



The Kindest Cut



The Internews *Voices in Health* program was launched in Kenya in 2003, a time when around 700 people were dying as a result of HIV related complications every day. The program is funded by the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and managed by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

HIV continues to affect the wellbeing of hundreds of thousands of Kenyans but there is a greater understanding of the epidemic and its challenges today. To date, more than 200 journalists have been trained to responsibly report HIV/Aids issues. Their stories explain the science, help to dispel myths and seek answers where stigma still casts a shadow.

Journalists are offered continuous training, mentoring and resources to help them find new angles on health stories. Training themes include Counseling and Testing, Stigma and Discrimination, Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission of HIV, Orphans and Vulnerable Children, Anti Retroviral Therapy, Gender Based Violence and Male Circumcision.

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Circumcised men are less likely to become HIV infected.

Trials in Kenya, Uganda and South Africa showed Medical Male Circumcision prevents 60 out of every hundred HIV infections that would have otherwise occurred.

An independent review of the findings recommended male circumcision as a prevention tool, based on the strong evidence. In response, Kenya introduced the Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision Program in late 2008.

Internews introduced dedicated training events to help journalists tell this story. Remarkably, non-circumcising communities have taken up Voluntary Male Circumcision: culture can be dynamic – for the sake of good health.

**Medical Male Circumcision does not provide complete protection from HIV infection. It significantly reduces the likelihood of heterosexual men becoming infected by their partners, if no other sexually transmitted infections are present.**

See [www.internews.org](http://www.internews.org) for a view of “The Kindest Cut”, photo essays from trainees’ stories on Male Circumcision.





# The Kindest Cut | Male Circumcision and Cultural Change An Internews Photo Journalism Project



# HIV Control at a Glance :

A comprehensive plan for Kenya

Preventing new HIV infections is a priority in Kenya's fight against HIV, and voluntary medical male circumcision is part of a broader prevention strategy that targets all Kenyans. It begins by making sure that Kenyans know their HIV status and continues through a variety of interventions based on age, risk factors, and other considerations.

There are now counseling and testing facilities throughout the country where any Kenyan can learn their HIV status without having to travel great distances. Once they learn their status they are provided information on how to protect themselves and others. Those who are HIV positive are referred to treatment and care facilities and those who are HIV negative learn how to maintain their status. In addition, health facilities and health care workers are offering tests to clients (and their friends or family members) visiting health facilities. Pregnant women and mothers are routinely tested when they visit health facilities and those who are HIV-positive are offered treatment to prevent the transmission of the virus to their children.

Injection safety is also a focus for Kenya's prevention strategy. Efforts are underway to train health workers in safe injection practices and management of healthcare waste. In addition to injection safety, infection prevention and control policies are being implemented in health facilities to reduce health worker exposure to HIV infection. Communities are also being educated so as to reduce the demand for unnecessary injections. Making Kenya's blood supplies safe so that transfusions do not transmit the virus to health facility patients is another important prevention emphasis. Strategies to ensure all blood supplies in the country are effectively screened for HIV are in place and facilities such as the National Blood Transfusion Centre are being strengthened.

Special populations – including commercial sex workers and their clients, injecting drug users, discordant couples, women and young girls, men who have sex with men, among others – are at high risk of contracting the virus and require targeted prevention programs. These efforts include nighttime outreach by health promoters and clinical staff. A wide variety of communication materials using all types of media have also been developed to reach these groups.

Condoms are a key method for the prevention of HIV and their correct and consistent use is a large part of Kenya's prevention strategy. Social marketing programs are succeeding in expanding and enhancing the availability and affordability of both male and female condoms particularly in high-risk locations such as bars and nightclubs. Youth provide a great opportunity to tame the tide of new infections. Theory driven, evidence-based and well targeted interventions that involve young people are being implemented throughout the country. In addition to increasing condom use, special efforts are underway to delay the sexual debut of Kenyan young people and to promote abstinence as a method of prevention. These interventions are just an example of the tremendous work being done by many stakeholders to prevent transmission of HIV in Kenya. As we plan for the next phase of the fight against HIV in Kenya, we will continue to look for better and more effective ways to prevent its spread. Programs targeting most at risk populations and voluntary medical male circumcision are steps in the right direction.



**Dr. Nicholas Muraguri**  
Head - (NASCOP),  
Ministry of Public Health & Sanitation



**Erna Kerst**  
Mission Director,  
USAID/Kenya

*To the men and women of Nyanza who have supported medical male circumcision.*

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# Foreword

A new world that is continuously being recreated. Every day is different, but time moves slowly until, like a coiled spring, it is released and it jumps into being, like a photograph.

Photography in and of Africa is a subject often wrought with complex issues of representation, bias and a narrow focus on calamity. Images of Africa are often made by photographers who are from other continents. Here, in these images, we encounter a new perspective. Presented here are six African picture stories told by emerging African photographers.

The journalists who made these pictures are health and science print journalists, who underwent an intensive photography workshop with photographers Stephen Digges and Dolphine Emali. The instructors challenged the students to change mediums and tell a complex story with their text and photographs. They encouraged them to render a complex and difficult subject with nuance and beauty. And that rendering is now in this book.

A book indeed is a beautiful thing. A book dedicated to the work of Kenyan photographers is something relatively new. A book like this functions on a multitude of levels. These are new photographers - to have one's work in print makes it permanent, portable, visible and gives it the potential to do the enduring work of photography. To illuminate a moment in time, a fraction of a second. And issues addressed at that moment challenge people to take notice - to think, reflect and talk.

The images themselves are quality pictures. They move beyond simple description. The subject matter is profound on its own merit. Any effort to stem the effect of HIV/Aids should be noted and examined thoughtfully. In the region where the journalists worked, the HIV prevalence is much higher than the national average. An effort like this is all the more exceptional - it shows men embracing a cultural practice that is often foreign to them in an effort to reduce the rate of transmission of the virus.

Here we witness a changing culture. This bodes well for the future - even if it is to be through gradual change. Much of the transmission of HIV has happened because of an unfortunate intersection of culture, religion, poverty and an opportunistic virus that preys on the most fundamental ways of being human.

These pictures and this practice are a step toward changing culture in ways that affirm life, and grant opportunities for more life. This book marks so many new beginnings - the beginnings of change, the beginnings of a perspective on Kenya by Kenyans and hopefully the beginning of many more books, in which Kenyans take control of the stories that are told about Kenyan life and the challenges of disease. I welcome with joy, these new photographers to a way of working with stories that they have been empowered to tell.

