

NOMINATED

The mothers of St. Rita

It all started with a boy named Ferdinand and his mother Rita who lived in a village by Lake Victoria in Kenya. Although both have since died of AIDS, it was Ferdinand who had suggested that people should work together to help AIDS orphans. It was his wish that the group should be named St. Rita after his mother. The twenty mothers of St. Rita, who are themselves poor, have now been helping orphaned children for the past seven years.

Ferdinand was born with HIV. Both his mother and father were ill with HIV/AIDS and, when they died, Ferdinand was taken in by his aunt Bernadette, who had

Ferdinand



promised Rita that she would care for him. So Ferdinand moved in with Bernadette and became part of her family.

“I wanted Ferdinand to lead as normal a life as possible. He went to school and I loved him as though he were my own son.”

As time went by Ferdinand’s health became worse. He was in and out of hospital and needed more and costlier medication.

“I had to sell nearly everything I had to keep him



Rita

alive: my car, video, tape recorder – even my toaster,” recalls Bernadette.

The two of them often talked about the disease and about his mother Rita. And although Ferdinand often thought about her and was sometimes sad, he was happy that Bernadette had taken him in. He called her Mum. He talked more and more with Bernadette about how they should try to help other children whose parents had also died from HIV/AIDS, so that they could get the same chance as he had.

The origin of St. Rita
Bernadette thought this was a great idea and discussed it one day with her friends.

“There was a growing number of children in the village who’d lost their parents to AIDS, and many of them had to drop out of school because they couldn’t afford to stay. And since the only chance of survival was to beg, many ended up liv-



Why the St. Rita mothers are being nominated?

The 20 mothers of St. Rita are being nominated for the WCPRC 2005 for their voluntary and committed struggle to help children living in the villages around Kisumu in Kenya who have lost parents to HIV/AIDS. These are children who could otherwise end up living on the streets facing a life of drugs, violence, crime and prostitution. The mothers fight for the rights of orphaned children to ensure that they get the same opportunities in life as other children. Despite the fact that most of the mothers are themselves very poor, they currently provide 43 orphaned children with food, clothes, medicines, schooling, new homes, new families and love. The mothers get no financial support from either the government or any organisation.



ing on the streets of Kisumu. As my friends and I are mothers we thought it was dreadful to see children suffer. We wanted to help them in some way.

“We went round the village and talked to other women. In the end there were twenty of us mothers who resolved to collectively try and take care of as many orphaned children as possible. We had no money, but we went ahead anyway.”

When Bernadette came home and broke the news to Ferdinand he was overjoyed. He asked if he could pick a name for the group, so they let him.

“He wanted to name it St. Rita in memory of his mother. It was such a lovely thought that we’ve kept the name ever since. Ferdinand was also very keen to help out at St. Rita, but he never had the chance to. He died in the sixth grade.”

Everyone helps out

From the very first day, orphaned children stood outside Bernadette’s house asking for food, clothes, school uniforms and somewhere to live.

“Initially we didn’t really know what to do because we didn’t have any money. A few of us started baking



bread and cakes that we sold in town. Others grew vegetables to sell. After a while we earned enough to buy a cow, so we started selling milk too. Then we decided that on the first Saturday of each month all the mothers should try and put aside at least 200 Shillings (USD 2,68) to help the children.”



Begging on behalf of the children
“I’m constantly going to offices in town begging for food and money for our children. I approach charities, authorities, companies and the well-off. I didn’t like begging at first but, as the children really need all the help they can get, I don’t mind it now. I can rarely afford to take the bus or taxi so I usually walk. I also bake cakes that Seraphine sells at her workplace.”
Bernadette Otieno

Sells Bernadette’s cakes

“I work as a telephonist in town. During my lunch break I sell the cakes that Bernadette bakes. I also work in the St. Rita’s vegetable garden. We sell some of the vegetables to earn money for the children, but we also give them to the children to eat.”
Seraphine Auma



Sells fish
Mary Okinda



St. Rita’s accountant donates money to the children
Jane Okuto





Visits the children

"I go round the villages visiting the children we take care of. I sit and talk to them and try to make sure that they feel OK. If the children need anything we mothers discuss it when we meet and try to help out as much as we can. I'm also a mother and I hate to see the children suffer. Sometimes I bring some food with me from home, but often I don't have anything even for myself. As many of the children have suffered terribly I believe the most important thing I can do is give them love and show them that I care. To give the children hope."

Judith Kondiek



Helps three boys

Lucia Auma Okore

TEXT: ANDREAS LÖNN PHOTO: PAUL BLOMGREN

Cleans, washes and cooks

Pamela Achieng



The right of every child

The mothers of St. Rita have worked hard for seven years to help orphaned children lead normal lives. 43 orphans are currently receiving food, clothes, medical care, education, homes, new families and love.

"It's tough going but we have no choice. We believe it's every child's right to be loved. If we don't help the children they'll end up on the streets in town surrounded by drugs, crime and prostitution. And as they cannot go to school they have no real future. These children come from our village so it's our duty to try and give them a good start in life. If we don't do it, who will?" asks Bernadette.

The mothers get no financial support from either the government or any organisation.

"We do our best, but we'd love to do more – if only we

Many of the mothers are widows, unemployed and have their own children to look after. To them 200 Shillings is a fortune. But everyone gave as much as they could, and those who couldn't afford to donate helped out in other ways. Some did the children's laundry and cooked their meals. Others became second mothers and let the orphans move in with them.

Providing the children with homes is the mothers' top priority.

"As mothers we believe that children should live with families and not in orphanages. We want them to lead as normal lives as possible and to be a part of the village community. We always try to find new families for children who lose their parents. But it's hard, because most of the people living in the villages are so poor that they cannot afford to take in any more children."



Milks Rainbow

"I take care of the St. Rita cow, Rainbow. All the mothers chipped in so that we could buy her. I sell the milk and the money goes to the orphans. If Rainbow gets a calf, we'll keep it at St. Rita's so that the children can have milk."

Margret Agalla

Donates money each month

Ruth Ocholla



Collects papyrus to sell

Birgita Were Mbola



Tells people about AIDS
Rose Otieno

Takes care of two boys
Rose Obondo



Takes care of three brothers
Mary Awino



If the children feel OK, I feel OK
Mary Angechi

Supports the children
Margret Akumu Otieno



Takes care of five children
Jerusa Ade Yogo

had the money. We'd like, for example, to give all the children a proper lunch every day, so that they'd at least get one square meal a day. And our latest survey of the area shows that there are currently more than 1,500 orphaned children. We'd take care of every last one of them if we could."

