



KENYA - 2026

## KENYA – RAMAT EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVE

In Kenya we work with the Samburu – a tribe of about a half million people who are traditional pastoralists. Even the youth are proud of their identity and heritage, dancing energetically to celebrate their culture in beads and the traditional shuka, a brightly colored cloth that represents strength and protection. But some aspects of the culture are harmful to girls, like Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and forced child marriage. Our goal is to address harmful practices while preserving and celebrating the culture overall, with its strong sense of community, respect for elders, and mutual care. The program Global Pearls supports in Kenya is called Ramat Empowerment Initiative. “Ramat” means “taking care of” in the Samburu language. But it is also a play on the name of our local changemaker, Josphine Naramat Lentiyani, who developed and runs the program. Naramat means someone who takes care of everything, and Josphine is definitely living up to her name!

## JOSPINE – OUR HERO

The starting point for any of our projects is a local hero, whom we call a changemaker, and in Kenya that is Josphine Naramat Lentiyani. Josphine was one of 10 children born to her impoverished Samburu parents. Her elderly father became severely disabled, and, when Josephine was ten, her mother, an angry alcoholic who had been forced into child marriage, abandoned the family. Josephine spent the next 5 years scavenging for ways to feed herself and her younger siblings. Often forced to spend her days in search of odd jobs, she was scorned by the community for being an irresponsible child who skipped school.

Things looked up when an NGO gave her an opportunity to return to school, but that sponsorship ended after a year. Once again, she struggled to support herself, now without a place to call home so she was even more vulnerable. She became the victim of a violent rape which left her pregnant and single. Under pressure, her rapist offered to marry her, but only if she underwent FGM as is the custom in the Samburu culture. She bravely refused.



Such hardships would make most people bitter, but Josphine’s natural compassion only deepened as she saw and empathized with the struggles of other children.

## ENTER GLOBAL PEARLS

We met Josphine when she was 15 years old at the NGO-sponsored school. Even at that age, her gentleness, deep compassion, and uncompromising integrity impressed us. We lost touch with her for several years until she found us on Facebook and reached out. For the next few years, we had occasional conversations and, despite her personal struggles, she didn’t once ask for financial help. Instead, one day, knowing that Global Pearls takes care of children around the world, she asked us if we had “room for one more”.

There was a girl she knew whose father was dead and her mother would soon follow. The men of the village were arranging for her to marry an old man. Only Samburu elders are permitted to marry, as the younger men, the Moran, are supposed to focus on their duties as warriors - protecting cattle and villagers from lions and raids by rival tribes. The young girl desperately wanted to continue her education and avoid a forced marriage, so Josphine asked if we could sponsor her education. Despite Josphine’s own troubles, she was thinking of others.

That is when Global Pearls' Kenya program was born. Since then, under Josphine's guidance, the project has grown from school sponsorships to include empowerment clubs for girls and for boys, a hostel for at-risk primary school girls, village visits and an Alternative Rite-of-Passage (all of which will be discussed later in the report). Josephine has a gentle, soft-spoken strength, and through her programs she quickly earned the love of abused children in the hostel, the respect of defiant teenage boys in her clubs, and even the admiration of hostile elders in her village visits – not an easy feat for a Samburu woman. She has been on national television for her Alternative Rite-of-Passage ceremony and was interviewed recently by a contingent from UN Women. Her projects are deeply impactful – genuine love can do that.

## EDUCATION

The Ramat program began with a simple school sponsorship program in Maralal, working with Moi Girls Samburu Secondary School, where we focused on girls who were rescued from or in danger of child marriage by paying their school fees. We initially focused on secondary school girls because most Samburu girls are safe through primary school but face forced marriage if they can't afford secondary school. We soon realized that primary school children also needed help with basic school expenses in order to stay in school – sometimes to rescue them from impending marriage, but more often to rescue them from abuse or the trauma of hunger. So, we expanded the program to provide support for such girls. Next, we began to include particularly needy boys.

### Meet EN (name changed for privacy)

Josphine met EN while volunteering at a local hospital. The petite 7-year-old girl had four gashes on her scalp where her aunt beat her with a hoe, burn marks on her shins where the aunt heated knives in a fire and pressed them against her skin, and emotional scars from being tied up at night and forced to sleep in the animal pen. Josphine reported the girl to the Children's Office and was given custody. EN is particularly intelligent and scores at the top of her class in school. EN has flourished in Josphine's care at the hostel and loves her new siblings.