Brendan Bannon - photo journalist and teacher



# Introduction: Now that is a story

When results from trials in Kenya, Uganda and South Africa showed that circumcised men were only about half as likely as uncircumcised men to contract HIV from infected women, it was heartening. Journalists needed to ask why and how? HIV penetrates easily into cells close to the inner surface of the foreskin. So removing the foreskin gives better protection. A systematic review of the findings from the trial sites concluded that no further evidence was needed: male circumcision significantly reduces the risk of infection. **That is a story.** Kenya moved swiftly to introduce a Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision drive. The initial target: Nyanza. Resources were mobilized, mobile circumcision centers set up. A team effort with key elements quickly in place: money to make it happen (from the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, PEPFAR, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation), support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and an action plan from Kenya's Ministry of Health through the Male Circumcision Consortium ensured Kenya was the first in Africa to be ready with this prevention tool. **That is a story.**

But these stories came with a challenge. How to get buy-in from a people who do not traditionally circumcise? How to ensure they know circumcision does not offer complete protection from HIV? Enter all the special people who made it happen. One of them is Dishon Gogi from Suba District. His official title is District Male Circumcision Project Coordinator. But there is nothing officious about Gogi. His smile is as big as his heart. His talk sweeps with enthusiasm, his voice warms the spirit. Gogi has been tasked with mobilizing men from Suba District for voluntary male circumcision. *"Fear of illness is a motivator. On some of the islands of Lake Victoria, HIV prevalence is 26% and higher amongst adults; they've seen HIV means business"*, says Gogi. Then political leadership came in. Prime Minister Raila Odinga and other politicians from Nyanza publically endorsed male circumcision. It helped broker a deal between the Luo Council of Elders, the custodians of culture, and the medical fraternity. Good science creating a shift in custom. **That is a story.**

At Internews, we work with journalists to tell HIV stories well. Here were three good news stories in one: good science, proactive authorities and a culture that is dynamic. It needed to be documented. Photo Journalism came to mind. And so it happened that six print journalists ventured into new territory: telling picture stories. Most of them had hardly handled a camera before. Feedback from the field was that the journalists had been transformed, like the men in Nyanza. They returned with a tapestry of interpretations of a complex theme. Their picture essays tell of hardship and of sexual networking around the lake as a driver of disease. What do goats in a boat have to do with male circumcision? The answer came in the silent language of pictures: it tells us the islanders are linked to the rural rites of yesteryear. Yet they have embraced change. And what about pictures of the procedure? Yes and no. More like pictures of the poignancy of the moment.

How does Gogi know in his heart of hearts if his work has been a success? In the case of the Nyanza drive, the numbers speak. In less than a year, 30 000 men had volunteered for circumcision. *"But it's about more than numbers"*, says Gogi. *"To a paediatrician it's a good job well done when a baby laughs and his mother smiles. I knew my job had been well done when I was off duty one day, and a newly circumcised man started telling me about circumcision."*

At Internews, first time photographers managed to seize upon an assignment called "male circumcision" and returned with images that are provocative, but not offensive. Picture moments that celebrate the good news, yet confront the uncertainties of change. They were print journalists, now reflecting on what was between the lines. **That, I think, is a story.** We have bound these stories into a book for you to evaluate if it was a good job well done.

# Making photographers

It was clear that we had to do it.

Internews awards journalists who have performed with equipment grants. Print journalists receive still cameras. The six journalists, whose work you see in “The Kindest Cut” had received still cameras, because their print training had been successfully completed and their subsequent stories were good. The look on their faces when they unwrapped their camera packages reminded me of children with new toys. But these toys came with challenge. How to make good photographs. Fresh images that had yet to be seen.

My own experience in learning photography has taught me one thing - that as much as photography in journalism is a tool that enhances the story, Photography is an art. Skills can be taught, but art has to be inspired. The journalists selected for the first Internews’ photography training didn’t just have potential, they were passionate about photography and wanted more.

Like all Internews workshops, the training is normally pegged to a theme in relation to HIV/Aids. Male circumcision, one of the preventive measures for HIV infection, was the theme of this workshop. We had to think hard of how to go about a training that would result in photography that had both the information and the art. The subjects picked for this training was the Luo community in Kenya, a people who do not traditionally circumcise. The journalists had a brief: have an open mind when interpreting the theme.

After the formal part of the training (introduction to the medium, technical requirements of a good photograph), it was off to the field. The journalists split into pairs so that Stephen and I could give them proper one-on-one mentoring. The training in the field took three days for each of the groups.

On the first day of the field training the trainees were like children, seeking reassurance with every image they took. Some even confessed they were afraid of the camera. The second day, they had some confidence, trying out different angles and techniques. The third day produced confident photographers, knowing when they got the shot, captured the moment. They were relaxed around their subjects, for the most part working on their own. Unlike the first two days, this day they would disappear and show up with a contented look informing us of the photographs they had made. This was to me the culmination of all the elements we put together for a successful photography training.

The work they produced is amazing, considering what little time they had to learn and do it. These are the images of six photographers who are just getting started and are willing to take it to the next step. Did they interpret the theme well? Yes. Did they present the subject fairly? Yes. To any photographer, that is usually the most important aspect of telling the story. I am excited about the level of appreciation that they now have for photography. They know when a photograph is right and acknowledge it when they get it wrong. They are not just using the medium as a tool to tell stories, they are making art. This makes people take more time to look at the photograph. This will ensure that more is understood about male circumcision and the Luo community.

We have made photographers.

Dolphine Emali - Photo Journalism Trainer | Internews in Kenya

# From metaphor to photograph

Dolphine and I had the intention with the workshops to train a group of six health and science journalists to make reports that explore the immediate physical world around them - as they have done through their writing. This time, they were to use not only their minds, which were thinking in print – they were to transform and express their ideas through the visual medium of photography.

What was interesting about this workshop for us as instructors was the fact that we were able to watch a group of students' progress and help them develop their skills with a novel, critical eye. We observed them working in the field and observed the details they observed. We also watched to see how the elements of their work corresponded with their writing. Coming from a background in documentary photography, I found teaching this group of print journalists rewarding and educational for me too: to follow their thinking and attention to detail during both the shooting and editing process.

They addressed hard hitting issues such as HIV, cultural difference and tribal alienation in a country that is still reeling and recovering from the effects of one of the world's worst political clashes since the genocide in Rwanda. They however remained and continue to remain objective and impartial. They were talking about HIV and taboos across a range of ethnic communities, whose issues are often marginalized.

In this body of work I feel that the students embraced the positive and preventative elements of circumcision. Their composition shows empathy. And each went away with a personal style developing. They took pride in their interpretations. They had addressed a “sensitive subject” and created something for the people to see and learn from. The work took place over the course of seven days for each trainee: four days in a training room and three in the field. We watched them at first being afraid to hold a camera in social situations, then saw them being kicked out of hospitals for not asking permission to take pictures. Seeing them learn from making mistakes was the most rewarding part of my assignment!

Dolphine and I were left to negotiate the aftermath – as their instructors. It was rewarding to be teaching and encouraging such a bold approach to the medium of photography that was an even balance between being sensitive to their subjects, yet unrelenting in their pursuit of passion.

We had created true photojournalists that were not afraid to take pictures regardless of the circumstances – journalists that were not afraid to confront their surroundings with their perspectives. This is an element in journalism that I feel has eroded and needs to be revived... this is what we set out to do and has been accomplished in this body of work.



# Bio

## Ernest Waititu



Ernest Waititu has immense experience in print and online journalism. He has contributed to prestigious publications such as The Washington Post and BBC Focus on Africa Magazine. He also is the founder of Afrikanews.org, an online news site.

**“This photography training was for me an ‘aha moment!’ All of a sudden, I started seeing things I hadn’t put much value to in life - the expressive skies, the reddening facade of sunset and the vivid gesture of a person popping out of a newspaper page.”**

# Looking ahead

Ernest Waititu

There is something heartening about being a kid. Childhood, at its best, comes with vigor, hope, thrills, and dreams of the times to come. A few weeks ago, I was immersed into these inimitable joys of childhood when I began a course in photography under the guidance of accomplished photography trainers at Internews in Nairobi.

I had never studied photography in earnest. Taking pictures, for me, was always a side dish to accompany the main course: something “in addition” - an exercise to get pictures to illustrate my all-important print stories. And during those family outings and reunions, photos were proof of who had come, not necessarily what they felt about the moment. Everyone would put on that funny grin to show how pleased they were with the moment, never mind what they felt inside.

