FATUMA
A TRUE STORY OF GIRL POWER IN KENYA

CREATED FOR THE GRASSROOTS GIRLS BOOK CLUB

#2 OF 6 STORIES TO INSPIRE ACTION FOR GIRLS
This graphic novella was made with Fatuma Aden Osman in June 2013 at the Nairobi, Kenya-based offices of Heshima Kenya. Fatuma, now 20 years old, shares her journey from her childhood in a small village in Somalia to her adolescence in the capital Mogadishu, where she worked as a maid for her extended family while dreaming of attending school. After finding herself in the middle of a firefight between the terrorist organization al-Shabaab and the Somali government forces in a Mogadishu market, Fatuma became one of 600,000 refugees to flee to Kenya. Girl refugees who arrive in Kenya alone are at great risk of being exploited, assaulted, forced into marriage and often cannot get access to schools, hospitals or employment. Fatuma overcame immense obstacles as an unaccompanied girl refugee with the help of the grassroots organization Heshima Kenya.

Heshima Kenya specializes in finding and protecting unaccompanied and separated refugee children and youth, especially girls, living in Nairobi, Kenya. Heshima’s Girl Empowerment Project provides refugee girls with basic education, life skills trainings on topics like health and leadership, job training and a chance to earn their own income and become financially independent. Fatuma is sharing her story to show that girl power is spreading at the grassroots level worldwide. The Grassroots Girls Initiative is a partnership of six funders that believe grassroots organizations are uniquely qualified to create and implement effective, organic solutions for the most underserved girls in the communities where they work. Grassroots Girls Initiative partners are: American Jewish World Service, EMpower—the Emerging Markets Foundation, Firelight Foundation, Mama Cash, The Global Fund for Children and The Global Fund for Women.
My father was old and didn't bother with household matters. I was ALONE.

You will be a SLUT like your mother!

I am TIRED of you!

You are a BASTARD!

I am SO HUNGRY. There was no BREAKFAST for me this MORNING.

MAHADSANID! (THANK YOU!)

GO home, child, and EAT some LUNCH. I will watch your Goats.

I came to EAT. I've had nothing today.

But the neighbor lady is with them.

You STUPID girl. You've left the Goats alone. They will wander off!

What are you doing here?

I CAME to EAT. I've had nothing today.

YOU STUPID girl. YOU'VE LEFT the Goats alone. THEY WILL WANDER OFF!

GO BACK to the Goats!

DON'T come back until it gets DARK.

Here child, drink this Goats milk. It will help ease your hunger.

MAHADSANID!
Whatever I do, even if I stay all day with the goats, my stepmother beats me. I might as well play!

My big brother is coming for a visit. Now that he is a big man working as a mechanic in Mogadishu maybe he will bring us some treats. But probably nothing for you.

Oh, Abdi is coming! Finally I will have someone to confide in.

Maybe this time he will take me with him. Last time I begged him, but father didn’t give permission for me to leave. I would do all the housework for him and his wife if he takes me!

Brother, please take me with you. The beatings are worse now. I can’t live here anymore.

Fatuma, I have something to tell you. Tomorrow you start your new life in Mogadishu!

Fatuma, I have something to tell you.

Tomorrow you start your new life in Mogadishu.

Fatuma will be a great help to my wife in caring for our two children.

Brother, please take me with you. The beatings are worse now. I can’t live here anymore.

Father, let her come. Fatuma will be a great help to my wife in caring for our two children.

Hmmm.
Children, this is my sister Fatuma. She is here to help us. You will treat her with respect and love her like a sister.

IS KA WARSO. (Hello.)

Here are the pots for cooking. You will need to make all the meals because I go to sell MIRRA during the day. Also, there is sweeping, buying food at the market and walking the children home after school.

I didn't mind doing all the chores. Sometimes Abdi's wife would yell at me for not cleaning well enough, but she never hit me. That was a big improvement.

How was your day, Fatuma?