Praying for a cure

"We pray that there'll soon be a cure for AIDS so that many more children can live with their parents. Then we won't be needed any more. But not a week goes by without new children needing our help. We always try to do what we can, even when we don't have much to spare. We never turn a child

away, and as long as there are children in need knocking on our door, we'll continue to fight to make sure they get a decent life!"

More mothers like the ones at St. Rita are needed. There are 43 million orphans in Africa, 12 million of whom lost their parents to HIV/AIDS. One of the hardest hit countries is Kenya, where there are an estimated 1.3 million HIV/AIDS orphans. The area around Lake Victoria in western Kenya, where the village of Dunga is located, is the most seriously affected. ☹



Plays and talks with the children
Rose Adhiambo



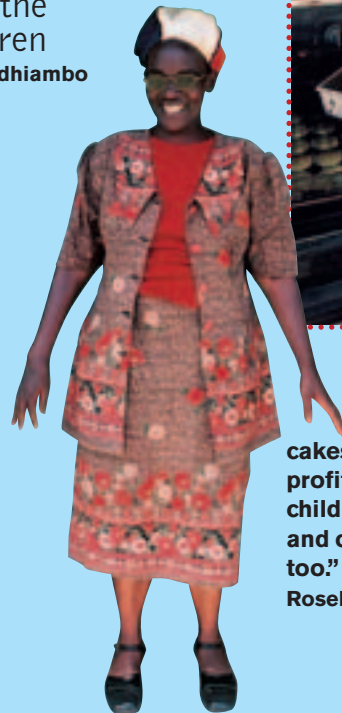
Bread and cakes
"I bake bread and cakes that I sell in town. The profit goes to our orphaned children. I often bring bread and cakes for the children too."
Roselyn Ogolla



Bakes bread and talks to the children
Martha Adhiambo



Takes care of a girl
Ruth Akinyiluya



We get help from the St.

Mum told me stories

"I was very young when my father died so I don't remember him that clearly. But I remember my mother clearly because she died when I was ten. When she was alive she used to weave papyrus rugs to sell. When she sat there weaving she used to tell me and my brothers and sisters stories. We used to laugh a lot and I really miss those moments.

I often think about all the bad things that have happened to me and sometimes I worry and fret so much that it makes me ill. It's worst when I'm alone, as all the thoughts come back to me and I get sad. If I could say something to my mother I'd tell her that I wished she was here so that we could talk for a while. Then I'd tell her that I love her and that I miss her."

ERICK ODHIAMBO, AGED 14



Watching football with dad

"My mum died when I was 11 and my dad died when I was 12. When mum was alive we'd often go to the market together. I always wanted to help her and I'd carry the basket full of tomatoes, onions and other vegetables that she'd bought. Dad used to take me to town to watch football almost every Saturday. Those were the happiest moments of my life. My best memory was when my favourite team, Gor Mayia, beat Telecom 2-1.

Dad had a bicycle and he gave me rides into town whenever there was a match on. I haven't seen a football match since Dad died as I haven't got a bicycle and can't afford the bus or bicycle-taxi fare to the stadium. It's 25 Kenyan shillings (USD 0,30) to get the bicycle-taxi into town, and there's no way I can afford that.

When Dad was still alive he gave me this t-shirt. It's the only thing I have to remember him by. I always think of my father when I wear it."

DENNIS OTIENO, AGED 14



Dad bought me chocolate



"My father died when I was in fourth grade at school. I was ten. My mother died when I was about to start fifth grade.

When my parents were alive we'd sometimes go into town at weekends. My father often bought us chocolate. I loved it! Sometimes he'd even buy me a dress or some jeans. We used to visit restaurants and have fizzy drinks and meat. I was very happy. We'd take a bicycle-taxi or bus into town. Nowadays I have to walk because the bus is much too expensive. It takes more than four hours to walk there and back.

I still have some of my mother's clothes to remind me of her. I look at them often and memories of my mother come flooding back to me. I miss my parents most of all when people are nasty to me. If I could tell my mother anything it would be to ask her to come back and take care of me. My life would be a lot easier and more fun than it is now."

WINNIE ANYANGO, AGED 13

Rita mothers

What's it like in Heaven, Mummy?

"My dad died before I was born and my mum died when I was four. It was such a long time ago and without the photograph I wouldn't have been able to remember what she looked like. My aunt has the photo and she lets me look at it sometimes. My mother and I are very similar, which is nice because she was very beautiful.

She left some clothes behind that she wanted me to have. I can't wait until I can wear them. It's great having something that belonged to my mother but it's also sad. I'm sure she's in Heaven now and is feeling fine. I try talking to her sometimes when I pray, but I'd rather be up there with her. I can't wait until the day we meet again. The first thing I'm going to say to her is "Jambo!" ("Hello!"), then I'll



ask her how she is. Then I will tell her that I miss her very much, but that I'm doing OK anyway. I'll tell her that the mothers of St. Rita are helping me buy a school uniform and books so that I can go to school and that I get food whenever I need it."

WINNIE AWINO, AGED 9



No help with homework

"My mum died when I was very young so I don't remember her that clearly. My dad died last year and I miss him very much. I used to enjoy studying with him. He'd always help me with my homework, especially maths. My dad was very good at explaining difficult subjects in a way I could understand. There's no one to help me with my homework now. I find it hard to keep up at school and I'm lagging behind the rest of the class.

I don't have anything to remember my parents by, which is a real shame. I'd love to have had something, but my dad's second wife took all his things - table, chairs, his tools, everything..."

MARITHA AWUOR, AGED 13

TEXT: ANDREAS LÖNN PHOTO: PAUL BLOMGREN

Dad was my best friend

"My dad died when I was nine years old, but I sometimes still cry when I look at his photo. I miss him terribly. I often used to help him plant corn, sugar cane and other vegetables. We used to talk a lot while we worked. And if I had a problem at school, I'd tell him about it and it'd make me feel better.

When we finished with the planting we'd go down to the lake for a swim. It was great fun. I miss it. Me and my dad were like best friends.

My mum's still alive but she's often ill. I'm scared that she's going to die too, leaving me and my brothers and sisters all on our own."