However, when I started the training with Internews, something was let loose from within me. Like a kid, I became enthralled by every little thing or idea that popped up in class. I wanted to experiment with shooting in its entirety. I began to appreciate a good picture; I began to savor the fixed moment in history that every frame presents. I learnt to relish the simplicity and individuality that each photographer brings to a composition. Where I come from, they say that a well-travelled person has dual view points. In my photographic journey, I realized the delicious slices of life I was missing out on when I looked at photography only from one perspective - as a duty.

But still, like a young kid, I was given to making baby-ish judgments. When my trainers, Dolphine Emali and Stephen Digges, said they had arranged for a trip to the field, hundreds of kilometers from Nairobi to the small islands of Suba District in Western Kenya, I could not see the sense of it. “Why the waste of time and resources?” I had wondered to myself. Why not just walk to a place in the precincts of the city of Nairobi and shoot?

Nevertheless, I accompanied them only because, where I come from, it is indecorous to say no to your teachers.

But when I arrived at Rusinga Island on Lake Victoria and started hitting my shutter release, I realized the importance of new, inspiring scenes in the business of photography. The lake was populated by young children swimming, bathing, others just liberally getting the feel of the cool breeze on their skin. There was something jovial, something rosy, something alluring about these kids that exerted a pull on me. Then, I could not tell exactly what drew me to them. In retrospect, now, I think that the young photographer in me, toddling in the wonders of making pictures, dreaming of the big and the not so big things that I would achieve when I grew up as a photographer, found something riveting in the pastimes of the children of Suba.

Without breaking into a sweat, just by listening to my instincts and finding inspiration in the surroundings, I had found a primary subject for my pictures - the children sprung up in my photography in a way that I had not imagined. Coupled with the children theme, was another tot subject: we were here on the islands of Lake Victoria to document the story of a community that was taking baby steps into voluntary male circumcision. The surgical procedure, while not a cultural tradition of the Luo people who live here, has gained much currency in the last year because research findings have indicated that the procedure cuts the risk of getting infected with HIV in men by 60 percent.

For a community that has in the last two decades been utterly devastated by Aids, here was a splash of hope. The community, now newly introduced to the surgical practice, was hoping to cut down the high HIV prevalence rates - 30 percent on some of the islands. On some islands like Remba - set miles deep into the lake, and at least two hours by boat from the famous Rusinga Island, people were falling over themselves to get the service. So it is that three young ones - a toddling photographer, a community that was new in experimenting in a wonder story that could save its life, and the community's children all fired up - met at a momentous time in history. The result was hundreds of pictures that were not terribly good and some dozens of others that were so dazzling that they will always be etched in my mind.

When my frames were put together with those of my classmates, the project was a treat for the eye. Seeing Ida Jooste, Internews Country Director in Kenya, teary-eyed after viewing the class production was a humbling appraisal of our work. Two months down the line, I have had opportunities to sit back and critique what I've been producing. I have noticed with much pleasure that I have developed a personal style. Just as it's easy to recognize the style of a piece I wrote many years ago, I now can easily pick out a picture I have taken. I have fallen in love with the prominent foregrounding I have seen in my pictures and the occasional slanted frames that I find myself returning to. Still, and this is the other amazing thing about photography, I have realized most of my best frames have less to do with meticulousness with the camera or the mechanics and more to do with being the lucky one to walk by, to hit the shutter release, at the right time.

There is, of course, a long and winding journey to be made. Beyond toddling there is the franticness of a preschooler, the clumsiness of an adolescent, and the recklessness of a youngster. But I hope that soon, I will attain maturity in my camerawork, like the many accomplished photographers I now love following. Still, I am enjoying the journey, whether the destination gets here or not. Today, I pick up the camera before the notebook. Also, I have developed camera envy: every time I see somebody holding a camera, clicking away, I think about the moments missed. I think about the great shot that I just didn't take.