Look at her. She's not even wearing a headscarf.

She must be from the village. I bet her legs are dirty, too.

QURAAC: A SOMALI BREAKFAST BREAD

I didn't know I would be with the little ones. Learning the alphabet at 12 years old is so embarrassing!

IN the village I didn't think about always wearing my headscarf. But in the city everyone thinks it's improper for a girl my age not to cover her head.

Finally someone is asking me about my day!

How was your first day of school?

She's illiterate. I saw the children's teacher ask her to write her name, but she didn't know how.

In the village I don't think about always wearing my headscarf. But in the city everyone thinks it's improper for a girl my age not to cover her head.

Well let's go home and play some football. That always cheers you up!

Now that you're more used to city life I think it's time you get an education. I've arranged with the school for you to start today.
Why are you such a difficult girl? Tell your brother to come see me tomorrow.

I tried to concentrate in class, but I didn’t understand anything. I would just daydream about playing.

No homework AGAIN?

It’s that stupid village girl. Let’s ignore her.

She never does her homework and in class she just ignores the instruction!

I understand, but try not to scold her. She has gone through very hard times and it is difficult for her to come to school for the first time.

Brother, I’m sorry but I want to stop going to school. I am not learning and everyday I am teased. This way I will have more time for the household.

Brother, I’m so proud of you. I just wish I was back at my brother’s house. It hurt too much to continue going to school, so I decided to quit. But the thought of telling my brother after all he did for me also hurt.

Those are beautiful! Where did you get them?

Just down at the market. They only cost 250 shillings.

I don’t think so Fatuma. We don’t have any extra money. Everything goes toward food and household expenses.

Very nice.

I thought about it and decided you deserve something new and nice. You work hard and are a good girl.

Thank you, brother, for my first gift ever!

Look at my new shoes. Aren’t they lovely?

Very nice.

Have you heard that al-Shabaab is moving into the city center?

I hear they are shooting Christians on the spot. And if a woman isn’t wearing a HIJAB, al-Shabaab hooligans will beat her up and call her loose! My wife is frightened to go outside anymore.
Oh! It’s almost dinnertime and I haven’t even been to the market. I’ll have to hurry.

Ok… goat meat, onion and tomatoes. I think I have everything to make the MAAQ HILIB ARI (stew).

Hey! What’s happening?

Even though everyone was running away from the noise I ran toward it. I’ve always been a curious sort of girl that way.

KABOOM!

BAM!

Suddenly I fell backward with my groceries flying above me.

Then everything went dark.
Al-Shabaab, or “The Youth,” is a terrorist organization in Somalia. Al-Shabaab uses violence to enforce their strict interpretation of SHARIA LAW, the moral code and religious law of Islam. They want to stop certain types of entertainment, such as movies and music, smoking, the shaving of beards and many other activities they say are “UN-ISLAMIC.”

The group is known to behead those who embrace Christianity or Western ideas. Al-Shabaab members have placed beheaded corpses next to Bibles and crucifixes in neighborhoods to scare people.

In 2008, the same year Fatuma was shot at the market, Al-Shabaab members buried a young girl accused of adultery up to her neck in the field of a soccer stadium packed with spectators. She was then stoned to death. Her family reported that she was only 13 years old and had in fact been gang-raped.

The Transitional Federal Government of Somalia is fighting against Al-Shabaab, but years of violent destruction caused by bombings, artillery shelling and open firefights has left Mogadishu in ruin.
There is no one left for you here. You're not safe. The doctors don't know how to fix your arm. We can find a better hospital in Nairobi. Escape with me while we still have a chance!

Yes, Fatuma. I am here. I found a little money to pay the hospital bill, but the doctor is demanding more so I must go and ask to borrow some. Don't worry, I will take care of you.

Later they told me that I was shot in the shoulder by al-Shabaab. I was unconscious for three days. The doctors took the bullet out, but there was still so much pain and damage to the nerves in my arm and hand.

