



**WHY ME?** Josephine Nekesa, a mother of two sets of twins. Her life changed after the contraceptives she took failed to work.

## A WOMAN'S SHATTERED DREAM: WHEN CONTRACEPTIVES FAIL TO WORK

*Her two sets of twins were seen as a bad omen in the family but Josephine Nekesa would not allow any harm to visit her innocent children. This was double tragedy as she hadn't planned for the pregnancy in the first place: the contraceptives she was using failed to do the magic.*

BY RACHUONYO DUNCAN

Josephine Nekesa's dream to spend the rest of her life with her loving husband was shattered after she gave birth to two sets of twins despite using contraceptives to prevent conception.

The twin brothers were not regarded as a blessing but as a bad omen in the family and no-one was ready to accept them; not even her hitherto sweet husband.

"I was shocked when I realised I was pregnant; our first child was just three years and we were not ready for another baby," Nekesa, 50, narrates.

According to the mother of six, things got worse after she gave birth to the two sets of twins.

"It was a trying moment for me, my husband was demanding explanation and my in-laws were also fighting our marriage because of the twins. My husband knew that I was using the pills and he was not expecting any child," she says.

Nekesa explains that her in-laws wanted the twins to be killed so that no calamity befalls the family in particular and the Luhya community in general.

To protect her kids from any harm, Nekesa ran away from her marital home in Kakamega with her children. She travelled to Nairobi to start a new life minus the man she once thought she was going to live with forever.

"I was ready to do anything to protect my innocent children and no-one knew where I had gone," she explains.

Fortunately, two years later, Nekesa reunited with her husband in Nairobi where they rented an apartment in Kangemi.

"I knew him as a loving person and that is why I accepted him back in my life. We later decided to seek help from a doctor who would answer our puzzle."

Nekesa was advised to use non-hormonal method (Coil) since her body was not reacting well with the pills she had previously used.

Three years later, Nekesa's life took

a different twist when a pregnancy test confirmed that she was indeed expectant despite using the non-hormonal method.

"I was very confused and my life was empty; it had no meaning at all. Although my husband was supportive, he was a worried man," she recalls.

She again gave birth to twins; two beautiful girls. Her previous nightmares returned a few months later; her 'loving' husband disappeared leaving her with the heavy burden of taking care of the children.

"I knew that he had disappeared because of the twins. Perhaps he was convinced that I was a cursed woman," she bitterly says.

Although her girls are grown-ups, she always advises them to avoid unplanned pregnancies as it can completely change their lives.

"If I say that they are not seeing boys then I will be lying to myself; I have witnessed many girls dropping out of school due to early pregnancies and I do not want them to be part of these sad

statistics," she says.

Nekesa urges other parents to be open with their young girls on issues touching on their reproductive health.

"Not many parents talk to their girls about contraceptives; our girls should be well-equipped and they should be advised not to misuse the drugs," she advises.

Nekesa urges members of her community to shun retrogressive cultural practices and particularly those which deny life to vulnerable kids

"Children are from God and no culture has the liberty to take away life; I could not allow my children to be harmed because of such beliefs. When I see them today I am very proud of them and I will do anything to ensure they succeed in life," she says.

Nekesa is however categorical that she is not ready to commit herself to another man.

According to Dr Aron Shikuku, Kangemi Centre Manager Marie Stopes Kenya, contraceptives failure depend on the method used and in

most cases women do not seek professional recommendation for which method best suits them.

"Not many people are knowledgeable about contraceptives. Often, many do not go for regular checkups; something which has contributed to the failure of some methods."

He adds that the failure rate of hormonal method is very minimal compared to non-hormonal methods like coils.

"One can experience excessive bleeding and in such cases we recommend that the patient tries another method," he explains.

Dr Shikuku said many young women misuse some drugs and even use e-pills as a way of controlling birth.

"One should make an informed decision and we always recommend the use of contraceptives rather than the e-pills," he advises.

Dr Shikuku says patients who have high blood pressure or are on drugs are not advised to use non-hormonal method.

"This can cause a hormonal imbalance which can increase the failure rate of the method."

He also urges young women using contraceptives to always attend regular checkups to avoid complications.

"Most of the women do not go for checkups and in most cases they are not knowledgeable of the pros and cons of the methods they use."

The level of unplanned parenthood is now a major global concern, particularly among young people. Worldwide, approximately a third of the 205 million pregnancies which occur each year are unplanned.

The World Conception Day which was held last month focused on encouraging teenagers to take full charge of their sexuality to prevent an unplanned pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections.

Dr Shikuku cautions Kenyans to beware of the counterfeit contraceptive drugs which are in the market since they are not effective or can cause serious harm on the body.

"People should not buy such drugs just because they are available and cheap. A doctor's recommendation is very important."