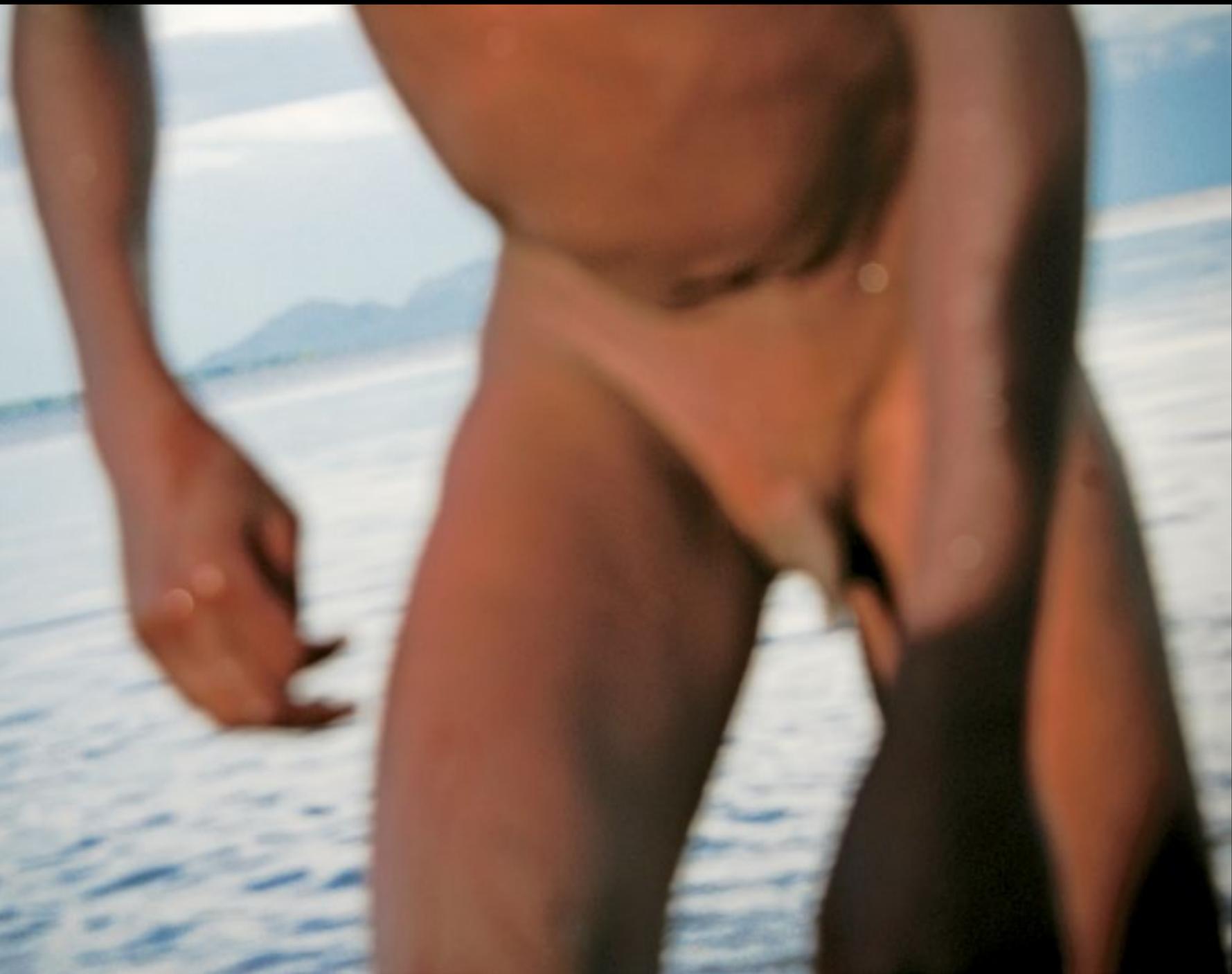
# Looking ahead

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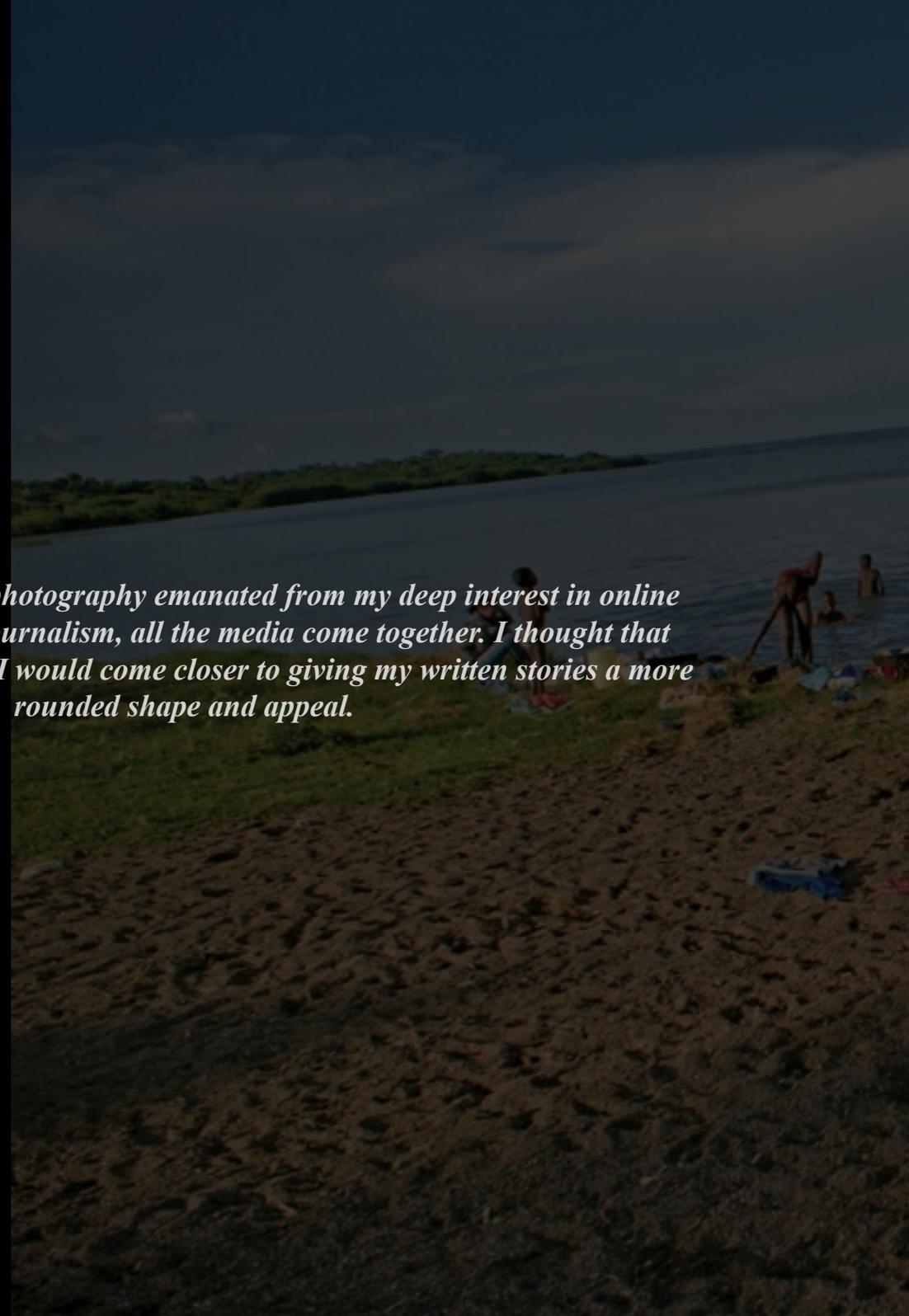








*My motivation to study photography emanated from my deep interest in online journalism. In online journalism, all the media come together. I thought that by studying photography I would come closer to giving my written stories a more rounded shape and appeal.*







# Bio

Isaiah Esipisu



Isaiah Esipisu has a knack for looking for ‘the story within the story.’ He has taken a deep interest in research and sourcing for information. He writes for the Kenyan print media and is the editor of The CLINIMED Journal and has contributed to UN publications and online news sites such as [Haiya](#).

**“The Internews photography training was an eye opener I loved photography, but had never practiced it professionally. This training has unlocked new opportunities for me.”**

To circumcise or not to circumcise has always been determined by one's culture or religion. But now things are different. Compelling evidence showed male circumcision reduces the risk of HIV infection by about 60 per cent for heterosexual men.

The response to these research findings shows people are willing to sacrifice in an effort to reduce the spread of HIV.

"Whether it is painful or not, it does not matter. All I know is that scientists have spoken. And if going through the cut will protect me to some extent, then I must do it. It is the responsibility of each one of us to contribute towards this noble fight against Aids," said 19 year old Francis Oduor, moments before he was circumcised at a mobile clinic in Sango-rota village in Nyakach District, Nyanza.

Initially, people from this community did not circumcise at all. Statistics show that 86 per cent of men in Nyanza Province have not been circumcised, because it is not part of their cultural belief system.

But according to experts, this figure is changing, due to the dedication people have towards the fight against the disease. "It is not long since the government drafted a National Guide for Voluntary Male Circumcision in Kenya, but figures of men who have gone through the simple surgery is very pleasing," says George Otieno, a statistician working for the Nyanza Reproductive Health Society (NRHS).

The Society is funded by Family Health International (FHI) as one of the members of the Male Circumcision Consortium (MCC) working in Kisumu East, Kisumu West and Nyando Districts of Nyanza Province. NRHS is also a recipient of (US) President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) funding to work in Suba and Siaya Districts. The MCC Project is a five-year initiative (August 2007 - July 2012) to help reduce the number of HIV infections.

"In about one year since the start of the therapeutic male circumcision campaign, close to 30 000 men have volunteered to go through the cut," said Otieno.

The government of Kenya announced a policy on voluntary male circumcision after a three country study (Kenya, Uganda and South Africa) revealed that circumcision reduces chances of once acquiring HIV by up to 66 per cent.

The studies, which were conducted between 2002 and 2006, and included a total of 11,054 men, revealed that circumcision in heterosexual men significantly reduces their risk of acquiring HIV, when compared with uncircumcised men.

Experts say it is important to have the surgery conducted by professionals alone. "There are several factors that must be taken into account while circumcising someone: the way the organ is handled, the sterility of the equipment, the state of health of the client, the way the wound should be dressed, and more. Only trained experts can observe these to the letter," says George Ogal, a hygiene officer working at a mobile clinic in Nyanza.

"There is a risk of people misunderstanding the whole concept. In therapeutic circumcisions, we conduct thorough counseling sessions. There is a risk of people perceiving male circumcision as complete protection against HIV infection, but this is not the case," says Ogal.

Male circumcision is – simply put - the removal of the foreskin of the penis. The HI-Virus gains easier access to the type of cells in the foreskin than to cells in the circumcised penis.

Kenya is one of the first countries in Africa to announce a policy on male circumcision in an effort to curb the spread of HIV.