That was the worst decision of my life. I hate that decision. Even today I don't know where my brother is. I should have waited for him. He is the only person who ever loved me.
We may have to wait for some time. All the buses are full. Is your arm ok?

Finally we got a bus. The pain was so bad in my arm that I vomited and passed out. The streets were in chaos. Everyone was fleeing the violence erupting throughout the city.

After three days, we arrived in the border town. But we couldn’t get across to Kenya because we didn’t have ID.

Farhiya and I got in the truck. It was very crowded.

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Just wait here. I will see if we can bribe someone to take us across at night.

Why am I going to Nairobi? There is no one there waiting for me. What if the people are scary?

AFTER THREE DAYS, HE ARRIVED IN THE BORDER TOWN. BUT HE COULDN’T GET ACROSS TO KENYA BECAUSE HE DON’T HAVE ID.

YOU CAN GO IN THAT TRUCK. ALL THE OTHER PASSENGERS ARE KENYAN, SO IT SHOULD BE OK.

But you must sit in the middle, and you two need to stay quiet. Don’t speak one word to anyone. If you open your mouth they will know you are not Kenyan because you don’t speak Swahili. The other passengers will throw you out, or worse, they will rape you.

THE PAIN!

He is squishing my arm. It hurts, but that man said not to say anything or I could be raped! KEEP QUIET. KEEP QUIET.

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THE PAIN!

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In 2008, Fatuma became one of 600,000 refugees from Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia and the Democratic Republic of Congo who came to Kenya to escape the same thing: violent conflict. Life for a refugee is chaotic and confusing, but for an unaccompanied girl, a girl alone, it’s terrifying.

There are so many people coming to Kenya that the refugee camps are too crowded and cannot provide security or enough basic resources like clean water, food, health services and basic education. In the camps, girls on their own are in greater danger and experience a lot of violence and rape.

More and more refugees are leaving the camps to move to Nairobi. Others never go to the camps, deciding instead to flee directly to Nairobi from the border, like Fatuma. As in the camps, refugee girls and young women in the city face the highest risks of exploitation, assault, forced marriage and abuse. Many girls become unpaid servants for urban households. With no family or friends to support them, they don’t know how to access schools, get medical attention or find shelter to live. Refugee girls cope with extreme poverty, the physical and emotional scars from war, and, in many cases, abuse from earlier in their lives.
Welcome my wife! My girls and I were so nervous waiting for you, but you’re here safe. When we arrived in Nairobi Farhiya’s husband and his daughters from a previous marriage were waiting for her. No one was waiting for me.

I told Farhiya what the neighbor lady said. Together we went to see about our rights. The pain in my arm was getting worse. The bullet damaged the nerves in my hand, freezing my fingers in a curled position. My hand was useless. Because Farhiya’s step-daughters didn’t like having me around I would often sit outside the apartment. Sometimes the old neighbor lady would talk to me.

Why isn’t that girl helping?

Yeah, I think she is using her arm as an excuse to make us serve her.

“Girls, Fatuma has been through a great ordeal and her arm isn’t right. It is our duty to help her.”

Girls, Fatuma has been through a great ordeal, and her arm isn’t right. It is our duty to help her.

I don’t have any ID to register. I was told that if the police find me they will send me back to Somalia.

I don’t have any ID to register. I was told that if the police find me they will send me back to Somalia.

Why aren’t you going to school like the other two girls?

Fatuma has been through a great ordeal and her arm isn’t right, it is our duty to help her.

Don’t anyone tell you that refugees have rights too?

No, I have rights?

Fatuma has been through a great ordeal, and her arm isn’t right. It is our duty to help her.

 Didn’t anyone tell you that refugees have rights too?

Yes, you need to go to the international refugee agency. They will help you get a refugee ID card. You’re lucky to stay with this family. The situation is very bad for the girls who are alone in the refugee camps.

Ok, they said we have to wait in this line, put our name on their list and wait for an appointment.

