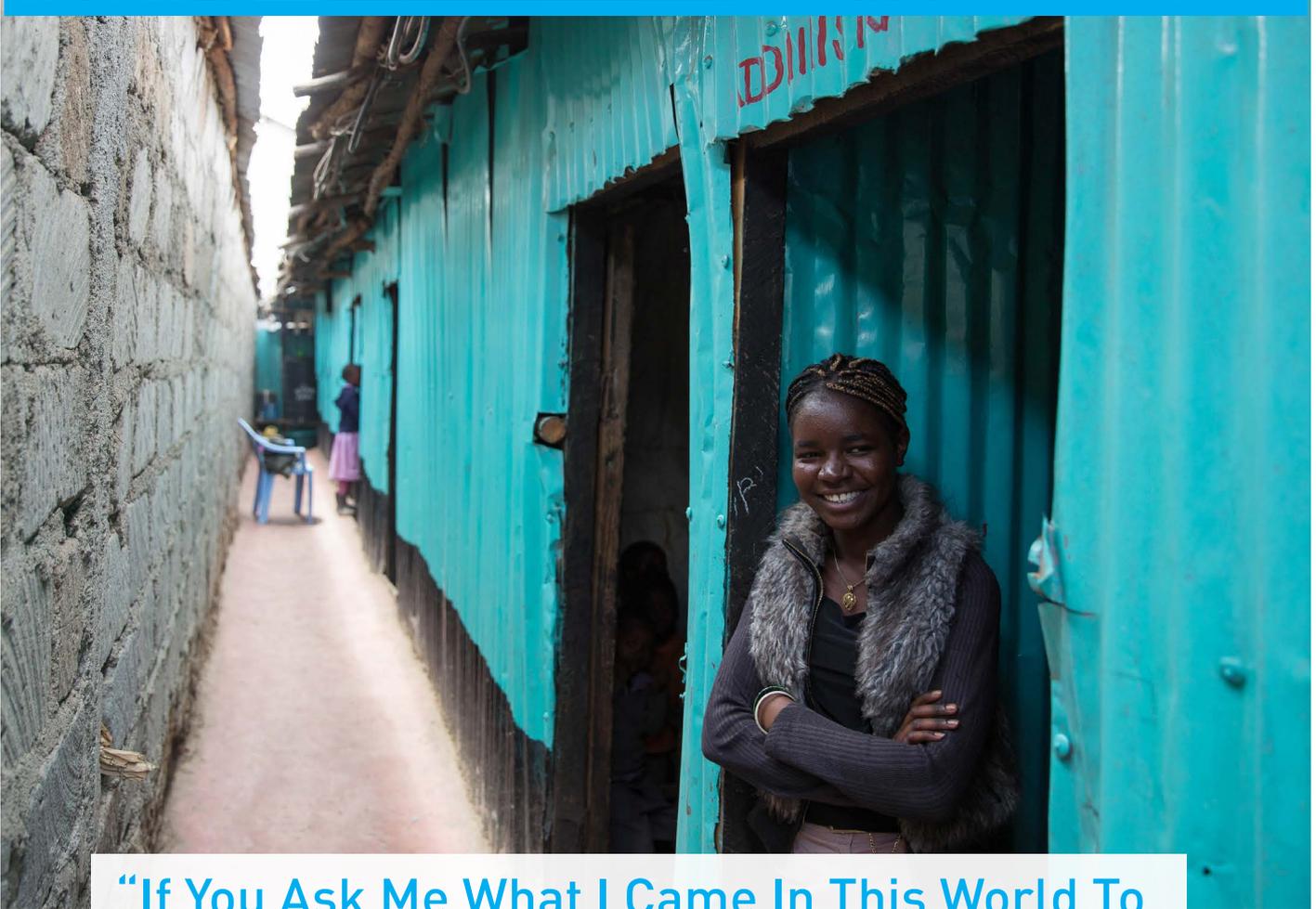


# Exercising Women's Leadership that Transforms Communities



“If You Ask Me What I Came In This World To Do, I Will Tell You I Came To Live Out Loud.”

## **Bold. Determined.**

## **Go-getter. These are some of the words that can be used to describe Claris.**

She is 19 years old and part of Paza, Akili Dada's gap year programme in Kenya. Claris joined Akili Dada in her first year of high school, at Precious Blood-Riruta. Coming from MukuruKwa Reuben, a resource-strapped community in Nairobi, she knew her chances of making it through high school were slim. She, therefore, sought scholarships for higher learning from multiple organisations through the principal's office. In addition to receiving a scholarship, she has been a project participant of the leadership academies supported by the African

Women's Development Fund (AWDF). The academies are spaces for reflection where Akili Dada scholars are equipped with life skills. This includes helping the girls understand themselves and their capacities comprehensively so that they identify how to best negotiate life in society. This in turn enables the project participants to excel in whatever they aspire to be and do, and to be the change leaders our world needs. At the leadership academies, young women also brainstorm new ways to exercise leadership to transform their communities. In that regard, Akili Dada introduced Claris to the service learning concept. In turn, she decided to start a library in her community.





"I started the library to inculcate a reading culture in young students by making it easier for them to access books," Claris states. Claris' choice to start the library was informed by her own experiences going to the community library as early as 6am to secure a sitting space. The environment was not very conducive for learning since the small space was always teeming with eager learners. Many times, a good number of visitors were turned away because the library was filled to capacity.



Claris gathered all the books in her home that were not being used and solicited more from friends. Armed with 300 books, she approached the headteacher of New Light Academy in her neighborhood and pitched the idea of starting a library for pupils. The head teacher was very receptive and allocated her a room in the school. Today, 150 pupils in the school have access to curriculum based textbooks as well as storybooks that they borrow to read at home. Through this new library, a large number of pupils' grades have improved significantly. The teachers at the school have also reported that teaching has become an easier and more effective process. Claris aspires to be a Mechatronics Engineer and is actively learning about global approaches to STEM development.



According to Kate Kiama, Young Changemakers Program Director, "We are learning that the girls and individual staff have room for innovation. For example, we have had sessions on women in STEM and used art for advocacy to address cases of sexual and domestic violence that the girls bring to our attention."



Through Akili Dada's methodologies of interactive leadership, expert mentoring and critical problem-solving, Claris is gaining a wealth of resources to continue building solutions for her community.

"Every day, I am inspired by different people and things. I have a couple of mentors who encourage me to just go for what I want without fear. They have helped me know who I am better...I also draw a lot of energy from my life experience and friends who keep reminding me about my goals every day."

**-Claris, Akili Dada**



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