VICTOR OTIENO, AGED 14





– the boy grown-ups call ‘trash’

Steven’s mum and dad died three years ago, leaving him all on his own. Since then he has been living on the streets of Kisumu. Many grown-ups call him ‘trash’. Many orphaned children who don’t have the St. Rita mothers to help them live like Steven.

It is a few minutes past nine in the evening as Steven, aged 12, wanders down to the abandoned field behind a Kisumu department store. Just like he does every

night. As he walks he hurriedly gobbles down a hunk of white bread that he’s found; if the other street children see him with food there could be trouble. Everyone is

hungry and there are often fights over the few scraps of food that exist.

When Steven arrives some of his friends are already there. They’re scavenging for old cardboard boxes, plastic bags and other rubbish to build a fire with. Most of his friends are high on glue or marijuana and are just fumbling about in the dark. It poured with rain that afternoon, so when the rubbish

finally catches alight, a thick, foul-smelling smoke billows up from the pile. Everything is soaking wet and it takes ages for the fire to get going properly.

The night buses that are about to depart for the capital Nairobi are parked just a few metres away. The passengers look down at Steven and the other grubby boys. Some even point and laugh at them, but Steven’s used to it.



“Sometimes when I ask grown-ups for food, they just say: “What are you doing on the street anyway? Push off back to your parents!” This makes me really sad because I don’t have any parents. Sometimes I answer: “OK, if you don’t think I should live on the streets why don’t you help me out and take care of me?” But no one ever does. Steven is one of Kenya’s 300.000 street children.



evening, Steven realised that life wasn’t going to be so easy. He had to sleep on the streets with the other homeless children. During the day he begged for money and food outside restaurants and hotels. Sometimes he was lucky, but mostly he went around hungry and sad. To help him forget things, he started sniffing glue.

Today, three years later, he still lives on the streets and doesn’t know how he’s going to get out. The only thing he’s sure of is that living on the streets is not a good life for children.

Children disappear

“It’s dangerous. A gang of older street children once thought that I’d hidden a large sum of money. I hadn’t, but they came over and started beating me up anyway. Some of the boys had long Panga knives and said they would kill me if I didn’t hand over the money. I was really scared because children around here get killed and just disappear. I didn’t want to die, and somehow I managed to break free and started running as fast as I could. The gang ran after me and I tripped and fell on the asphalt several times. In the end I was too exhausted to stand up. I heard the gang coming and I thought I was finished. But I was lucky.

When they saw the blood running from my hands and legs they left me alone.

But it isn’t just gangs of older children that are a threat - grown-ups also hit street children.

“As soon as anything bad happens in town we get the blame. Four nights ago some policemen came and started to beat us up. They said that a man had been stabbed with a knife and we were the ones who did it. I managed to get away but ten of the other children were arrested. No one knows what happened to them. I think what the police are doing is wrong. They should take care of us

“Many people call us *chokoras* which means ‘trash’. I hate it. I mean, how can anybody call another person ‘trash’? Sometimes I cry when people shout *chokoras* at me. They’ve got no idea that there’s a reason why I’m forced to live like this,” says Steven.

Steven’s parents died

When Steven was nine, something happened that changed his whole life.

“My family was poor but we usually had enough food to go round and my mum and dad cared about me.

Then my parents become ill. They got thinner and thinner until one day my mother died. My father died shortly after that. Suddenly I was all alone and no one in the village could take care of me.”

One day Steven stole 100 Kenyan shillings (USD 1,30) from a neighbour who had been nasty to him. He used the money to go to Kisumu.

“I knew that in town there were schools, work and everything else people needed. So I thought that life would be OK once I got there.”

But on the very first



Steven Omondi, 12

Lives: On the streets of Kisumu.

Loves: Playing football.

Hates: Stealing.

Best memory: When I got a Christmas present.

Wants to: Work in an office.

Dreams about: Going to school and learning to read.



Edward lives under a bench

Edward took care of his mum and dad on his own. And when they died no one in the village wanted to take care of him.

“I no longer felt welcome. Now I live under a bench at the bus station in town.”

When I was little I went to school and played with my friends. But when I was nine, both my parents became ill and weak. That was when my whole life changed.

“I’d get up at 5 in the morning to light the fire and run down to the river to fetch water, and then I’d make porridge. When I’d done that, I’d help my mum and dad outside. Then we ate breakfast together. They often felt cold so it was important that they got to be in the sun. Mum and dad often couldn’t get to the toilet on time, so I had to wash their clothes and sheets every day. I had to wash my parents too. Then I made lunch. No one in the village would help me, so in order to have the time to do everything, I stopped going to school.”

Wanted to disappear

“I cried a lot but my mum and dad comforted me and said that everything would be OK.

My dad and I shared the same bed. One morning when I woke up, he was completely quiet and still. He was dead. I was terrified and ran outside and cried. One morning, just one week later, mum didn’t call for me as she usually did. I whispered, “Mummy, mummy,” but she didn’t reply. Her heart had stopped beating.

“I ran out into the forest and when I came across a river I felt like jumping in and just disappearing. I stood for a long time deciding whether or not to kill myself. In the end I decided not to jump: I would at least bury my parents first.”

No one wanted to shave me

“Around here, children who lose their parents have to

shave their heads. My father’s second wife was supposed to shave mine but she refused. Instead she gave me ten Shillings (USD 0,13) so I could go to the barber. It felt really bad that I couldn’t be shaved properly. I think she was scared that I too was ill and that she would catch something.

“Many of the villagers assumed that mum and dad had died of AIDS. I think they were all frightened of getting it because no one came to visit them when they were ill, and no one wanted to help me when I was left on my own.

“I decided to try and survive on the streets in town. But I hate it here. There’s a lot of violence and drugs and I’m often hungry. And I can’t go to school either. I miss my mum and dad and I’m often miserable. All I want is to be accepted in my own village, to come home and continue going to school. But I think that they’re still frightened of me and that no one will want to help me.” ☹



TEXT: ANDREAS LÖNN PHOTO: PAUL BLOMGREN

➔ instead of being horrible. At least some grown-up out there should help us get a real home and go to school like other children, then we wouldn’t have to beg and steal just to survive.”

Hates to steal

The fire has nearly burnt itself out and it’s getting late. The gang splits up and the boys head off into the darkness. They all have their own little spot where they usually

sleep. Steven wanders off with some of his friends. They stick together - there’s safety in numbers.

“At night, the older boys sometimes rape the younger ones. We’re constantly afraid that it’ll happen to us. I’ve been lucky so far.”

