

# Kidege

## Life Through the Eyes of a Kenyan Youth



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of a Kenyan Youth

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*This book is dedicated to girls like Ruth  
who face and conquer challenges  
bigger that we can often comprehend*

*and*

*to all the men and women  
who are working to transform the lives  
of youth around the world.*

*Youth are our greatest hope  
for a better future.*



This book was written and published  
by members of the YouthHOPE team.  
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Special thanks to Solly Smook for allowing YouthHOPE's designer, Drew McClary, to use his beautiful painting for the cover of *Kidege*.

# PREFACE

You are reading this book because, in some way, you care about young people. For that reason, you are an awesome person! You are also in good company. You are joining a movement around the world focused on intentionally investing in the lives of youth and adolescents. Youth ages 12-24 make up nearly 25% of the people living on this planet. That totals 1.8 billion youth, a number possibly unfathomable. It's close to double the population of China, the world's largest country. So in other words, there is a super-massive amount of youth. Another fact you should know is most of them live in less developed countries where they face significant challenges. Access to healthcare, access to education, lack of safety, unemployment, religious persecution, gender discrimination, and extreme poverty are just a few of the issues most of the world's youth face. There is no doubt those numbers and the realities youth face are just plain overwhelming. What could you do? Where could you start? Could you make a difference?

The purpose of this book is to help you think through and begin to answer those questions. The first part of each chapter is an episode in the story of a young person from Kenya. Ruth is a 14-year-old girl. Her story is based on culture, statistical data, and personal experiences. Ruth represents the reality mentioned above but she is not a real person. As you read about her life, her struggles, her heroes, and her accomplishments, you will get a small idea of what it is like to walk in her shoes. As you read her story you will be accomplishing the first goal of this book which is to EMPATHIZE with global youth and the circumstances in which they live.

The second part of each chapter highlights one of the issues Ruth is facing in her life as a youth growing up in Kenya. There are seven issues we address:

1. Education
2. Family
3. Identity
4. Safety
5. Injustice
6. Voice
7. Faith

As you read more about these issues and interact with statistics, facts, and figures, you will be accomplishing the second goal of this book; you will LEARN about the reality of a global youth. This new information, we hope, will inspire you to action.

At the end of each chapter, there will be a set of questions that will help you process what you've read. This can be done alone or with a group of people who are reading the book together. By the way, this story was written in a way that it can easily be read aloud with your small group, family, or Sunday School class. By answering the questions, you will be accomplishing the third goal of the book which is to REFLECT. It's important to take some time and think about what you have learned and how this makes you feel. So, don't skip the questions! At least take some time to think through them, even if you don't take time to write down any of your answers.

Ruth is waiting for you on the next page! As you read her story, don't hesitate to close your eyes and imagine the scene, what the characters look like, or the emotions they are experiencing. This is a story which brings to light some very tough issues many girls in Kenya and other parts of the world face. While the story reveals some of the ugliness of man and sin, it also highlights that God has a plan for global youth, plans to prosper them, not to harm them, to give them hope and a future.

## CHAPTER ONE

# *Education*

“RUTH, GET UP NOW!” yelled her mom from outside where she was finishing cooking food for the family. Usually, Sundays were a day to sleep in and relax, whether she was here at home or at her boarding school. However, this was not the case today because Christmas break was over and Ruth was going back to school right after church was over. It was about two hours from her village in southwestern Kenya and really the only chance she had for a good education.

She had enjoyed her last few weeks at home with the family. Her mom, Namelok<sup>1</sup>, was a beautiful and caring woman. Ruth always felt loved and special when she was around her and she encouraged Ruth to continue her studies. Her mom had stopped going to school after primary school because that’s just what girls did when she was growing up. She wanted more for her daughter and many times had fought with her husband, John, about investing in their daughter’s education and future. It wasn’t that he didn’t love his daughter, but he was a traditional and practical man. He worked hard both at his job changing tires on the lorries that broke down on the highway near their village and with his cattle herding. He saw education as a luxury and didn’t have much hope that a daughter was worth investing that much money in. He had a hard time seeing beyond the place of a woman being something other than a wife or mother. However, she had done so well and achieved such high marks that he could not say no, at least for now.



Ruth closed her eyes and sang as loud as she could. It was going to be her last chance for a few months to be at her church here in the village. Though it was small and most of the people were older, she felt a peace that was hard to explain. She had come to church with her mother since she was a little girl. First, it was just the two of them, but now her younger brothers and sister also went. She loved to see them sing and dance before running off with their Sunday School teacher to have their class under the acacia tree just outside the church building. She wished her dad would come with them, but he was always busy working or many times Sunday was the day he met with the other village elders to discuss important issues or resolve some conflict. He was a respected man and that made her proud. However, it always seemed like he wasn’t happy and she wondered if it had anything to do with him not having the hope she found in Jesus. She always invited him every Sunday and she planned to keep on doing it.



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<sup>1</sup> Pronounced NAM-EH-LOK. In Maasai, it means “the sweet one.”



“Why don’t you have your things ready, Ruth? We have to walk to the highway soon or you will miss the bus when it passes by. Hurry up!” said Ruth’s mom. Ruth stuffed her last few white shirts, that were part of her school uniform, into her duffel bag.

“Back to boring clothes,” she thought to herself, as she was not the biggest fan of the uniforms she had to wear every day at her boarding school. It could be worse, though. She could be stuck in her village like many of the girls she grew up with. Some of them were already getting married. Ruth took just a moment and thought about what that would be like. She was 14 years old, well almost 15 as her birthday was coming up before the semester ended. Married? And most of the girls she knew were married to old men. That made her stomach hurt.