How long does that take Farhiya?

Maybe six months.

Even after all these weeks, she’s still not helping.

Yeah, I’m getting tired of doing everything for her. Let’s talk to father.

Why aren’t you going to school like the other two girls?

Girls, Fatuma has been through a great ordeal and her arm isn’t right, it is our duty to help her.

I have ongoing pain in my arm. I need surgery to fix it. And I’d like to go to school.

It’s here or us!

It’s here or us!

Yeah, I know how much longer I will be able to stay with Farhiya.

I told Farhiya what the neighbor lady said. Together we went to see about our rights. The pain in my arm was getting worse. The bullet damaged the nerves in my hand, freezing my fingers in a curled position. My hand was useless.

Because Farhiya’s step-daughters don’t like having me around I would often sit outside the apartment. Sometimes the old neighbor lady would talk to me.

No, I have rights?

I have ongoing pain in my arm. I need surgery to fix it. And I’d like to go to school.

How can we help you?

I have ongoing pain in my arm. I need surgery to fix it. And I’d like to go to school.

Ok, well first thing first, here is a voucher to go to a German organization. They will help with your medical issues. It will take about a month to get an appointment with them, so go right away. After you get treatment, come back and we’ll talk about school.

After three months I got my appointment. Usually it takes longer, but because of my arm they put me higher on the list.
The German organization gave me this voucher for the Kenyatta Hospital. But how can I go there? I don’t know where it is and I don’t speak any Swahili.

Don’t worry, my husband will take you.

This girl has a refugee voucher to get surgery on her arm. Oh, the doctor’s not in today. Come back tomorrow.

We came back every week, but the doctor was always busy or not there. They always said, “Come back next week.” Eventually my voucher expired and they told me not to come anymore.

How will I get surgery for my arm? I am still getting terrible headaches from the pain. I think the German organization has a branch close to us. Go there and get a new voucher.

I can’t do anything for myself without speaking Swahili. If I knew the language I could find the German office in Westland. Or I could even just be able to buy some necessities at the kiosk. Everything is so strange to me here.

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Fatuma, you’ve been with us for more than a year now. It’s time you looked for somewhere else to live. There isn’t enough space for all of us.

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Oh...

The international refugee agency gave me a list of schools, but they all require a registration fee, tuition money and money for school uniforms. Soon I won’t even have a place to live, no way can I afford school! Now I’m really alone, I’m so tired. I want to give up.
It’s been so long, but nothing has changed. My arm still hurts every day, and I’m not even in school. Now I need to find somewhere else to live. Hmm. I think I know a social worker who might be able to help you. Let’s go see her now.

This girl needs help immediately. Do you know anyone who can help her?

I think I do. There is one organization here in Nairobi that focuses on helping adolescent girl refugees. Let’s give them a call.

Is this Heshima? Yes, ok. I have a girl here from Somalia and she needs housing and an education. Can your organization help? Great! I will send her over.

Welcome Fatuma. We are happy to have you in our class.

I hope I don’t get teased like the last time I tried school. I must pay attention. This time, it’s now or never for a girl, my age!

Don’t be nervous. I don’t know how to write my name either. None of the girls in this class have been to school before. So we all have the same challenges you do.

It took six weeks, but I learned how to write my first, middle and last name! PHEW!

I am so happy here. I even remember that I love to play football and laugh.

Heshima Kenya is for girls like you who came to Kenya alone. Through the Girl Empowerment Project, we offer classes in English, Swahili and math Monday to Thursday. Then on Friday we have a life skills class where you will learn about health and do some livelihoods training. We also have a safe house with 40 beds just for girls.

I didn’t have any big expectations. Nothing had worked out for me yet, but I went to the appointment anyway. For the first time since arriving in Kenya I felt hopeful…

Once again, the old neighbor lady tried to help me. Welcome Fatuma, we are happy to have you in our class.