# Clean cut

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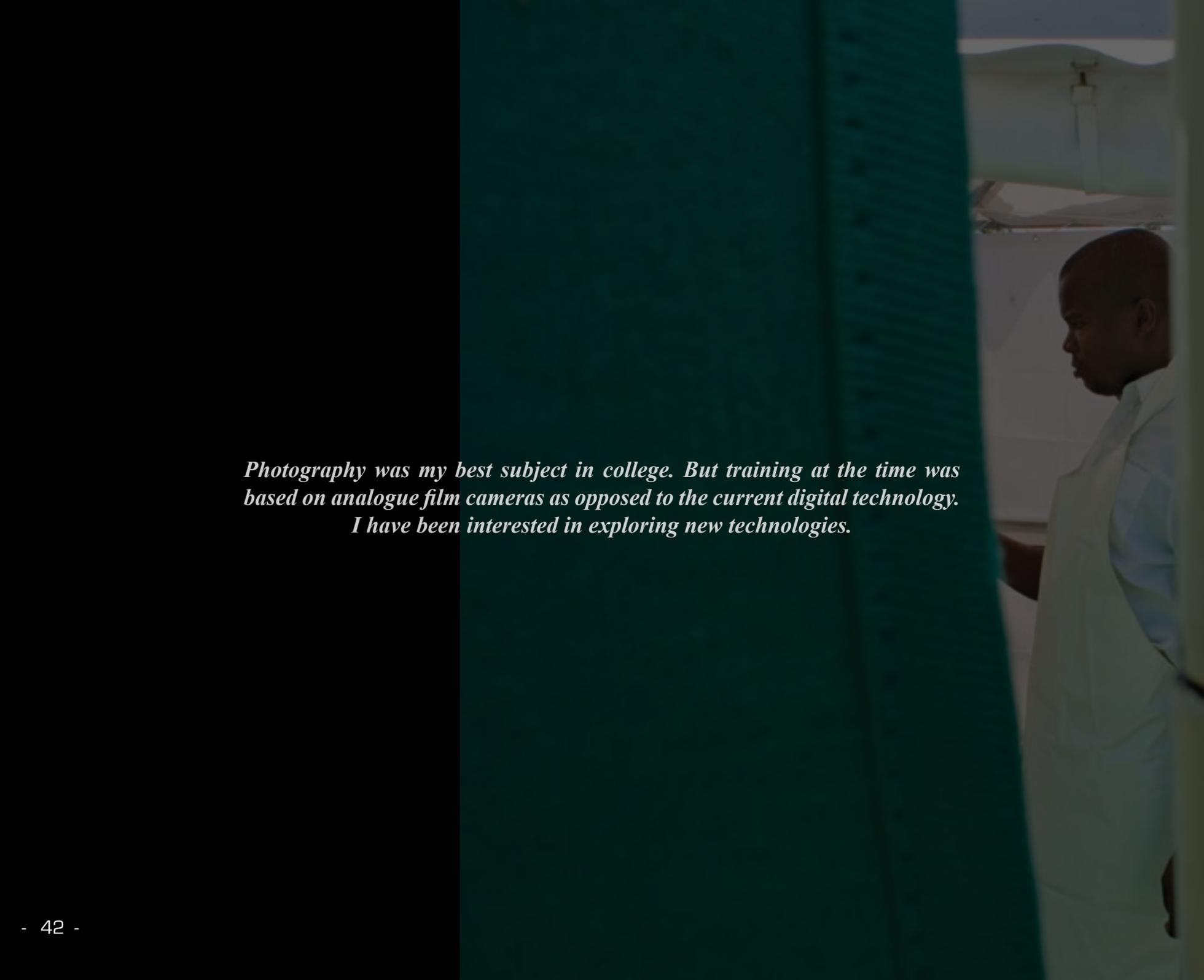












*Photography was my best subject in college. But training at the time was based on analogue film cameras as opposed to the current digital technology. I have been interested in exploring new technologies.*





# Bio

David Njagi



Freelance science writer, David Njagi, has contributed to the print media for past five years. He injects energy and zest into his work as a correspondent for both local and international publications such as [SciDev.net](http://SciDev.net), [Islamonline.net](http://Islamonline.net) and [Africa Science News Service](http://Africa Science News Service).

**“The Internews photography training was an inspiring experience as I learnt that the combined power of images and the pen make an invaluable force.”**

# A cut with culture David Njagi

At the time of doing this photo shoot, farmers in Nyanza province were weeding their land. It was a season that marked an important stage in the province's agrarian system, and which calls for some ritual incantations.

Other times when the farming community is expected to invoke the good favor of the gods, we were told, was during the planting and harvesting seasons. All one needs to do is have sex with his wife before carrying out a key activity on the farm. Failure to comply often leads to a poor harvest, pest infestation and other calamities on the scale of the biblical plagues.

When we met Amos Ogola at Mfangano Island, he was weeding his land using a hand hoe. Behind his deep set eyes lurked the sadness of having lost his parents to HIV/Aids. Ogola now lives with his grandmother. He is married and has a bouncing baby girl. In his family and many others on the island, an entire generation was missing. Sex is a ritualized cultural practice in the Luo community. Men of the Luo community are not circumcised. Scientific studies conducted in Kenya, Uganda and South Africa showed by not being circumcised, men are at about double the risk of becoming HIV infected.

HIV has showed its face in Luo Nyanza. Ironically, farmers sought to prevent the consummation of illness by engaging in unprotected sex - oblivious of the fact that it was tragedy that they were breeding. And HIV was spreading.

Thus Ogola became orphaned. He was determined not to succumb to HIV. When he heard that there was a government led initiative in Sena village that reduced the risk of HIV infection by 60 per cent, Ogola dared the forefathers by getting circumcised. A few kilometers from where Ogola lives, Alshlmus Achola Oketch tells another circumcision story - "the cut" is what people are talking about here. As a nurse counselor, Oketch's job is to convince young men to be circumcised. It's not an easy task, and they have a lot of questions. How long does it take to heal? Can they afford to abandon their farms for that long? Also, during the healing process, sex is risky. Are they expected to go without? And then the question Oketch wonders about: is our culture going to change? Will the Luo become a circumcising community in time?

Tribes in Kenya which do practice circumcision, see it as a rite of passage into manhood. After being circumcised, one is expected to marry, own property, and participate in the society's social and economic activities.

Dishon Gogi is an elder and a community mobiliser for the male circumcision drive at Mfangano, Mbita and Rusinga Islands. He tells us that for the Luo community, initiation into manhood was marked by removal of six front teeth from the lower jaws. Having entered into manhood status, the man was expected to perform certain duties as family head. This could include inheriting a brother or close relative's widow, a cultural practice which has counted against this community. Often the woman would have become widowed because of HIV, and then she passes on the virus to her new husband.

Gogi says for those who are keen to preserve culture, he has found clever ways to emphasize that the circumcision drive is done for medical reasons only, not for cultural reasons. He says the benefits should be clear in a few years' time. Scientists believe they'll be able to illustrate lower infection rates in the men who got circumcised. In time, circumcision in the Luo community may no longer be the exception, but the norm. Culture at a crossroads for the sake of survival.