“Focus daughter!” sternly chided her mother, “you are staring off into the sky. Zip up your bag and let’s go.”

It was about a 30-minute walk to the highway, the one her father took every day to go to work. She held one side of her duffel bag and her mother held the other while carrying her youngest brother, Jacob, on her back. She was going to miss him. She had lots of fun with him during her break, as he was just starting to run around and play. He was almost too big to be carried around like her mom was doing, but it was the only way to keep him out of trouble on the walk.

As they stood there waiting, she glanced over at her mother. She looked tired and maybe a little bit sad.

“Are you alright, yeyo<sup>2</sup>?” Ruth asked.

Namelok smiled and took her daughter’s face in her hands and said, “Don’t you worry about me. You go to school. You study hard. God has a plan for you.”

Before the tear could roll all the way down her cheek, Ruth heard the blaring horn of the bus, calling out to potential passengers that it was slowing down and they needed to be ready to jump on board. Ruth violently hugged her mother, kissed Jacob on the cheek and pushed her way onto the bus. She hoped to find a seat for the two-hour ride. More than likely, she would be standing.



Ruth woke up startled as she felt someone trying to take her duffel bag from her. She noticed because she had hooked one of the straps through her arms. It was hot and she had not been able to keep her eyes open. Being alone on the bus ride, this was her only security measure. She looked up from her seat to see who it was that was trying to steal her bag. Immediately she saw Kingasunye<sup>3</sup>, who was laughing uncontrollably.

“That’s not funny!” Ruth shouted.

“You should have seen your face! I wish I had taken a photo, but my mobile battery is dead.” Kingasunye was one of Ruth’s best friends from school. She must have gotten on the bus while Ruth was sleeping and took advantage of it to play a joke on her. This was nothing new, as Kingasunye was known for that at school. In fact, she got in pretty serious trouble with the headmaster last semester for a prank that she pulled. Ruth loved her, though. She was always there for Ruth and helped her with English homework, which was Ruth’s worst subject. Their beds were next to each other and they would sometimes whisper late into the night talking about going to university and how they were going to be successful Kenyan women.

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<sup>2</sup> Pronounced YEE-YOH. In Maasai, it means “mother.”

<sup>3</sup> Pronounced KING-A-SOON-YAY. In Maasai, it means “chubby/fat.”

For the rest of the trip to school, Kingasunye and Ruth caught each other up on what had happened during Christmas break. Both of them had a very good time with their families and both were ready to get back to school. The bus came to a quick stop as it entered the town where the Nala Girls Academy was located. The streets were busy with people going to market to buy and sell. Ruth and Kingasunye got off the bus and pushed their way through the crowds to make it back to the school before they missed dinner.

## CRITICAL ISSUE: EDUCATION

Imagine you're in Kenya. You live in a small village many miles from the nearest town. You are 14 years old and you love school. But like Ruth, there are barriers to getting an education. An obstacle course of environmental, financial, social, and cultural hurdles stands in your way. How many miles would you walk? How long would you stay away from home? What if you could not afford the school fees? What if your parents and even your community told you to stay home? What if the plan for your life was being written by someone else? Ruth represents the real young people throughout Kenya who must answer these hard questions.

There are more than 70 million adolescents not enrolled in school around the world. More than 20 million of them live in Sub-Saharan Africa. Tens of thousands of these adolescents live throughout Kenya. Educational numbers are the worst among the poor and among girls.

The question is, "What difference does education make in the life of a poor Kenyan girl?"

Education is a key that can open the door to a transformed life. For girls in Kenya, like Ruth, education helps eliminate poverty. Every year of secondary school education has the potential to increase a girl's future income by 10-20%. Education promotes gender equality. It helps girls like Ruth avoid the dangers of early marriage, sexual abuse, and human trafficking. Education fosters more peaceful societies through tolerance and understanding.

For a girl like Ruth, access to education can mean all the difference. She could stay in her village, marry at age 14, and get pregnant by a much older man. Like so many others, she could then die giving birth.

Alternatively, she could continue her schooling. This not only increases her potential to earn a living wage but also gives her the confidence to try. She could then afford basic health care, eat a healthier diet, contribute to her community, and literally make Kenya a better place. She and her future family could be one big step out of the cycle of poverty.

Ruth deserves an education not because she shows potential as a good student, but because every girl should have the opportunity to gain knowledge, learn new skills, scale the walls of poverty, and contribute to making the world a better place.

Education is praised throughout the bible. In fact, we're told in various ways that an education is more valuable than material things.<sup>4</sup> God has preserved entire volumes in order that we may gain wisdom, instruction, understanding, knowledge, and guidance.<sup>5</sup> God used educated,

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<sup>4</sup> Proverbs 16:16

<sup>5</sup> Proverbs 1:2-5

intelligent young men like Daniel<sup>6</sup> to accomplish great things at the highest levels of society. The gospel writer Luke tells us that even Jesus had to grow in wisdom and stature<sup>7</sup>.

Opportunity is a priceless commodity. While we may take our educational opportunities for granted, there are millions of young people around the world who are desperate for a different life afforded by education. The Church must continue to promote education and create educational opportunities for youth.

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<sup>6</sup> Daniel 1:17

<sup>7</sup> Luke 2:52

## QUESTIONS

1. Think about being 14 years old and having the opportunity to receive a valuable education at a boarding school. As excited as you might be to attend school, what would you miss about your family, your home, and your town/city?
2. How do you think a girl like Ruth would feel knowing her mother supported her education but her father did not see it as important?
3. How has your education (or lack of education) been a factor in your life?
4. What fact about education in this chapter stood out to you the most? Why?
5. How do you feel knowing that so many young people, especially girls, face barriers to receiving an education?