



Lydia's Story

Lydia came from an unstable family living in abject poverty and had to drop out of school in 7th grade. By the time she joined Neema in 2017, she had three children. While there, she received counseling and was able to forgive herself and others who had hurt her. She was a hard worker in class and says she was able to concentrate because her heart was now free.

After graduating in 2019, she started working and saving and eventually opened her own shop. Today, she supports herself, her children, and her parents, and when she gets lots of work, she hires other Neema alumni to work for her! And because of Neema's alumni program, she's continuing to receive counseling and support.

[Watch this video of Lydia, Class of 2019, sharing her story!](#)

What is it like to be a girl growing up in rural Kenya?

1



Many families make less than \$2/day.

38% of individuals in rural Kenya live in poverty.¹ Living in rural areas puts young women at a greater disadvantage because of fewer job opportunities. Many resort to selling vegetables on the street or other forms of casual labor, but none of these will sufficiently provide for a family. This is why the cycle of poverty is so difficult to break.

[Learn the facts and statistics about life in rural Kenya for young women](#)

2

Most girls drop out of school by 8th grade.

While public school is technically free, students are required to pay for various supplies, which is often too much for families. Less than 25% of women in rural Kenya who went to school completed high school, crushing their opportunities for a better future.² Lacking school fees, girls drop out of school, leaving them with no real option to further their education.



3



[Hear Faith share about her relationship with her daughter \(image #37\)](#)

A high rate of teen pregnancies.

40% of women aged 15-19 who have no education have been pregnant, compared to 5% of women who have more than secondary education. Adolescent pregnancies are more likely in poor areas: 21% of women aged 15-19 in the lowest wealth quintile reported to have been pregnant, compared to 8% in the highest.³ Teenage moms face a societal stigma that threatens their chances of further education or career opportunities, making them even more vulnerable.

[Click here to visit our multi-sensory virtual exhibition to hear from our students directly.](#)

¹Kenya Poverty Report (2021). Individuals (or households if estimated at household level) whose total consumption per adult equivalent was less than KSh 3,947 per month in rural areas and less than KSh 7,193 per month in urban areas, respectively, were considered to be overall poor or live in "overall poverty."

²KNBS
³UNFPA

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Families prioritize their sons' education.

Reportedly, when families have limited resources, boys are given educational priority since they are considered the future caregivers for the family.⁴ Girls however, despite equal access to education, face barriers such as heavy domestic workloads and adolescent marriage and pregnancies and are, therefore, unable to develop advanced literacy skills or other skills that could lift them out of poverty.



5



Parents marry away their daughters to get a dowry.

23% of married women age 20-24 were married before they were 18 (the legal age), 4% before they were 15.⁵ Parents perceive their daughters as an investment. While there is no standard process, the tribe's culture will dictate the terms of the dowry. It is generally equivalent to five years of the groom's salary, paid in monetary or in kind (livestock), often in installments.

6

Many women in rural Kenya experience violence.

41% of women and girls age 15-49 in the county Neema is in have experienced physical violence since the age of 15.⁶ "Kenya continues to witness social tolerance for violence against women, with 42% of women and 36% of men believing a man can be justified for beating his wife under certain circumstances."⁷



7



Women aren't empowered to make their own choices.

Despite recent measures advancing gender equality, only 29% of women in Kenya are considered "empowered" as of 2020.⁸ To be empowered, a woman has to have viable options to choose — the ability to decide how she will live her life. Rural Kenya is a patriarchal society where cultural attitudes around gender roles and norms exacerbate gender inequalities. It's also twice as likely for women in urban areas to be empowered in comparison to those in rural Kenya.⁹



Benta's Story

Life before Neema was hard for Benta. Her father was unsupportive, and her mother struggled to provide. Benta says they depended on casual labor and had a hard time acquiring food, let alone money for clothes and books. She had no other choice but to drop out of school because it was too expensive. And then she got pregnant with her first child.

The people of her village looked down on her. "They saw me like rubbish," she says. But after coming to Neema, things changed. "Now," she says, "[they] respect me...and they use me to encourage their girls." Since graduating in 2018, Benta continues to receive counseling and support through Neema's alumni program.

[Watch this video of Benta, Class of 2018, sharing her story!](#)

Give now and make a difference for these women!

⁴UNICEF
⁵2014 Kenya Demographic and Health Survey
⁶KNBS

⁷2014 Kenya Demographic and Health Survey
⁸UN Women and KNBS
⁹KNBS

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