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Sr. Teresa Barongo, a member of the Assumption Sisters of Eldoret and a nurse at the Dorothea Health Centre, greets a patient in Nairobi, Kenya. (Shadrack Omuka)

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Surviving the streets of Nairobi is an endless struggle, marked by extreme poverty, exposure to harsh weather, constant threats of violence and deep social exclusion.

Outside a makeshift structure, a young girl is seen stumbling as she clears her eyes using saliva; water here is a luxury. The girl is Wairimu, a 12-year-old orphan who was born on the streets.

As she struggles to walk, she pulls her yellow tattered jacket tight to her body to protect against the harsh weather.

Wairimu represents thousands of young girls and boys who for years have been calling the crowded and dangerous streets of Nairobi home and not attending school.

To Wairimu, going to school would be a luxury, as learning requires funding, and she has nobody to support her education.

"I would like to go to school, but school is for the rich and those who have parents to pay their fees and buy them uniforms. I am an orphan, I have no one to pay my school fees," Wairimu told Global Sisters Report.

Children like Wairimu spend most of their time begging on the streets or doing crude jobs, while some resort to stealing for survival.

For years, Sr. Caroline Ngatia, a member of Assumption Sisters of Eldoret, has been transforming the lives of street children like Wairimu as the director of the Dorothea Rescue Centre.

"We used to work with boys, but after doing some investigations we came to realize that girls are more vulnerable and from that point we started socializing with them and now we have some here," Ngatia told Global Sisters Report.

Ngatia visits girls on the streets of Nairobi three days a week and works with families in the mentoring and rehabilitation process by ensuring they attend school, or are economically empowered before being reintegrated back into their families.

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Data from the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics and the Street Families Rehabilitation Trust Fund says the national population of street-connected individuals dropped from over 46,000 in 2018 to 18,049 in 2025.

Government studies attribute this decline to focused rehabilitation programs, increased funding for rescue centers like Dorothea and efforts to strengthen family structures.

Ngatia said once the girls are rescued from the streets, the center encourages them to focus on their education, because it is the only thing that can enable them to break the cycle of poverty.

With the boys, the sisters said they had a success rate of around 50%. In their experience, girls prefer not to return to the streets.

"With my experience, it's difficult to keep boys from the streets, they easily return to the street unlike girls who are always focused and ready to move on once rehabilitated," she said.

Roseline Njambi, who was rescued from the streets in 2022, has gone from being a drug addict to a top performing student. In 2025, she passed the Kenya Junior School Education Assessment and was admitted to a junior secondary where she continues to excel.

Through charities like Aid to the Church in Need, Dorothea Rescue Centre has successfully rescued about 200 girls ages 4-11 from the streets of Nairobi. The center not only provides basic needs to vulnerable girls but also restores dignity by rebuilding lives and nurturing dreams.

Ngatia said the work needs funding and determination.

Some girls cannot return to their families and are living at the center while going to school. Michael Kimani, the Nairobi County officer in charge of social services and estate management, said the county government plans to construct and expand housing and educational facilities in an effort to improve lives on the streets.

Kimani said that the government supports social enterprises and programs that integrate former street youth and vulnerable groups into economic activities, including considerations through local empowerment funds.

To reduce expenses, the center has initiated low-cost development projects that provide necessities, such as dairy farming and poultry farming.

The center also opened a health clinic to help the girls in case of injury or other health-related issues.

Sr. Joyce Nyagucha, superior general of the Assumption Sisters of Eldoret, applauded Ngatia's ministry, adding that not all people have such kindness.

Because of the congregation's knowledge and experience, Nyagucha said other organizations have asked them for help to run their homes.

"We have been approached several times by other organizations to help them manage their homes since ours are doing well," she said.