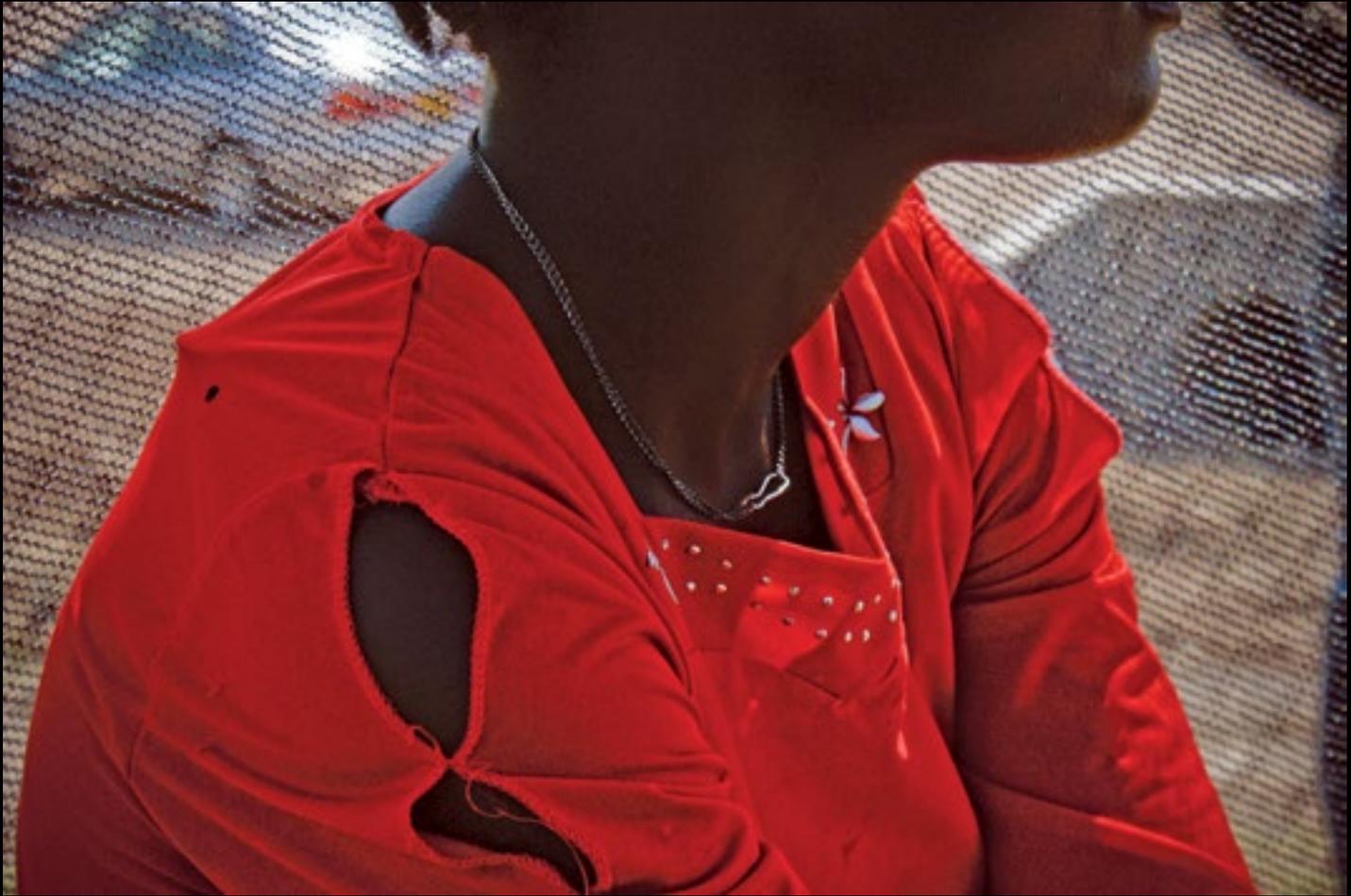
A cut with culture



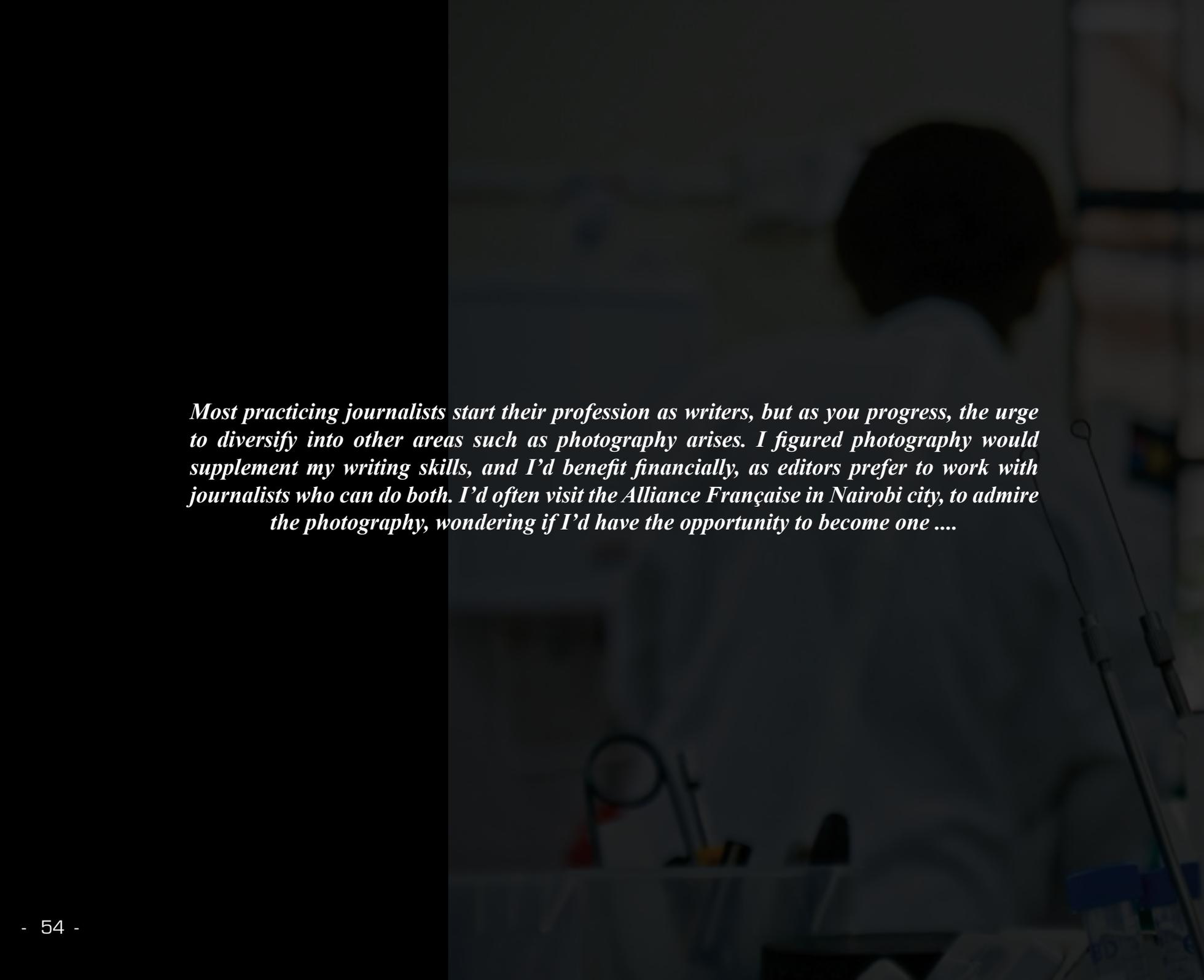












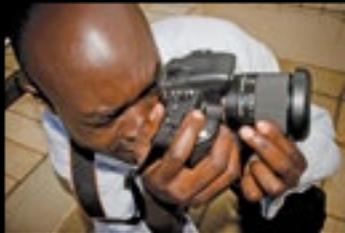
*Most practicing journalists start their profession as writers, but as you progress, the urge to diversify into other areas such as photography arises. I figured photography would supplement my writing skills, and I'd benefit financially, as editors prefer to work with journalists who can do both. I'd often visit the Alliance Française in Nairobi city, to admire the photography, wondering if I'd have the opportunity to become one ....*





# Bio

Erick Otieno



Erick Otieno has been writing for the past six years, on staff at The Kenya Times newspaper. His stories often make the front page. Erick hopes to run his own media house one day.

