

THE STAR LADY

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A SOCIAL ENTERPRISE MODEL
FOR FEMALE YOUTH EMPLOYMENT
IN SOUTH-EASTERN KENYA, EAST AFRICA

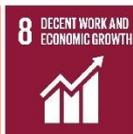
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❖ *The Star Lady*, a bi-weekly narrative essay on the plight of young women in East Africa and how they're overcoming it. Due to privacy reasons, the name of the story's originator and the place where she lived or lives have been changed.



My name is Lolita (*not real name*) from NTT town in East Africa. I'm from a modest family of four girls. My father, a cobbler by profession, managed to send us all to school. I completed my high school in 2015 with an average grade of C plain. I was supposed to join college the following year, but it was difficult for my father to afford the college fee. I felt that I should do something to alleviate my father's burden on my college fee. I decided that I should look for a job for form-four leavers, then make savings from my wages to raise my college fees. My father was proud of me for thinking that way uprightly, but the problem was, in NTT town, there're no job opportunities for form-four leavers. Many people told me that in the capital city, there're plenty of jobs for form-four leavers. I talked to my father, and he encouraged me to go to the capital city, get a job, make

savings, and pay for my college education. Then after graduating from college, I'll get a much better job. It seemed more natural the way I was planning with my father.

I made contacts with a female cousin of mine who lives in the capital city; she agreed to host me. I had a lot of expectations for a bright future when I left *NTT town* for the capital city. My cousin welcomed me, but I was shocked to realize that she lives in a slum. Since I was there, I just accepted reality and assumed that all was well. Contrary to what I was thinking, my cousin, warned me of the scarcity of jobs in the capital city. But she encouraged me to try harder. I was enthusiastic and started looking for a job straight away.

As I hit the ground, I realized that finding a job was indeed so hard. My focus was more on those



promotion/sales jobs, which are fit for form-four leavers, but I never got one. I walked in and out many offices in town but in vain. Whenever there's recruitment for sales ladies, I'd always find so many ladies in front of me. Sexually harassment was the order of the day.

On one occasion, we were almost 300 of us, and only ten were needed. I remember the manager coming to me personally and assured me that I'd be enlisted for the job if I sleep with him. Due to desperation as

I needed the job, I gave in to his offer but later on, I was rejected and never got the job. I was so demoralized. Due to the constant disappointment and persistence of sexual harassment, while looking for a job, I became discouraged and almost gave up. I spent much of my time at our corrugated iron sheet room at the

slum doing nothing. My cousin started to complain since I had never been in a position to provide for our survival.

It was on a particular morning; I was wandering along a street in the slum when all of a sudden, I came across a poster put up on an electrical pole. It captivated me as it was about a job offer for form-four leavers. But I was not convinced. I've tried to apply for such jobs endlessly, and the results have always been negative. Although not sure, I wrote down the phone number just for the sake of it. Back to our room, some minutes later, I told my cousin about that job offer. She encouraged me to try it out. Although I was reluctant, I called the contact number I wrote down earlier. I talked to a gentleman. He was eloquent as he gave me the background of the job and persuaded me to visit their office as soon as possible the same day.

It was around 2:30 pm. My cousin gave me the bus fare. At 4:00 pm; I arrived on the 4th floor of a specific building in one of the capital city's suburbs, as directed. I could see the office well branded, I walked up to the door and rang the bell. Somebody opened and welcomed me in. The moment I got in, he locked the door and went away without telling me anything. I was wondering as the office looked odd; it was an empty room — no office furniture such as desks, tables, chairs, cabinets, etc. I became suspicious, and it didn't take two minutes when I saw around ten ugly naked men emerging from another room. At that time, I knew something was wrong. I begged those men not to harm me but in vain. They tied my hands with a rope and put a cloth in my mouth. You can't believe what followed; those men gang-raped me from 6:00 pm to 6:00 am. I went through a terrible ordeal the whole night. At 6:00 am, they untied my hands and went away. I was in severe pain; I could not stand up and walk. I lay down on the floor there. I removed the cloth in my mouth and shouted: "**Help! Help!**" It took almost an hour before people came into my rescue. The rescuers took me to the hospital, and I was admitted me for three weeks.

Everybody in my family was informed and came over to see me. The Police got the report a little bit late; they could not catch the rapists who left without any trace. The owner of the building said the 4th floor had no tenant and that the office never existed; it was a fake one. As a result of that gang-rape, I lost my uterus. After being released from the hospital, I went straight home to *NTT town*. I was depressed, full of anguish, and withdrawn. I stayed indoor in fear of men. My family and church were very supportive; mainly, my pastor worked hard. He prayed for me and took me through counseling.