Steven wriggles into his thin cloth sack and lies down on the pavement. He knows that if he doesn’t succeed in begging for food tomorrow he’ll be forced to steal an

avocado or some other fruit from the market. He hates stealing but it’s even worse going hungry. Steven doesn’t like this way of life. He wishes that everything could be different, that both his mum and dad were still alive and that he could go to school.

Eventually he falls asleep and starts to dream. In his dream he’s finished school and is working in an office. He works hard and manages to save almost everything he

earns. One day he’s saved up enough money to buy his own house. It’s not a big house, but it’s his.

“Chokora! Get out of the way!”

Steven wakes up with a jolt and looks up to see a woman hurrying past. Steven flattens himself against the wall to make himself as small as possible. He wants to get back to his dream. ☹

Edward Odhiambo, 12

Lives: On the streets of Kisumu.

Loves: Reading.

Hates: Death

Scared of: Older street children and the police.

Wants to: Be a bus driver.

Dream: To live in a house.



What is HIV/AIDS?

HIV is a virus that destroys the body's immune defence. Without your immune defence you become highly vulnerable to infections and illnesses. HIV can make your immune defence so weak that the infection develops into AIDS.

How does HIV/AIDS spread?

HIV is spread mainly through breast milk, semen and blood. HIV is transmitted when the infected person's body fluids come into contact with another person's mucus membranes or open wounds. The most common ways of catching it are:

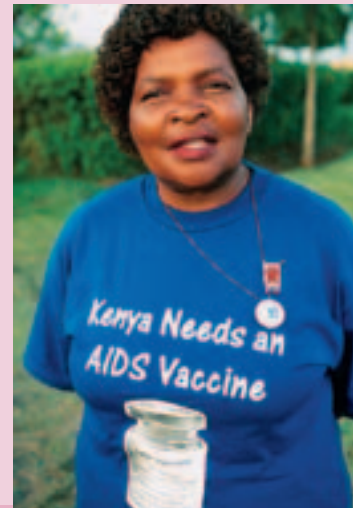
During sex (the best protection is a condom), blood transfusion (if the new blood is infected with HIV), and during childbirth and breast-feeding (if the mother has HIV there's a significant risk of the child becoming infected too).

HIV *isn't* caught by hugging or holding hands and it doesn't spread via cutlery, food or drink. And you can't be infected if you swim in the same water or use the same toilet as someone with HIV.

Are there medicines for HIV/AIDS?

There's no cure for HIV/AIDS and most AIDS sufferers die. There are

medicines, however, that allow you to live with HIV. In the world's richer countries there are many people who use HIV medicines, but the majority of HIV/AIDS sufferers live in poorer countries. In Kenya 2.2 million people have HIV/AIDS, but only 10,000 of them use HIV medicine. If poor people with HIV/AIDS are to have the same chance of survival as rich HIV/AIDS-sufferers, the medicine must be made cheaper. If an infected mother receives HIV medicine just before she delivers, the chance of her baby being born healthy doubles.



AIDS has many victims

AIDS deaths:

Adults: 21.8 million

Children: 4.3 million

HIV/AIDS sufferers:

The World: 38 million

Africa (Sub-Saharan): 25 million

Asia: 7.4 million

Latin America: 1.6 million

Eastern Europe: 1.3 million

North America: 1 million

Western Europe: 580,000

All other countries: 1.1 million

Infection rate:

The World: 15,000 people a day.

Children with HIV/AIDS:

The World: 2.7 million

Africa (Sub-Saharan): 2.4 million

All other countries: 300,000

AIDS orphans:

The World: 15 million children

Africa (Sub-Saharan): 12.3 million children

All other countries: 2.7 million children

In 2010, an estimated 25 million children will have lost their parents to AIDS.

Kenya hard hit:

Total number of infected people: 2.2 million

Number of infected children: 220,000

AIDS deaths: 1.5 million

Number of AIDS orphans: 1.3 million children

Steven saved by the



“I love school and if I try hard maybe I’ll be a doctor when I grow up. I’m really lucky the mothers of St. Rita helped me and gave me the chance to go to school. Many orphaned children end up living on the street.



“Without help from the mothers of St. Rita I’d been on the streets and with no chance to go to school,” says Steven, 12. Steven, his older brother Martin and Rainbow the dog are now their own little family, one which is being helped by the mothers.

In his room at St. Rita, Steven is trying to get to sleep. But he can’t. He lies awake twisting and turning. He’s thinking about the time when he and Martin approached the family house in the village.

Their father’s first wife sat outside and was drunk as usual. She had left several years previously but had returned after the death of their mum and dad. They knew she was mean. She had thrown them out several times before and the last thing they wanted to do was

ask to live there again. But they had no choice.

They had been staying with their uncle for a while. But in the end he said that he was simply too poor to take care of two more children. He was probably also afraid of catching something, because Steven and Martin were never allowed to use the same cutlery as the other family members. And now there she was – right in front of them. She flew into a rage when she saw them.

“Go away! I never want to see your faces again. Do you

hear me? Never!” and she started to throw stones.

Martin managed to get away but little Steven wasn’t as fast. He was struck in the leg and fell. When he felt his leg he found that his hands were covered in blood.

Steven will never forget how it felt when the grown-ups abandoned them and no one wanted to take care of them.

Fishing every day

Next morning, the sun is shining and Steven is feeling better. As it’s Saturday he packs his fishing gear after breakfast. Then he and Martin wander down to Lake Victoria with Steven’s dog Rainbow following, as always, at their heels.

On the beach, women are gutting fish while Steven and Rainbow stand to one side



“I’m always happy to see Martin. He’s very important to me now that everyone else in the family has died. When I see him I know that I’m not alone.”

looking expectantly down into the murky water. Now and then Steven stoops to pick up the fish remains to use as bait.

Steven then moves further away, puts some of the fish onto the hook and throws out his line. Suddenly there’s a sharp tug. He’s caught an Opato fish. And then another.

mothers



Steven Odhiambo, 12

Lives: At St. Rita in Dunga.

Loves: School.

Hates: That some children can't go to school.

Worst memory: When my parents died.

Looks up to: The St. Rita mothers.

Likes: Football.

Wants to: Be a doctor.

Dream: That all children have parents.



Rainbow wags her tail. She likes fish too. Steven and Martin then spear the catch on a blade of tall grass and immerse them in the water to stop them going off in the heat of the sun.