### Meet DL (name changed for privacy)

DL comes from a rural village prone to banditry. His mother died when he was two, and his father's first wife (polygamy is very common among the Samburu) refused to let him attend school. Instead, she forced him to herd their livestock, and she treated him very badly. Driven by his desire to learn, he ran away at age 14, but the family found him and took him home. He ran away two more times, and, on the third attempt, a headmistress took pity on him and allowed him to stay. He distinguished himself as a bright, respectful, and disciplined boy, and the headmistress covered his fees until she retired and moved away – leaving him once again with no support. Fighting back tears, he requested help from Josphine, and he is now one of the boys we sponsor.



By 2026 we were partnering with 3 primary schools, 2 junior secondary schools, and 3 senior secondary schools. We are paying **boarding school fees for 137** at-risk students, purchased **uniforms for over 200** of the neediest children in our empowerment clubs, and **cleared the balances of an additional 120** graduating secondary school students who qualified for university studies - this allows them to receive their high school diplomas.

## NOT A ZERO-SUM GAME

As organizations work to pursue social justice, they are often tempted to act as if their cause were a zero-sum game. In their efforts to help marginalized groups, they might treat some other groups as opponents or villains, but this does not advance social justice – it only invites backlash and greater hardship for all. For example, we can't help women by attacking or dishonoring men. At Global Pearls we do our best to work holistically with members of the community to bring about positive change for all, and that approach is proving to be remarkably effective.

## EMPOWERMENT CLUBS

When Global Pearls began sponsoring after-school girls' clubs in 2022 in Cameroon, the focus was almost exclusively on puberty, menstruation, and the like. But girls face many other difficult issues and it was clear that we needed to go beyond giving them information about handling menstruation; we needed to develop a curriculum designed to develop confidence, regain a sense of dignity, develop skills to meet the myriad difficult challenges they face in life, and inspire them to drive positive changes in their communities. That's when, collaborating with partners in Cameroon, Kenya, and Malawi, we developed our own curriculum which we piloted in Kenya, Malawi, Zimbabwe, and Uganda in 2023. The curriculum is neutral—we share a few facts, but then the meeting is discussion-based. Our leaders never lecture or say something is right or wrong, and all views are given an equal chance for expression and discussion.

It soon became clear that boys needed the curriculum too! All boys want to be a hero. If they are taught that a powerful man beats his wife, they will strive to live up to that standard. If they are taught that a powerful man uses his power to protect and serve the community, then they strive to use their power to defend and care for others. Our job is to point them towards the right sort of role model, and it turns out that's pretty easy. The boys' clubs start by asking the students to think of a man they admire and share with the group why they admire them. Invariably the boys choose a man who is kind and has helped the community. The 42 topics addressed in the



club meetings help the boys grow their power and use it well so they can become like the men they admire.

We were curious to test the impact on beliefs and behaviors, so, in 2025, we decided to run an experiment in the boys' clubs. In the Samburu culture, no boy is supposed to marry a girl if she has not undergone FGM, so, on the day clubs discussed this topic, our leaders asked the boys if they would consider marrying a girl who had not been "circumcised" (FGM). At that time, all our clubs were held in Maralal, a large town that is not as traditional as rural areas, yet only 31% out of several hundred boys said they would consider it. In a rural area, this number would be far lower. At the end of the meeting, our leaders asked the same question again. After just this one meeting, 93% of the boys said they would consider marrying an uncircumcised girl. That is a big change after just one meeting!

**Weekly attendance is averaging 1,370 students in 2026, and 1/3 of the clubs are now in rural areas.**

## GROWING UP SAMBURU

Winning the support of elders hinges on the respect we show for the Samburu culture. One fun project we worked on that served this goal was collecting stories written by Kanady (“Kideh”), a Samburu Moran who beautifully describes events in his childhood. The book celebrates the Samburu culture, and we printed 2,000 copies which Josphine is distributing in clubs and village meetings. The book has been so well received, we are working on a second book with short stories from Kideh’s life as a Moran. Here is an excerpt:



### PREFACE

*In the quiet evenings of my childhood, when the sun dipped behind the hills and the air turned cool, we would gather around the small fire outside our hut. The flames flickered softly, painting our faces with a warm orange glow as the smell of smoke mixed with that of the night wind. My grandmother would sit at the center, her voice steady and full of wisdom, telling us stories of brave warriors, clever hares, and strong women who shaped our people’s past. We listened with wide eyes, learning not just the tales but the values hidden within them: courage, respect, unity, and patience. Those nights were our classroom, and her voice was the bridge between our world and the world of our ancestors.*

*My grandmother has always been more than just a storyteller; she is the heartbeat of my childhood and the keeper of our family’s wisdom. Her words carried comfort when life was hard and guidance when I was lost. She taught me that strength is not in shouting the loudest, but in understanding deeply; not in wealth, but in kindness and truth. Every story she told still lives in me, shaping how I see the world and reminding me who I am. To me, she is not only my grandmother; she is my history, my teacher, and the voice of our people echoing through time.*

## VILLAGE VISITS & ALTERNATIVE RITE-OF-PASSAGE CEREMONIES

In 2025, Josphine and Samson, one of the men on her team, started village visits to build relationships with elders and discuss issues affecting villagers’ lives—20 villages, 3 times per year. Josephine wanted to bring aspects of our club curriculum to villages, because, while participating children were impacted by the clubs, the children were struggling with resistance in their home villages. Villagers have loved the chance to openly discuss issues they care about, and they keep encouraging Josphine to return. She treats complaints from the men with as much respect as those from the women. For example, it is the men who complain about domestic abuse, not the women. Young girls forced to marry elderly men become bitter, and, being young and strong, they are a greater danger to the elderly men than the other way round! When equal attention is given to problems bothering the men, the male elders are more open to responding to concerns from the women as well.

On Josphine's second set of village visits, she brought up FGM. The ritual is illegal in Kenya, but the laws are rarely enforced in rural areas. According to the Anti-FGM Board Kenya, prevalence of FGM had dropped to about 76% across Samburu County by 2022, but most of the decline was in urban areas. The rate is much higher in the traditional rural areas of the county, though accurate estimates are hard to obtain since no one admits to the illegal practice. Many groups have tried to dissuade villagers from the practice, even threatening them with arrest, but that has only served to create greater resistance. Elders don't like "outsiders", even if they are Samburu, telling them what to do. They especially don't like anyone challenging their traditional culture.



When Josphine brought the subject up, villagers immediately became hostile and angrily told Josphine if she wanted to talk about FGM then she should just leave. She gently explained that she wasn't there to tell them what to do. They hadn't been to school, but they worked hard and sacrificed to send *her* to school (figuratively) and she was just there to share what she had learned. What they decided to do with the knowledge was up to them. That calmed them down and they listened. What happened next was amazing!

As Josphine shared the details of FGM, including risks of the procedure itself and subsequent risks during childbirth, the men were shocked. It is a taboo subject, so men didn't know! They kept turning to the women asking, "Is this true? Are the things she's saying true?" The women confirmed what Josphine was saying, and pretty soon an argument broke out – the men angrily told the women they were to blame for FGM because no one had shared with the men what the procedure actually entailed; the women in turn blamed the men since women were just obeying their husbands' orders. Josphine observed the heated



discussion quietly, giggling to herself. In the end, the ELDERS REQUESTED that Josphine come up with an Alternative Rite-of-Passage Ceremony (ARP) for their daughters!!! We happily obliged, and in December 2025, Josphine offered her first ARP to 104 girls. The girls experienced 5 days of teachings based on our Empowerment Club curriculum, and, on the 6<sup>th</sup> day, parents and elders were invited for a celebration that included dancing, speeches, a feast, and blessings by the elders. The only complaint? They had far more than 104 girls ready for FGM, so they wanted her to offer more alternative ceremonies!

In keeping with our values of honoring traditional cultures, we will only offer the experience to girls if their entire village embraces the ARP, and the elders need to participate and bless the ceremony. This is vital if we want the ARP to truly be accepted as a replacement for FGM.



This year we created a flyer which we will send home with all middle-school girls in the Wamba area (it will be translated into Samburu) and we anticipate many more ARPs to take place this year:

## PROTECT OUR CULTURE THROUGH ARP

Some aspects of our culture have become illegal, and this is threatening our culture more broadly. We want to provide a legal alternative to FGM so we can once again celebrate and honor our culture openly.