After six months, I started getting back to my healthy life but with a lot of reserves. As I improved and



started to accept my condition, the need for a job arose again. It became an awful challenge because of the sensitivity of my situation. Fortunately, my pastor told me about MavunoBiz, a social enterprise that addresses the problem of female youth unemployment in south-eastern Kenya. I was interested as I went personally to their office in Emali town. That was the most daunting experience since it was the first office for me to visit after the

gang-rape ordeal. But my visit experience was utterly different from the previous ones in the capital city. I was welcomed and felt comfortable.

I introduced myself and narrated my story. I was encouraged that the social enterprise exists to overcome the plight of young women when searching for jobs. I was impressed that the manager didn't ask me to sleep with him for a job. He didn't ask me for my experience; neither did he ask the level my education. All he did was to test my ability to communicate with people face-to-face. He instructed me on something and asked me to describe the same to somebody else which I did well and got the job as a field officer.

Working with MavunoBiz was a turning point in my life. I felt respected as a human being. Our work involved marketing several products and services from different companies and organizations. We visited many markets in south-eastern Kenya and talked to people of diverse backgrounds. That experience rebuilt my confidence. When performing our marketing job, I engaged people in a conversation, and that's what healed my injuries as I came to realize that not every man is a rapist or an abuser. I met other young women from different parts of south-eastern Kenya; we enjoyed working as a team with no discrimination from our manager. I benefited much from the mentoring activities we went through, which gave me a lot of self-esteem. I realized that I have a future that I can better and should not dwell on the disappointment of the past.

Like everybody else, I was paid \$10 each working day as agreed. And as a result of the mentorship I received regularly, I developed a desire for entrepreneurship. I was encouraged to open a bank account and started to save \$2 out of the \$10 each time I got paid after work.

After a short period, I saved \$30 and needed \$20 to make \$50 to pay for a two-month vocational training at an NGO center that provides a business solution to poverty. MavunoBiz topped up the \$20 on my \$30 savings and was able to attend the training. After two months, I acquired the skill of making detergents for washing floor, carpets, etc. I was motivated to launch my own small business selling homemade detergents. Since I was still part of the social enterprise, I continued working and making savings. After three months, I had saved \$40. I needed \$100 to start the business that included buying all the materials and acquiring licenses required. My father boosted with me \$20, adding to my savings, I got \$60 and still needed \$40. Once again, MavunoBiz topped up the \$40, and I got the full capital money required, and without waiting, I started my small business of selling detergents. At first,

I was doing it alone at home. With a confident attitude and marketing skills, I acquired from working at the social enterprise; I reached out to my prospects directly where they were and was able to establish a customer base, which tremendously improved my income. Customers are now calling directly to order the product, and I deliver it to them. I receive payment in cash or M-Pesa upon delivery.

In June 2019, I was able to set up a kiosk near the marketplace at *NTT town*. I bought a bicycle and



employed a young man who's helping me in the delivery of the products to customers even in villages around *NTT town*. Many customers also come to the kiosk to buy themselves, and they always find me there. I now have the job that I can rely on, and I'm already an employer, but I'll never harass anybody coming to seek for a job here. My future looks brighter because I'll expand and employ more people. My dream is to set up a company and brand my detergents into new packages and then supply countrywide. I'm now able to pay for a full course at a college. I will be participating in short courses to acquire more knowledge. I'm happy that I've come to terms with my situation. The consequences of what I went through no longer disturb my mind. I know

I'll never bear a child, but that should not be the end of the story because I'll adopt as many children as I can and take care of them.

I can only thank MavunoBiz for empowering me. I'm just one of the young women who have benefited and continue to benefit from this social enterprise. I appeal to well-wishers to invest in it and save the lives of many disadvantaged young women from being trapped into the cycle of poverty. ■

Disclaimer:

This story has been captured to provide condensed information on the plight of the young woman in East Africa and how she's overcoming it through empowerment from a social enterprise. Every effort has been made to make this story as accurate as possible. However, there may be mistakes, both typographical and in content. Therefore, this story should be used only as a general guide. MavunoBiz shall have neither liability nor responsibility to any person or entity for any loss or damage caused, or alleged to have been caused, directly or indirectly, by the information contained in this story.

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*The Star Lady, C/o MavunoBiz, Generations Motel, First floor, Shop 5, Mombasa Road, P.O Box 11 – 90121 Emali, Makueni County, Kenya • Email: the-star-lady@mavunobiz.com
Coordinator: Marcel Musyoki*

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