I need to remind myself to get serious and work hard in school too. I’m so proud I can write my name, but there is so much more to learn!
Oh Fatuma, I am sad you are leaving. I know you have no one here, and I was the one who brought you to this country. I am so worried about your safety.

You did nothing wrong, and it’s not right to ask your husband to choose between me and his children. Heshima will take really good care of me. Don’t worry Farhiya, I’m finally getting an opportunity to change my life.

Let us help you, Fatuma. I know your hand has been hurting a lot lately.

 Welcome to Heshawa’s safe house for girls Fatuma!

You girls are all so kind I feel more at home than I ever have in my life.

We’re going to show you our traditional Congolese dance. Watch closely because you’re going to dance it with us!

Let us help you, Fatuma. I know your hand has been hurting a lot lately.

I’ll help you, Fatuma!

You girls are all so kind I feel more at home than I ever have in my life.

The pain is so intense today! The doctor started physical therapy on my hand, but now it feels worse than ever!

Don’t worry, we’ll stay up with you all night massaging your hand.

You never have to be alone in pain again. We’re here for you.

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Are you almost ready Fatuma? You’re going to love cultural day at Heshawa. It’s the best!

Are you almost ready Fatuma? You’re going to love cultural day at Heshawa. It’s the best!

To share our Ethiopian culture with you, we’re going to learn a few Amharic phrases.

“Tewestlign” means “How are you?”

I love trying all these foods from Congo, Ethiopia and Kenya! But I can’t get used to this Kenyan ugali (porridge).

I miss my mother’s chikwangwa (cassava), but this is pretty good too.

I love learning about my fellow African girls!
Just because my hand is not working properly, I will not give up on my dreams. Everyone I read about who is famous also had to struggle, but they didn’t give up. I will fight for my dreams.

Before we can do the surgery, we need to work on loosening up your fingers and see if we can regain some mobility through physical therapy. You’ll need to come here twice a week. Deal?

Yes, I know. I can do it with Meselech’s help!

Now Fatuma, don’t forget to do your hand exercises. The doctor is putting pressure on me when you don’t do them!

Hi everyone, I’m back from the House of Pain! Come over here Fatuma and see what I’m working on.

OK, Meselech, I’ll do it.

I don’t know physical therapy would be such a HOUSE OF PAIN!

Yes, I know! It is important to tell the world what is happening to us refugee girls. If nobody talks about it, then nobody can help us.

Your passion is inspiring! Let me see what I can do to find you and some of the other girls a journalism teacher. We will support you in creating your own independent life.

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At Heshima, if girls show dedication to their studies they are invited to join the MAISHA COLLECTIVE. They go through a seven-month training in tailoring, bag stitching and dye technique.

But because of my hand, I couldn’t participate.

Heshima sells scarves and bags on Etsy.com and other places to help girls earn their own income and experience financial independence. We all came to Kenya alone so we’ve got to learn how to make a living.

I tried the big aid organizations, like the international refugee agency, but they are trying to help so many people that girls like me with no advocates just get lost. But Heshima is a smaller group, so they can provide each of us with individualized help. We are not just refugees, we are girls with hopes and dreams. When you are alone you have no life at all and die of depression thinking of your past. But once you get someone who is willing to do even a little bit and stand with you, then you can have dreams.

HUJAMBO (hello), Fatuma. I’m so impressed with your progress! In just over two years your Swahili is very good and your English is rapidly progressing. Now is a good time to talk about your future and how you can be financially independent. What do you want to do?

I want to be a journalist!

Anne Sweeney, Heshima Co-Executive Director

Yes, I need to be a journalist. I will not give up on my dreams. Everyone I read about who is famous also had to struggle, but they didn’t give up. I will fight for my dreams.

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Now that we have gone over the basics of interviewing, the best way to really learn is to practice. So, for the rest of today, please interview each other. All of you have extremely powerful stories, so let’s start telling them!

Chance, after your family moved from Uvira to Lubumbashi, Congo what happened?