“We always go fishing on Saturdays. And on Sundays after church. We often come here after school too, before we do our homework. Not because we want to – but because we have to,” says Steven.

There was a time when they didn't have to get their own food – their mum and dad took care of them. But that all seems such a long time ago. Almost as if it was in another life.

Dad died alone

“My mum died when I was only two and my big sister when I was seven. After that

dad's second wife took care of us, but she died a year after my sister. In the end there was only me, Martin and dad left. But then Dad died too a year later,” says Steven.

“I remember the night dad died. He had been ill for a long time and that same evening he gave me and Martin some money so we could go to a place where you can watch video films. When we returned home, Dad was dead. I think he knew that he was going to die and didn't want us to have to be there when it happened. But I'd rather have been there with him when he died than have watched a video. I think it's horrible that he died all on his own.”

Saved by St. Rita

Steven and Martin were now all alone. None of their rela-



tives wanted to look after them. They didn't know where to turn or how they'd get by. Then Steven remembered he'd heard of this place called St. Rita, where some mothers helped orphaned children.

“It felt like this was our last chance. When we arrived the mothers said that naturally they would help us. They said that they didn't have much money, but they would do everything that they could. We were given a

small house to live in and we went back to school. We've been living at St. Rita ever since. The mothers buy our school uniforms and if we get ill, they buy our medicine or take us to see the doctor. They help us with almost everything, but there's not enough money to buy all the food we need – there are so many children in the villages who need their help. That's why we do so much fishing. But that's fine by me - without the mothers we would've ended up on the streets with no chance of going to school. And most importantly, they love us and care about us.”

We're a family

When Steven and Martin have caught four Opato and one Fulu fish they decide it's time to head back. When they get home they light the





People let you down – but Rainbow won't

"I met Rainbow one day as I was out walking. She was only a puppy then. Since then she's followed me around everywhere - when I'm fishing, swimming or playing football. She even wants to follow me to school! At night, she lies outside and guards the house, which makes me feel safe. I love her. Playing with Rainbow helps take my mind off the horrible things that have happened."



fire and start preparing their meal – fish soup and Ugali (cornmeal porridge). Steven goes out to the vegetable

garden, which the mothers have helped them plant, to get some greens.

Rainbow licks her nose

and watches Steven intently as he stirs the pot. She's hungry.

"We're a family now – Martin, Rainbow and me – so we always cook for three. Rainbow loves fish and Ugali."

After supper they wash up, sweep the house, water the vegetables and then study for a bit. At dusk, Steven and Martin sit outside the house and chat, just like they usually do. They talk about everything, but often about their parents so they don't forget them. Rainbow lies at Steven's feet. She loves it when he tickles her behind the ear. As they sit there, one of the St. Rita mothers pops by. It is Bernadette. She joins them for a little while most evenings.

"Everything all right? Have you got everything you need?"

"Yes, mother. Everything's fine," reply the boys in unison.

"Have you eaten?"

"Yes."

"Good. Well, good night then"

"Good night. See you tomorrow". ☺



Steven and Martin lives in the room on the right side.

Welcome to the World's Children's Prize for the Rights of the Child!

Waruakou e nyasi makwako piny ngima mar chiwo mich ne nyithindo e bwo tipo moyiedho kendo mogeno migap nyathi edongruok mar ngima nyathi!

In Luo

Karibuni kwa ulimwengu wa zawadi za watoto Kuhusu haki za watoto!

In Swahili



Listen to children welcoming you to the WCPRC in Luo and Swahili at www.childrensworld.org

What's your name in Luo?

Most of the children who live in the villages around Kisumu in western Kenya belong to the Luo people. They always get given a middle name that reveals when they were born. Do you know the time of your birth? Check below and see what your middle name would've been if you'd been born in a Luo village.

WHEN WERE YOU BORN?	GIRL	BOY
Early morning	Amondi	Omondi
Mid-morning	Anyango	Onyango
Evening	Adhiambo	Odhiambo
At night	Atieno	Otieno
When the sun is hottest	Achieng	Ochieng
When it's raining	Akoth	Okoth
For twins	Apiyo (No. 1) Adongo (No. 2)	Opiyo (No. 1) Odongo (No. 2)



Listen to the children counting in Luo and Swahili at www.childrensworld.org

A riddle from Dennis

Question: What do you call a house with no doors or windows?

Listen to Dennis's riddle at www.childrensworld.org

Count to 10 in Luo and Swahili

There are over 40 ethnic groups in Kenya and as many languages. Although Kenya's official language is Swahili, the children you've been reading about belong to the Luo people and speak Luo. Here's how to count to 10 in Luo and Swahili:

	LUO	SWAHILI
1.	Achiel	Moja
2.	Ariyo	Mbili
3.	Adek	Tatu
4.	Ang'wen	Nne
5.	Abich	Tano
6.	Auchiel	Sita
7.	Abiryo	Saba
8.	Aboro	Nane
9.	Ochiko	Tisa
10.	Apar	Kumi

Answer: An egg.

Washington

gets beaten for having no shoes

“School is the most important thing there is and I believe that all children, rich or poor, have the same right to learn. But in Kenya there are rules that make it very difficult for us poor kids to go to school. We get beaten and sent home,” says Washington Osonde, 14. He is one of the orphans receiving help from the mothers of St. Rita.



