi County and has increased the number of WHRDs supported by the program by an additional 15 TOs. As the first cohort of the PBI toolkit program approaches its transition phase, the journey

forward is illuminated by their commitment to progress. This transition involves multifaceted elements. Naomi's vision for the PBI Toolkit involves passing down knowledge and skills as HRDs take on mentorship roles, ensuring the sustainability of the movement. "Those cohorts will form the movement," she says. To achieve this, selected individuals from the first cohort will be supported in becoming trainers themselves, as Naomi explains, "Ultimately, we must build proper trainers, and maybe that, for me, is through a strong Training of Trainers (ToT) model." This emphasis on training highlights the program's commitment to empowering HRDs for the long term. Moreover, HRDs are expected to remain engaged in advocacy, turning their training into action. As Naomi stresses, "We must be very focused. We know what we want," highlighting the program's dedication to practical change. Lastly, the transition underscores the importance of collective action and collaboration among HRDs. In doing so, HRDs continue to forge a path toward lasting transformation in their communities.

### Challenges Strengthen Resolve

Naomi understands that the path she treads as a feminist and human rights defender is not without its obstacles. Her work often places her in perilous situations, where personal safety remains a constant concern. Yet, it is precisely these challenges that have fortified her resolve and solidified her commitment to the cause. In the face of resistance and potential danger, she lives by the mantra and advises HRDs, "Nothing is worth your life; you are only useful to us 6ft above the ground." Safety and collaboration are the cornerstones of effective advocacy.

### Empowering HRDs, Transforming Communities

Naomi's greatest achievements are the achievements of the HRDs she continues to mentor. Her guidance has played a pivotal role in campaigns that have led to transformative change. She understands that their journeys are uniquely theirs, and the lessons learned through trials and tribulations are often the most profound.





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