Mbuti extremists were killing members of my tribe, and they killed my father. The rest of my family was put in jail, when we were released from jail my mother, who was pregnant, died. Then each sibling went their own way. I was 3.

Where did you go?

I walked to Rwanda. It took a year. There was a group of children that walked together. We don’t know where we were going. We were just looking for a place to find peace.

In Nairobi I thought things would change for me. There was no security in Congo. So I had hope I would find it here. I found a house-girl job with a family, but they didn’t pay me. Before I got that job I would sleep anywhere. After six months with the family, I found a sympathetic lady who I told my problems to. I was able to stay with her for a week, and then I was brought to Heshima.

Now I have a family with you girls and a home at the safe house. I am getting an education and we are preparing for our futures.

Fatuma, how did you come to Heshima?

Hutu extremists were killing members of my tribe, and they killed my father. The rest of my family was put in jail. When we were released from jail my mother, who was pregnant, died. Then each sibling went their own way. I was 7.

I walked to Rwanda. It took a year. There was a group of children that walked together. We didn’t know where we were going. We were just looking for a place to find peace.

Our journey didn’t end in Uganda. There at the refugee camp we saw the Hutu tribe that is against my tribe, the Banyamulenge. We feared that tribe, so we left and came to Nairobi. By that time, I was 17.

Now Fatuma, how has your life changed since coming to Heshima?

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Heshima has given me hope for my future and the education necessary to move forward. When I was in Somalia I never thought of the future or what I could do. My whole thinking was that I would someday get married and have kids. Now I see possibilities for independence and a life I choose.
We can't stay at Heshima's safe house forever. There are so many refugee girls who need the beds that those of us older than 18 are encouraged to become independent. With Heshima's help I got an apartment that I share with two other awesome girls.

Do you have basketball practice today?

Yeah, but I'll be back in two hours. Should we watch a movie tonight?

Oh, I think there's a Bollywood movie on. I love the way they dance! I don't have a shift at the hospital today, so I'll start dinner.

Fatuma, today's the day! Before we proceed I want to remind you that the surgery won't be so bad, but the therapy will cause a lot of pain. You may hate us for a year, but you'll thank us for the rest of your life.

Oh, House of Pain! Yes, of course I will go, with your help Meselech!

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Once the pins come out, remember your commitment to the doctor: therapy twice a week.

Oh, that House of Pain! Yes, of course I will go, with your help Meselech!

Oh, my phone!

Oh yeah. I think there's a Bollywood movie on. I love the way they dance! I don't have a shift at the hospital today, so I'll start dinner.

Some people in the Somali community knew my family name and were able to help me find my mom's mobile number. She is still in Somalia, but I get to talk to her now. IMAGINE: it wasn't until I came to Nairobi that I found her. My mom and I are making plans to be reunited. But first the fighting between al-Shabaab and the government in Somalia needs to stop so I can safely return to my country.

There was a lot of nerve damage to my hand, so it will never be like before, but it has gotten better. I have better mobility now and am using it more every day.
Today I will talk about HIV. What do you know about that?

Don't only sex workers get that?

And they can pass it to anyone standing close, so we have to isolate them.

Well, that's a common misconception in our community. Actually HIV is in part passed through unprotected sexual contact, that's why, well, that's why...

Don't only sex workers get that?

Just say "CONDOM!" Fatuma! Don't be so embarrassed. You have to be a strong, confident leader for the other girls in the community.

WOW, I THINK THESE ARE IDEAS YOU'RE GETTING FROM FOREIGNERS. PROPER SOMALI GIRLS DON'T TALK ABOUT THOSE CONDOM THINGS.

It's not always easy to train others. A lot of the women don't listen, but I am trying to be a good leader so I am working on being very patient.

At the training they may not ask questions, but then one day they remember what I said and one girl will tell another girl.