TEXT: ANDREAS LÖNN PHOTO: PAUL BLOMGREN

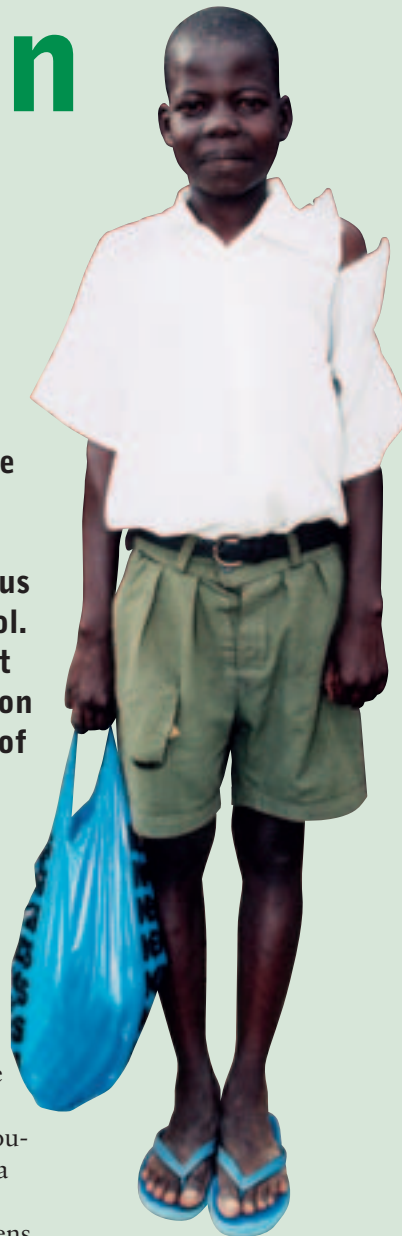


Washington Osonde, 14

- Loves:** School
- Hates:** That my life is hard.
- Worst memory:** When my mum died.
- Best memory:** Getting help from the mothers of St. Rita.
- Likes:** Playing football and writing poems.
- Wants to:** Be a pilot.
- Dream:** All children having parents.

“School starts again on Monday and I’m really worried about it. Deep down I look forward to it because I love school, but as I’m poor I know there’ll be trouble. School is free in Kenya but you still need to buy a uniform, shoes, satchel, pens and books. My uniform is worn out and I wear sandals instead of real shoes. I can’t afford to buy a satchel either so now I carry my books in a plastic bag.

“The mothers of St. Rita have asked the headmaster for a little more time to try and scrape the money together to buy new uniforms for all the orphaned children. They do this every term, and I know that they do the best they can. But there are so many of us that need help. If we don’t get new uniforms, first of all the teachers will chase us away



“School shouldn’t be about uniforms, satchels and shoes, but about learning,” says Washington.

from the classroom. If we return without proper clothes we get beaten.

“Once when I was ten, the teacher forced me and six other children to lie down on the floor. Then he beat us with a bamboo stick in front of the whole class just because we didn’t have complete uniforms. It was awful. Later the same year, just

before we were going to leave third grade, I was sent home just because I wasn’t wearing any shoes. The teacher told me off in front of the whole class. It was embarrassing and I started crying. I wanted to tell her that it wasn’t fair and that it wasn’t my fault that I didn’t have any shoes. But I didn’t dare; she was in such a rage. When I came back two weeks later I had fallen behind in all subjects so they forced me to repeat third grade all over again.

“This year there was a competition at school where you had to write a poem about yourself. I wrote about all the problems that we poor children have at school and I had to read it out in front of all the teachers and pupils. Afterwards everyone clapped loudly – even the teachers – and I felt proud. For a while I thought things were going to change as everybody was clapping so much. But they didn’t. Since then I have been sent home three times just because I wasn’t wearing shoes or socks. Now I’m really scared that I won’t be able to finish school and take my exams. I want to be a pilot when I grow up, but if I don’t finish school I’ll never get a chance to become one and have a good life.”

The price of a uniform

Jumper:	650 Shillings
Shirt:	250 Shillings
Shorts:	250 Shillings
Socks:	35 Shillings
Shoes:	800 Shillings
Satchel:	300 Shillings

Total:	2,285 Shillings (USD 30)

Listen to Washington's whole poem at www.childrensworld.org

Will I really pass my exams?

Very early in the morning I take my bag and dust it. Put on my tattered uniform, and give a big yawn. Then off to school I go.

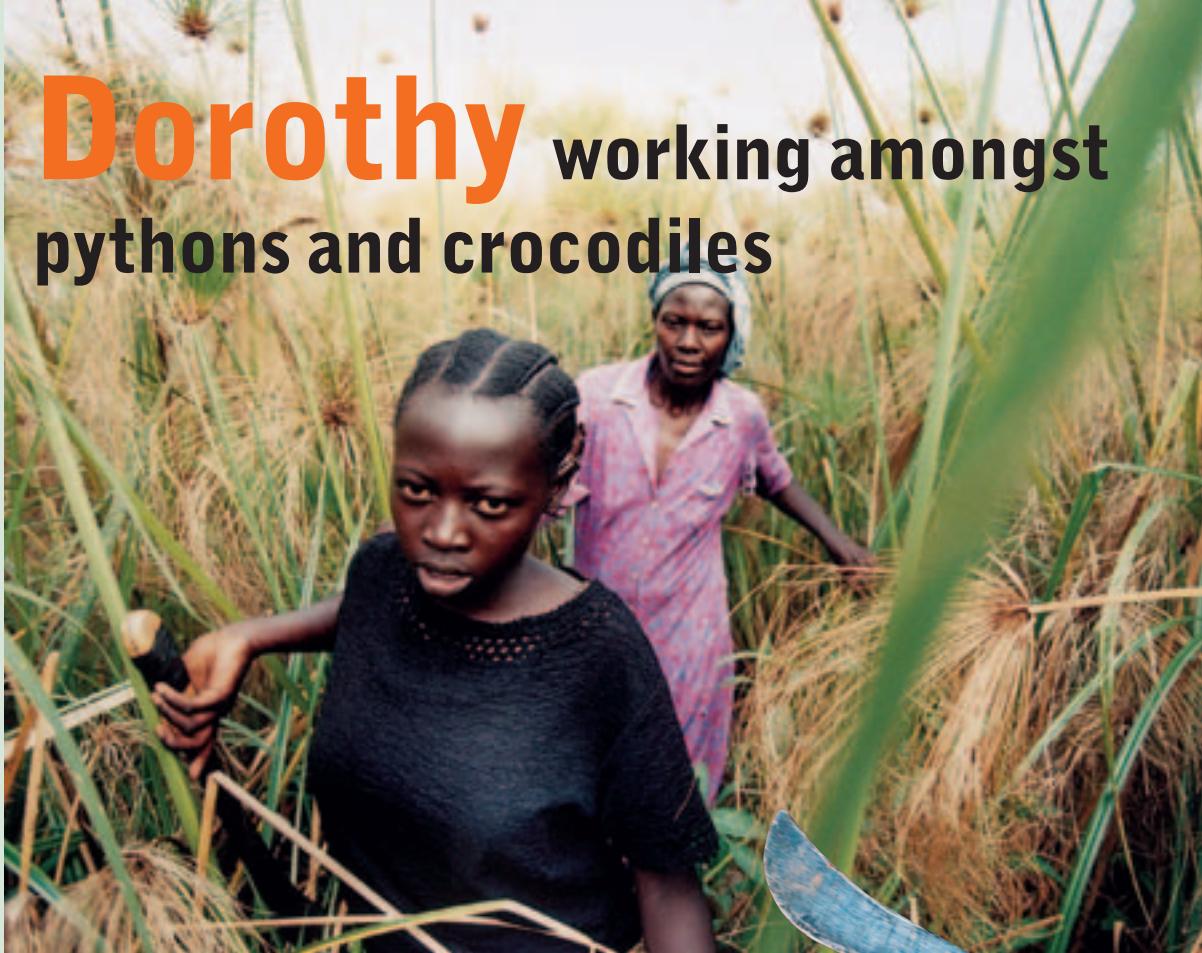
On an empty stomach I run for ten kilometres. As usual I am late. The cruel teacher meets me: – Why are you late!? he shouts. I start trembling and sweating all over, he doesn't sympathize.

