

All we have is happiness



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A little girl is singing along to the radio. She is sitting inside her house, made out of waste materials. Cardboard, tin, plastic. Basically other people's leftovers. The girl begins to sing louder, imagining a better place. Singing herself out of poverty with her family, so she can be an ambassador for young women from the slum. For a short moment, it provides an escape for her. Until she realizes the fact that she is still home. In the slum.

On an unpredictable Wifi connection from the Korogocho slum in Kenya to a boarding school in Denmark, Nancy is telling us the story of how she fell in love with singing. "Music is my passion. Music is my hope that tomorrow will be a better day." she says with a heartfelt glance. Nancy Kathini is 22 years old. She lives with her single mother, her sister, her two nephews and cousin in the Korogocho slum.

The poor conditions are no joke, but Nancy can find light in any situation. "Look at the cockroaches." She says excitedly, while showing us around her home. She picks up her telephone and places it close to the food cabinet. The little creatures are crawling on the same shelf that all their cooking ingredients lay on. But that is normal for her. Nancy's house consists of one room where everyone sleeps, eats and cooks.

The only separate rooms are the bathrooms, which is a hole in the ground. Adults and kids have a bathroom each. There is also a place in the middle of the hallway where they shower. They clean themselves by getting a bucket of water and pouring it over themselves.



Raised with her mother's strength

When Nancy was little, her father left, so she has never known him. She tells us that it is very difficult to grow up with a single mother as the only provider, since it is usually the man in Kenya. It has been hard for her mother to earn money and make it last, because many people do not want to hire a woman. But Nancy's aunt is a big help. She often comes by to help out and sometimes she even gives them money. "The landlord is usually lenient when my mother has trouble paying the bills" Nancy says eternally grateful for all the things her mother has worked hard to give her. Nancy really looks up to her mother and appreciates everything she has done for her. She inspires Nancy to fight for women and equal rights every day.

Nancy's mother works as a cleaner and she earns 3000 shillings per month, which equals 20 Danish crowns. In eight grade Nancy was not in school, because they could not afford it. During that year she helped her mother by washing clothes.

Women and the music industry

When asking Nancy about how she experiences the differences between living as a woman and a man, it is clear that the respective difficulties uphold each other. She sees a lot of the problems rooting in mental health. "Most of the girls here are being forced and pressured", she says looking directly into the camera. When Nancy started her music career, she and her friend were supposed to be signed with a music association in Kenya, but the producer wanted to take advantage of them. "He asked us to sleep with him, and then he would produce

us a song... It was terrible.” She says while gently noting. The girls refused his offer, but the threat of sexual violence is a vast fear for women that lives on and therefore dictates their freedom. Experiences like these are the ones that can build up to mental health issues. But luckily for Nancy and her friend the organization NAFSI, that helps kids and young people in different slum districts in Nairobi, found them.



Pepeafrik

Together with NAFSI, Nancy and some of her friends are a part of a project with Spor Media and NAFSI called “Manzi Rada” which means “girls be ready” in Swahili. Together with a few other women from the slum Nancy is a part of a band called Pepeafrik. They want to make the slum a better place and therefore they primarily perform in the slum.

You can listen to their song “Usife Moyo” while you continue reading
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HqQifWxifl>

Pepeafrik means “flying africa”. Nancy told us that she and a couple of friends came up with the name, because everyone from the band comes from very poor families. The name symbolises them “flying” away from their background of poverty.

Music as therapy

For Nancy pursuing music is not only a passion, but also a way to forget her problems for a while. It helps her keep going when things get tough and makes her full of hope. She dreams about a better tomorrow and she wants to create a better life for herself and her family.

Nancy does not necessarily want to be a celebrity, she wants to be a role model for young girls. Someday Nancy wants to go to a college where she can study music. She strives to go to one in Nairobi first, but she also wants to study in Denmark because that is where her teacher studied. One day she hopes to support her family through music.

Nancy's dream

In the future Nancy wants to open an organization for young stars. She is already teaching younger kids about music as a part of her work with the organization Global Kids. "I hope that one day I can speak not only for women, but also for men. That I can speak for everyone." she says.

When asking her how she plans to start her own organization, she replies: "It is a really hard question, but what I do know is that first I have to bring the kids together. Some kids need to be convinced, because of the environments they are in. Most kids are using drugs and because they are around bad influences, it is hard to get them involved."

"I want to give back to my community." Nancy states, elaborating that her work with NAFSI has helped her do so. Then she explains how she wants to make a career out of helping and teaching others. She wants to be an example to the people in her community and show them that you can achieve anything.

There is hope

Living in the slum as a young woman is harsh. Drugs, gangs, sexual insults and extortion is an everyday reality in the Korogocho slum, that steals the lives of many young people. You can clearly sense Nancy's passion about securing better possibilities for her community in her vigorous eyes. The young people are where to start.

We ask Nancy if they have any ideals in the slum. Her eyes look flustered before she forms a firm no. She continues with a mellow smile "All we have is happiness, that is the only thing we have."