HMM, I THINK THESE ARE IDEAS YOU'RE GETTING FROM FOREIGNERS. PROPER SOMALI GIRLS DON'T TALK ABOUT THOSE CONDOM THINGS.

If I could be an international photojournalist reporting on street people, refugees and those who are suffering I could inform and enact change. I've lived these realities and know that suffering exists, but not everyone does. If my stories and photos are published, my hope is that people feel compassion and pitch in to help.

But for me, the most important way to help is to tell the stories around me and hope that the world listens. Heshima found a Canadian organization to come train us in photography. They even gave us cameras, but I have to leave mine at Heshima because there are too many violent robberies in my neighborhood.

As my hand heals I'm thinking a lot about how I can help the girls in my community. I participated in Heshima's peer educator program, and now I'm trying to empower my neighbors by sharing my knowledge of reproductive health, HIV and human rights.

For one assignment I took photos of a woman who lives on the streets. I captured how she cooks for her children and how she deals with the mud when it rains. The organization liked the photos so much they posted them on their website!
is nice to be on your way.

sad stories, so I too just have to keep

that behind many successes there are
downs of life are, don’t give up. Work
I see. No matter how hard the ups and

and waking, I wish they could see what

girls out there who are only sleeping
never realized existed. And for all the
My eyes were closed, but now I can see

ing! But girls are still facing exploitation
her family and community. That’s amaz-
earn an income that she’ll invest back into
have fewer and healthier children and
earn a good wage, she will marry later,
take control of their lives. We know that if
that all girls everywhere are empowered to

fired up to take action for girls everywhere!

why we love
grassroots organizations

consider: Marginalized by cultural practices, poverty and discrimination, girls are often outside the reach of larger development projects led by governments and international aid agencies. Grassroots organizations are smaller and created by the community to address specific problems. Grassroots organizations are familiar with local language, culture and the challenges that shape girls’ lives. That makes them uniquely equipped to address girls’ urgent needs and create spot-on solutions. They also stay put to offer girls support for the long run.

ask: How did Fatuma use girl power to transform her life and help her friends?

discuss: What problem in your community can you confront with girl power to create a positive solution?

why we love

the girl empowerment project (gep)

consider: Refugees have immediate needs for food, housing and security. Large aid agencies work really hard to get these basic necessities to refugees in Kenya, but as Fatuma said, “We are not just refugees, we are girls with hopes and dreams.” Heshima Kenya recognizes that girls need individualized attention, access to education and livelihood classes and opportunities to learn about their human rights and to cultivate leadership skills. By providing programs for the girl’s whole self, Heshima Kenya is empowering refugee girls to take charge of their own lives. Girls learn the skills they need to become financially independent and also to become community leaders to help other girls. Beyond providing for each girl’s basic needs, Heshima Kenya supports each unique girl in creating a bright future for herself.

ask: How did Heshima Kenya respond to the specific needs of unaccompanied refugee girls in Nairobi?

discuss: What was different about the way the large international refugee agency tried to help Fatuma from the way that Heshima Kenya helped Fatuma?

why we love

girl power

consider: Bands in the 1990s like Bikini Kill and the Spice Girls made the phrase “girl power” popular, but we’re not talking about pop culture. Girl power means that all girls everywhere are empowered to take control of their lives. We know that if a girl stays in school, has access to health services and is given an opportunity to earn a good wage, she will marry later, have fewer and healthier children and earn an income that she’ll invest back into her family and community. That’s amazing! But girls are still facing exploitation and injustice. Girls in poverty, navigating the tricky years of adolescence, face additional challenges like child marriage, early pregnancy and violence.

ask: How did Fatuma use girl power to transform her life and help her friends?

discuss: What problem in your community can you confront with girl power to create a positive solution?

why we love

the girl declaration

consider: The Girl Declaration is a call to action from leaders of the world’s most vulnerable girls: girls who have been displaced by war and conflict, girls who live in extreme poverty and girls from the most neglected communities. We are girls with hopes and dreams.” Heshima Kenya is empowering girls to take charge of their own lives. Girls learn the skills they need to become financially independent and also to become community leaders to help other girls. Beyond providing for each girl’s basic needs, Heshima Kenya supports each unique girl in creating a bright future for herself.