With no uniform, incomplete fees, the headmaster sent me back home. After two weeks I go back to school, the class is four subjects ahead.

The mothers of St. Rita try to help

The mothers of St. Rita are currently helping 43 orphaned children to attend school. But they find it hard to pay for their school things. They recently demonstrated in Kisumu for the right of orphaned children to go to school. Washington was there: "Many of the grown-ups in town promised they would help us then, but we still haven't seen any money. I think that's really terrible."

Dorothy working amongst pythons and crocodiles



"I know that wild animals can be dangerous, but I try not to think about it. After all, we need the money. What scares me the most is that my mum is ill," says Dorothy Awuor.

Dorothy and her mother Rose wade further out into Lake Victoria. They're gathering papyrus, and each is carrying her own Panga knife. To get to the choicest papyrus they have to go far out from shore and around the first cape. The water comes up to Dorothy's armpits before they can start hacking into the dense thicket. The mud on the bottom of the lake seeps up between her toes as she walks.

"It's horrible because you never know what you're stepping on; there are poisonous fish down in the mud that can

bite your feet at any time."

Dorothy hacks deeper into the papyrus grove where more dangers lurk.

"There are pythons, crocodiles and hippopotamuses here. If you disturb them they can attack. Hippos are the most dangerous when they're with their young. If they think their calves are in danger they will attack straight away, and if a hippo gets hold of you, you haven't got a chance. They'll kill you on the spot.

"Once I was about to walk back home with a bundle of papyrus when I discovered a large python inside it. I screamed

and ran away as fast as I could. But the snake seemed to be as scared as I was because it wriggled away just as fast, but in the opposite direction!"

The most fatal disease

Dorothy and Rose gather the papyrus they harvest in a large pile. They're going to make mats out of it which they can sell.

It's midday and over thirty degrees in the shade. Beads of sweat appear on Dorothy's forehead. Suddenly she cuts herself on the papyrus and her fingers start bleeding. The work is hard, but without the papyrus the family won't survive.

Dorothy helps her mother at the weekends, and every day





Dorothy Awuor, 14

Lives: In the village of Kapuotho.

Loves: Reading.

Hates: My mother being ill.

Frightened of: My mother dying.

Likes: Football and listening to music.

Wants to: Become president.

Dream: Every child in the world having parents.



A St. Rita mother
Not only is Rose Dorothy's mother, she's also one of the St. Rita mothers. "I'm too poor to give money so instead I tour the villages talking about AIDS. Sometimes I tell them about my own life and what it's like living with AIDS. But not always – too many people around here are frightened of AIDS so you have to be a bit careful. I'm not worried so much for my own sake as for my children. Suddenly, maybe, nobody wants to play with them and the whole family can be ostracised. It's wrong. But that's all the more reason to tell people about AIDS; to explain that, as an AIDS sufferer, I – and also my children – need love and comfort!"



The mothers help each other
Rose and one of the other St. Rita mothers (whose name is also Rose) help each other make the papyrus mats. But before they can start, the papyrus has to dry for at least three days. If they are lucky they can sell a mat for 30 shillings (USD 0,39).

Dorothy's tips!

If you're being chased by a hippopotamus ...
"...run in a zigzag pattern. If you run in a straight line, it will catch you and kill you on the spot!"

during the holidays. Because the work is so dangerous it's always a comfort to be two. But nowadays Dorothy has to work alone most of the time. Rose is ill and is usually too weak to work. Today, however, they are together. Dorothy keeps a watchful eye on her mother, hoping that she has the strength to carry on.

Dorothy will never forget the evening when her mum told her she was ill with the most fatal disease in the world.

"When I was twelve, I

noticed that mum had grown very thin and tired. I knew that something was wrong. One evening, just before we went to bed, she wanted to sit and talk for a while. She said that she's been to the hospital and that the doctor had told her she had AIDS. I was terrified. I knew that people died from it. But I wanted to hide my fear from my mum and tried hard not to cry. I told her that everything would be all right. When she couldn't see me I started crying. My dad had died when I was younger so

what would happen to me and my two brothers if mum died?"

The mothers help

Two years have passed since that evening and Rose is still alive. Dorothy and her brothers have also been to hospital and tested themselves, but none of them have AIDS.

"Life was hard enough before mum became ill, but now it's even tougher. In addition to collecting papyrus and making mats, I have to cook, wash up and

do the cleaning. Mum has always struggled to ensure that my brothers and I should have a good life, so now I help her as much as I can. I worry about her so much that I find it hard to concentrate at school."

But Dorothy is not alone. "The same year that mum told us she was ill, the mothers of St. Rita decided to help us. If we haven't got any food I can go there and get some corn and beans. They also help me and my brothers with school uniforms and other clothes. Without the



Wants to be Kenya's first woman president

"I want to become Kenya's first woman president, then I would help all the orphaned children find somewhere to live, get enough to eat and have the chance to go to school. I would also help those that have HIV/AIDS get the medicine and care that they need."

mothers, all this wouldn't have been possible," says Dorothy.

Rose agrees:

"So many people around here are scared to be near people with AIDS, but the mothers give me and my children support and love. I know that I haven't got long left to live, but I am so relieved that the mothers will take care of my children when I die. Dorothy will never have to live on the street."

Loves the radio

After four hours' hard work, it's time for Rose and Dorothy to head home. They carry the heavy papyrus bundles on their heads. Dorothy is starving as they only took a bottle of water with them. When they get home, she immediately begins preparing the cornmeal porridge. After the meal she rests for a while before starting on the mats.