**“The theme of the training was well chosen and timely, just when the national Male Circumcision campaign was gaining momentum. I listened to the stories of men who’d decided to undergo voluntary medical circumcision and captured their stories in photographs. I am proud of the photos I took!”**

The introduction of male circumcision among the Luo Community in Nyanza Province may have initially been met by resistance, but the long queues that have become a feature at health facilities offering the service in the region tell a different story.

When scientific research revealed that male circumcision can reduce chances of HIV infection by 60 per cent, the debate on the subject among the Luo, whose men are traditionally not circumcised, was passionate and heated. Many saw it as an attempt to introduce a foreign cultural practice in the community under the guise of fighting HIV. The Luo Council of Elders who still command influence among the community, who live on the shores of Lake Victoria, were adamant that they would not accept any imposition of foreign culture on its members. But thanks to intensive sensitization programs by the government and non-governmental organizations, mindsets have changed. When male circumcision services became available in November 2008, the queuing started.

Politicians, too, played a role - specifically Prime Minister Raila Odinga, who holds sway in the region. Mr. Odinga, who is a Luo, was able to use the huge political support he commands to successfully appeal to the Luo Council of Elders and members of the community to put aside cultural issues and accept male circumcision as a way of preventing the further spread of HIV in this community.

Nyanza Province has the highest HIV prevalence in Kenya – 15.3 per cent, more than double the national average, according to the Kenya Aids Indicator Survey (KAIS) 2008. Today the young and the old, the rich, the poor and the in-between in urban and rural centers have embraced “the male cut” in what can be seen as a bold defiance of culture. From the animated conversations of middle-aged men outside a health centre to the exuberant faces of secondary school students gathered at a hall for a pre-circumcision counseling session, there is no doubt that this is a community in transition. The concept of male circumcision as part of a package of preventive measures against HIV has been embraced. Statistics from the provincial public health department are quite encouraging.

By June 2009, more than twenty thousand men had been medically circumcised at 124 private and public health facilities across Nyanza. Prevention of HIV is not the only reason why Luo men have taken to circumcision. Experts and members of the community say there’s a perception that it enhances sexual pleasure, increases sexual desirability and improves hygiene.

More women are now encouraging their husbands and boyfriends to go for the procedure as the ones whose partners have been circumcised report increased sexual satisfaction during intercourse. But with the high acceptance of circumcision in the community comes challenges that must be addressed if the present success is to be consolidated and HIV prevalence is to be reduced in the region. To begin with, the messages included in male circumcision campaigns must be clear about what the scientific findings mean. There is still a considerable risk of HIV infection, when exposed to the virus. It would be counter-productive if circumcised men thought they had full protection and had unprotected sex with multiple partners. Proper counseling is vital, say scientists.

Another challenge is the overwhelming number of clients turning up for circumcision. More health workers would need to be trained in male circumcision services, especially at public health facilities. It is the same limited staff at government hospitals that are also required to attend to the demand for other medical services. Given that male circumcision is not a medical procedure of emergency, clients are therefore more likely to be turned away.

It is, however, encouraging that some non-governmental organizations in the Male Circumcision Consortium are already exploring the concept of training female nurses in areas like Suba, Nyando, Homa Bay and Bondo districts. But the issue has ignited debate among the public and within medical circles, who wonder about sustainability. Some argue that tradition cannot permit the presence of a woman in a circumcision theatre. Some female nurses have also been averse to the idea.

My visit to Sango Rota beach in Nyakach district, where a mobile circumcision clinic was set up, showed that most young men were unperturbed by the presence of women in the theatre. Amongst us photojournalists were women, who could walk in and out of the room without raising an eyebrow. There have also been calls for the integration of traditional circumcisers from other communities into this service to deal with the high demand.

But such a step may just come too close to stepping on the toes of tradition.



# Stepping up

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*As a print journalist, I have been writing feature stories on topics like health, education, entertainment and politics. To be able to tell the stories better, I need to accompany them with pictures for publication. Pictures generally make stories more believable and the pages more attractive to readers. Relying on photographers in the newsroom to take pictures for me has not worked so well, as I could not be sure they'd have my interpretation in mind.*





# Bio

Venter Mwangera



Venter Mwangera has a nose for unique science stories. Her pieces are published in newspapers and online publications, like *The Star*, [Africa Science and News Service](#) and [The Dubbling Mum](#).

**“I had a camera but I didn’t know how to handle it. Now, after my photography training, I have been able to take good photo’s, which helped to enhance my stories. All my recent photos have been published - I really felt good about that!”**

The Kenyan government last year issued a new policy to adopt male circumcision as an HIV prevention strategy. The Policy on Male Circumcision 2008 calls for the procedure to be provided to all willing males. The decision to adopt circumcision as an HIV intervention follows studies showing that male circumcision can significantly lower risk for HIV infection.

Male circumcision had not been a practice in the Luo community, but things are changing. According to the Director of the National Aids/STD Control programme [Nascop], Dr. Nicholas Muraguri, HIV prevalence in the region is 15% - about double that of the nationwide figure.

Akinyi Ochola, 25, is a businesswoman along the beaches of Lake Victoria and her husband is a fisherman.

"I have seen many of my friends struggling with the virus and finally succumbing to it after a long suffering. I would not like to end that way. We respect and uphold the ties of our culture. But when it comes to matters of health, how can we respect our culture if we all are swept away by HIV/Aids? Circumcision is a foreign culture but if it improves our husbands' hygiene, then, it is good for our health too", says Akinyi. Akinyi encouraged her husband to be circumcised, especially after she heard that the service was free and that the wound doesn't take long to heal. Dr. Walter Obiero, Clinical Manager of the Male Circumcision Project of the Nyanza Reproductive Health Society says there is an overwhelming number of men making inquiries on circumcision. They are accompanied by their wives, who at times are asking more questions about the pros and cons of the procedure.

"Yesterday, we had an operation on a high school teacher who was brought by his wife and their two children waited at the reception as their dad was circumcised. The couple was really happy after the operation and the wife jokingly said she would enjoy sex more and her friends wouldn't be ridiculing her anymore.", said Dr. Obiero.

On Mbita Island, some men were apprehensive about being circumcised. Their wives are stepping in for them to make bookings and on the day of the operation, their wives come along to give them moral support. Mbita Island Beach Management chairman Mr. George Ogola is an advocate for male circumcision. He often calls upon the fishermen at the beach to be circumcised - for the sake of hygiene and the fight against HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. "For this effort to bear fruit, we had to talk to women on Mbita Island. They benefit because it also protects against the virus that causes cervical cancer", he says.

Mr. Wycliffe Okeyo Kidera is a married fisherman whose wife encouraged him to be circumcised. Says Kidera: "I am grateful for everybody who came up with this noble idea. I feel much cleaner after sexual intercourse. I am no longer embarrassed in front of my friends."

A commercial sex worker in Mbita Island, who asked to remain anonymous, said she would not dare having sex with a man who is not circumcised. "It's the latest fashion, it's prestige. Male circumcision is a prerequisite", she says. Advocates say it is very important to ensure people know even when circumcised there is still a significant risk of contracting HIV. All the same rules apply: no unprotected sex with many partners.

Amos Ogola, who is 24, says there are hygiene benefits and it allows one to offer more protection to your partner. "Even if I underwent male circumcision, it doesn't mean that I am having a number of female lovers. No. I have one beautiful wife and I wouldn't like to make her suffer in any way." Mr. Ogola says, smiling. And even older people are embracing this new form of protection. A staff member at Rusinga Island Lodge, Mrs Ruth Oloo, acknowledges that male circumcision is a foreign practice but because of sexually transmitted infections she encouraged her 48 year old husband and her son of 22 to undergo circumcision.