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why we love

girl power

read, discuss, act

This is Fatuma’s story, but there are many other girls lost in the refugee crisis and needing immediate assistance. Grab some friends, get your school and after-school clubs interested or go to www.grassrootsgirls.tumblr.com to discuss the issues below, learn more and get involved. After reading Fatuma’s story we hope you’re feeling inspired and fired up to take action for girls everywhere!


Heshima Kenya is supported by the American Jewish World Service. Discover how the American Jewish World Service works to realize human rights and end poverty in the developing world at www.ajws.org.

Curious about the situation of girls globally? www.girleffect.org is bursting with videos, stats, stories and more. Dig into “The Girl Declaration” to learn the five goals and seven principles that can create a better future for girls and end poverty for the world.

www.girleffect.org/2015-beyond/the-declaration/

Fatuma brought her story to you by making this graphic novella, and now she wants you to do the same. Go digital, use a comic book app on your tablet or fill your notebook; use photos or illustrate your own life. Get you going: What problems are you dealing with these challenges? Are there any organizations in your community helping girls tackle these challenges? What are you doing to spread girl power in your community and beyond? Every girl has a story and deserves to be heard. What’s yours?

Submit your graphic novella to share with other girls at www.heshimakenya.org.

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Discover how the American Jewish World Service.
**GLOSSARY**

**AL-SHABAAB:** Translated as “The Youth,” al-Shabaab is an al-Qaeda-linked militant group and U.S.-designated Foreign Terrorist Organization fighting for a fundamentalist Islamic state in Somalia.

**CHIKWANGA:** Made from cassava, cooked and stored in banana leaves.

**DORO WAT:** Spicy Ethiopian chicken stew

**HIJAB:** A veil that covers the head and chest, worn by a Muslim female beyond the age of puberty in the presence of adult males.

**HIJAMBO:** (Swahili) hello

**INJERA:** A yeast-risen flatbread traditionally made out of teff flour with a unique, slightly spongy texture. It is a national dish in Ethiopia.

**IS KA WARRAN:** Hello

**MADRASAH:** A building or group of buildings used for teaching Islamic theology.

**MAGACAYGU WAA...:** My name is...

**MAHADSANID:** Thank you

**MAISHA COLLECTIVE:** A peer-driven initiative that fosters leadership and business management skills through the design and production of unique hand-dyed scarves and textiles. In managing the collective, girls gain life-long business and marketing skills that develop their confidence and prepare them for future independence. The power of purchase inspires their journey to support, empower and ultimately protect other young refugee women. One hundred percent of the proceeds are reinvested into Heshima Kenya’s programs and the savings of Maisha Collective members. Browse their fabulous work here: [http://www.etsy.com/shop/HeshimaKenya](http://www.etsy.com/shop/HeshimaKenya)

**MARAQ HILIB ARI:** A traditional Somali recipe for a stew of goat meat and vegetables.

**MIRRA:** An evergreen shrub native to tropical East Africa, having dark green leaves that are chewed fresh for their stimulating effects.

**SECOND WIFE:** The laws of most African countries with significant numbers of Muslims allow polygamy, with different conditions. Somali laws have slowly changed from broadly allowing polygamy to the Somalia court now requiring permission and proof a man’s first wife is infertile.

**SHARIA LAW:** The moral code and religious law of Islam. Sharia deals with many topics addressed by secular law, including crime, politics and economics, as well as personal matters such as sexual intercourse, hygiene, diet, prayer and fasting. Though interpretations of sharia vary between cultures, in its strictest definition it is considered the infallible law of God—as opposed to the human interpretation of the laws.

**UGALI:** A dish of cornmeal cooked with water to a porridge-like consistency commonly eaten in Kenya.