In the evening Dorothy

finally gets a moment to spare. She switches the radio on. She loves listening to music and tonight they're playing her favourite singer, Princess July.

"Many of her songs are about AIDS. I think a lot of people listen when she sings. And we must all start listening otherwise the whole of Kenya will die of AIDS."

It's dark and quiet outside. Dorothy turns the radio off and snuggles up to Rose and



Listen to Princess July at www.childrensworld.org

her two younger brothers, Isau and Jacobo. She loves her family, and when they all lie close together like this she feels secure. ☺





Penina Awino, 12

Lives: With my brothers.

Loves: Reading books.

Hates: Snakes.

Worst memory: When Mum, Dad and my big sister died.

Best memory: When my big brother bought me some shoes.

Looks up to: My big brother and the mothers of St. Rita.

Wants: To be a pilot.

Hopes: That there'll soon be a cure for AIDS.

Dream: That parents don't die when their children are small.

Penina misses her mother very much and thinks about her every day. But she is very grateful for the help she and her brothers get from the St. Rita mothers. Now they can continue to live together and go to school.

Penina looks out of the window. Out in the yard women are washing clothes and children are running around playing. But Penina is lost in her thoughts. She's humming a song that her mother Josephine used to sing to her. Penina often sits on her own thinking about her mother. They were the best of friends and Penina misses her every day.

"Because my dad lived with his second wife, Mum and I always helped each

other around the house. If she did the cooking, I'd take care of the washing up or pop down to the local store for her. In the evenings she used to sing songs and tell stories to me and my brothers. We didn't have much money but at least we had each other."

A mother to her mum

"When I was in second grade everything changed. Mum fell ill. Sometimes I had to stay home from school for several weeks and was soon

lagging behind the rest of the class. When I was eight it was me who had to take care of her instead of the other way around. I did the cooking, washing and cleaning. I'd also bathe Mum and help her go to the toilet several times a day. I combed her hair, too."

"We slept in the same bed and I was often woken in the middle of the night by Mum whispering that she needed a drink of water. I often had to comfort her. I was very sad, but I didn't want to worry



Expensive taxi

A ride in the Matutu taxi to see her mum in hospital cost 50 shillings (USD 0,67), and so Penina couldn't visit her as much as she'd wanted.



Penina wanted to live with the St. Rita mothers

her. I cried a lot, though, when she wasn't looking."

Mum died

Penina's mum became so ill that she had to be admitted to hospital.

"Whenever I visited her I always brought cornmeal porridge and clean clothes, and took the dirty laundry home with me to wash. I'd have brought food and clean clothes every day but the hospital was so far away. It cost 50 shillings (USD 0,67) to get there by taxi, and there was no way we could afford to go every day. It was far too expensive for us. I felt depressed on the days when I couldn't go to see her. I was

worried that she didn't have enough to eat, and was lying there all on her own."

Penina's mother died on one of the days when Penina couldn't afford to visit her. This is something Penina will never forget.

"That night I sat with my brothers outside the house and cried. My older brother Eric tried to comfort me but it was no use."

Penina missed her mother terribly. She often sat outside the house in the middle of the night staring into space instead of sleeping.

New nightmares

After a few months Penina started school again. At first

she found it hard to concentrate, but it got easier after a while. Her big brother Eric fished and took all the casual jobs he could to support himself and his brothers and sisters. Sometimes their father John helped them out with some money.

Penina's big sister Beatrice, who was married and lived in a village far away, had come home for their mother's funeral. One day she told them that she too was ill. And it wasn't long before their father said that he was also ill. Exactly one year after the death of Penina's mother, her father passed away. A few months later her sister also died.

Penina and her brothers were now all alone. Her big brother Eric knew that it was impossible for him to take care of four brothers and a sister all on his own.

Saved by the mothers

Some of the other children in the village had told Penina about how the mothers of St. Rita help them. One day when one of the mothers, Bernadette, was passing by their house, Penina plucked up the courage to ask for help. Since that day, Penina and her brothers have received help with just about everything. Her older brother Eric, 25, is still working as hard as he can to take care of

ts to be mothers

Loves to swim

Each day after school, Penina and her friends go down to Lake Victoria for a swim.

In Penina's language (Luo) the lake is called Nam Lolwe.

It's Africa's largest lake and the second largest fresh water lake in the world. Only Lake Superior in Canada is larger.





A game not to Miss!

In the afternoons Penina often plays Miss with her brothers and friends. They make a ball by stuffing a sock with plastic bags. Two children stand fifteen metres apart and throw the ball back and forth to each other. The other players stand between them. The trick is to avoid being hit when one of the throwers suddenly throws the ball at them instead of to the other person. Whoever gets hit by the ball is out of the game.



A ball from a sock

Simply stuff a sock with plastic bags. Then you're all set to play Miss or football.

his younger brothers and sister. Without the mothers' help, however, it would have been an impossible task.

"We all go to school now and whenever we don't have enough food they provide it as well. And if we need medicine for malaria or something we can go to the pharmacy and the mothers pay for it."

But the best part about being helped by the mothers is that Penina and her brothers can carry on living

in the village together.

"It's important that we stick together now that we've lost Mum and Dad. It would've been much worse to have ended up in an orphanage. This way we remain a family.

I love the mothers and call them all 'Mum' now. It feels so good to get to call someone that again. When I grow up I want to be like the mothers of St. Rita and help other orphaned children." ☺

Children need families

The mothers of St. Rita believe that children should live with families and not in an orphanage. They want children to lead as normal lives as possible and be part of the village community. They aren't able to look after all orphaned children on their own and always try to find new families for them. But most of the local villagers are too poor to take care of more children.





Listen to Penina sing her mother's song at www.childrensworld.org



Penina's secret

"At first I didn't know why Mum, Dad and my big sister died. Now I know they died of AIDS. When my big brother told me I got really depressed. I don't dare tell anyone how my parents died. I'm worried that no one will want to play with me any more. Everyone will think that I have AIDS too?"

Mum should have had free medicine
"Mum was given a prescription for medicines that we couldn't afford. It seems so unfair. The poor should get medicines free or at least very cheap. I know that there are medicines that allow rich people with HIV/AIDS to live longer. If Mum had been given that medicine she'd probably still be here with me today."



Selling yourself

"If it hadn't been for the mothers we would've been forced to live on the street, where life is really tough. Boys can possibly manage to get by somehow but for us girls it can be really dangerous. Some girls are forced to sell themselves just to survive," says Penina.