**FRIENDS:** Top, Bernadette Julita with Miriam Wambui. Above, Dr Aron Shikuku, Kangemi Centre Manager Marie Stopes Kenya.

## WHAT GIRLS THINK ABOUT CONTRACEPTIVES

MIRIAM Wambui (pictured below), 21, says that she is not very informed about contraceptives but she rarely discusses such issues with her mother.

"Mum is also not very knowledgeable either and I am afraid to talk about it. I can only share with my friends or my twin sister who is always supportive," she confesses.

Wambui says she has a boyfriend and always insists they use protection to avoid unplanned pregnancy.

"I am still a student and not ready to have a child; I want to concentrate on my studies first."

In what could be food for thought for all stakeholders, Wambui said contraception contributes to immorality because many girls are not afraid to have multiple sex partners.

"Though they can prevent pregnancy, one can easily contract sexual transmitted infections; one should just be faithful to their partner," she advises.

Bernadette Julita, 21, also says that although it is important for young girls to prevent unplanned pregnancy, they should not misuse contraceptive drugs since can affect their future.

"Many young girls use contraception without getting a doctor's advice. I believe this is one of the reasons why many young women fail to bear children when they are married."



## Kaswasha old women soccer team kick societal problems away

BY WANJIKU MURAYA

WOMEN will come together for chamas (merry-go-rounds) and other income generating initiatives. It is therefore mind-boggling to hear a group of women, and not young women – who have come together to play football.

This is not to say that women's football is a rarity; it has been enjoyed in its organised form since 1970 and the first Women's World Cup held in 1991 in China and won by the USA.

At Kariobangi South at the KCC depot playing field in Nairobi, a group of more than 30 women meet every day between 4 and 5pm to indulge in the joys of being children again. Their football may not be structured or organised but it serves the purposes it was cut out for. They come clad in t-shirts and African tailor-made long shorts ready to stretch and flex muscle. Most of them do not have the uniform – can't afford it but that is not a deterrent to get dirty. The minimum age to join this group is 40 but none of these women comes even loosely close to this age, most of them are in their fifties, sixties and seventies, the oldest being 72.

The oldest player does not look a day older than 50 and one can clearly understand the wonders of exercise by looking at her. Why the minimum age of 40? A woman is mature, stable and has come to terms with life's anecdotes, they explain. So jumping into a football field and running around for an hour is something they will do without thinking too much about its oddity. This football team that is called 'Kaswasha Old Women Football Team' was formed in September 2007. Their



**NO CHILD'S PLAY:** Kaswasha Old Women Football team put their best foot forward

initial aim was to fight poverty, HIV/Aids and general ailments in their area. Kicking the football was symbolic – it represented their kicking out this tribulations from their midst. One thing they have kicked in as they kicked the football is their good health. They attest to the true benefits of exercise and explain how back, joint aches and other aches associated with advancing of age have no place in their bodies.

Their formation also coincided with the eruption of chaos that followed the 2007 general election and they became an instrument of channeling peace within their area. Kariobangi South is one of the areas in Eastlands where peace was maintained during the post-election violence of

2007/2008. These women are mostly proud of their peace initiative which they say began even before any government efforts had been made to spread peace within the country. Their initiatives have rubbed off on other areas namely Dandora area 4, Starehe, Mukuru kwa Njenga, kwa Reuben and Kaiyaba. Some of the women in these areas have registered their interest in joining their football team but they encourage them to start similar outfits in their respective areas since they will make more and direct impact in their areas. Their rejoinder is to carry the banner of peace and to keep spreading the gospel of harmony across Eastlands and farther. They have a scheduled visit this month to a group of women

in Nyeri to share and exchange ideas on how to make their lives and of those around them better.

The birth of the football team has led to other amazing endeavours which they may never have realised individually. Fighting and creating awareness of HIV/Aids was of course one of the forefront objectives of this team and it has generated another very significant aspect of this problem – taking care of children infected and affected and with no one to take care of them. They have developed an unstructured feeding and caring programme for these children and aim to be able to establish a more institutionalised caring centre where their needs are met. The group also takes care of adults who may also be infected and have no-one to take care of them.

Coming together everyday and indulging in a relaxing football game would not be enough if these women did not think about the financial aspect of their lives. They have pooled together and helped each other start income-generating activities which include selling vegetables, clothes, detergents etc.

The women's football team is a branch of the larger Kaswasha which is a resource centre covering interests in youths and the community.

Their immediate need is uniforms since most of them cannot afford to get a set. The feeding programme for the children and orphans affected by HIV/Aids would also be more successful if they would have a proper home for them and resources to take better care of them.

For as long as the football can be kicked, then these amazing women will keep kicking their problems away which they are already doing superbly.