### Harmful aspects of FGM for girls/women:

- It is far more extensive and dangerous than male circumcision, so girls are at risk of dying from excessive bleeding and infection.
- It is far more painful than male circumcision, so the emotional trauma can scar a girl for life.
- Scar tissue is not pliable, so childbirth becomes dangerous as the baby often gets stuck in the birth canal. Women need to be ripped to allow the baby to come out, and this can lead to severe health issues for the mother, including fistulas and death.
- The rite of passage of a girl into womanhood is an important cultural milestone, and when FGM is done privately, the girl is deprived of an important community celebration.

### Harmful aspects of FGM for men/families:

- If a girl dies as a result of FGM, the family loses the future bride price.
- Keeping a circumcised mother safe during childbirth can be very expensive. If medical care isn't available or can't be afforded, then the possible death of the mother means a man must pay another bride price for a new wife.
- A girl who is forced to undergo FGM and marriage against her will, often becomes bitter, and bitterness can lead to alcoholism and abuse of the husband.
- A parent might be arrested, as FGM is illegal.

We can re-claim and protect our culture by embracing an alternative rite of passage (ARP) for our girls.

If the elders of a village wish to replace FGM with a legal alternative, **and if they are willing to participate and bless the ceremony**, we offer this 6-day event:

- For 5 days the girls will attend educational sessions covering a wide variety of topics designed to increase their confidence and critical thinking skills. The curriculum encourages them to become positive, responsible leaders in their communities.
- On the 6<sup>th</sup> day, parents and village elders are invited to join their daughters for a celebration that includes singing, dancing, speeches, and blessings by the elders.



If your village is interested in adopting this alternative rite of passage ceremony, you can contact:

Josphine Naramat Lentiyani, Director of Ramat Empowerment Initiative  
0728993868, 0792822070, 0702110747

## HOSTEL

Some girls, too young for boarding school, need a safe place to live where they will be free from severe abuse and the threat of child marriage. Some older scholarship recipients also need a safe place to stay between school terms. To accommodate such girls, Josphine, with funding from Global Pearls, oversaw the construction of and runs a hostel to care full-time for girls grades 3 and under and provide sanctuary to older girls on school breaks. Here, the children live and study, tend a garden, and do chores together. They are part of a healthy, loving family.



These children have faced more trauma than any child should. Addressing their emotional health is important, so we create opportunities for the children to laugh and have fun, to bond as a “family”, and to experience unconditional love. A few of the excursions we arranged for our younger children in 2025 were:

- A Kids Fun Day, with slides, bouncy castle, swimming, bubble balls, games and entertainment.
- The Maralal International Camel Derby where the children could cheer the camel racers and enjoy a lively celebration of Samburu culture with traditional dances and costumes.
- Outings for ice cream or fries to cheer the children up after discouraging events.
- A weekend camping trip at a wild animal sanctuary with zebras, giraffes, impalas, wildebeest, hippos, and so many other animals roaming around the tents! They enjoyed dancing, storytelling around a campfire, delicious food, and even a boat safari.
- A Thanksgiving feast – a holiday Josphine had never heard of before. Thirty people were part of her “family” this past Thanksgiving.
- A Christmas celebration with new, white dresses for all the girls, a scrumptious breakfast feast, and an excursion to Joy World amusement park.

It is heart-warming to see abused girls grow calm and confident, young rape victims play with joy and enthusiasm, malnourished girls become healthy and unafraid. In a safe environment, they are also excelling in school. EN, for example (introduced on EDUCATION page), is consistently the top student in her class! We are proud of our girls for overcoming so much and for now being such a source of joy for us and others.

**Josphine’s description of Thanksgiving:** *We had the best day of our lives. This will be a tradition in our house.... Let me tell you, the excitement I had for that party could’ve powered a whole village. We prepared food like we were feeding an army — pots everywhere, smoke rising, people shouting instructions like a battlefield. And the chapatis? I made them with the strength of my ancestors. Everyone devoured them like they hadn’t seen food since 1999. I honestly think I created legends that day. 😊🔥*

### Ten young girls live full-time in the hostel with Josphine.

**From Josphine:** *Thank you for making 2025 a year full of celebrations for me and my family. From Thanksgiving, to Christmas, and all the way to the New Year, you gave us laughter, joy, and memories we will cherish forever. Normally, this season is quiet and sometimes lonely for us, but this year, through your love, it became the happiest year of my life. My children and I had so much fun; we felt truly seen, loved, and celebrated.*