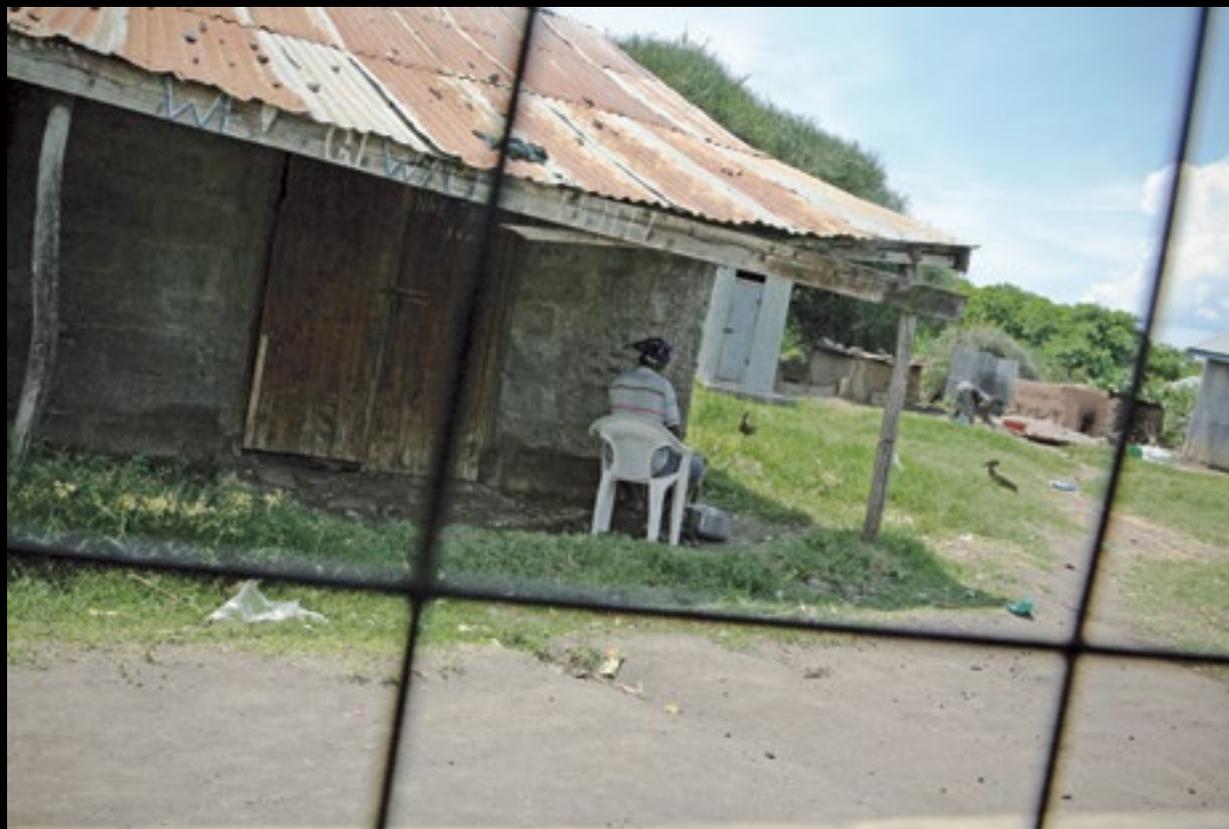
On the islands of Mbita, Mfangano and Rusinaga, men, women and teenagers have started to own male circumcision. The men have said they appreciate the protection it gives. Their wives are happy that family ties have been strengthened. And it has gotten people to talk about safer sex.



# Stepping in

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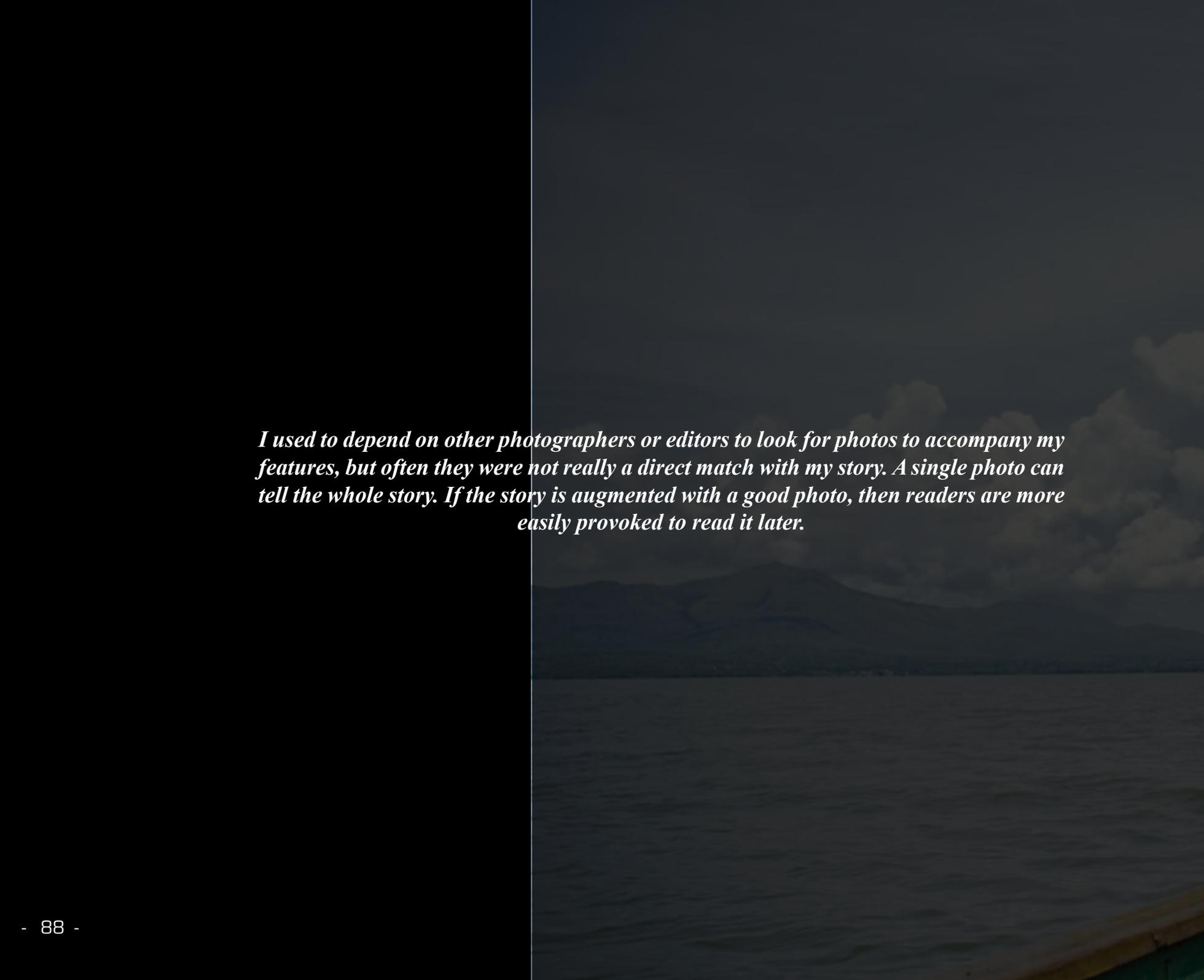












*I used to depend on other photographers or editors to look for photos to accompany my features, but often they were not really a direct match with my story. A single photo can tell the whole story. If the story is augmented with a good photo, then readers are more easily provoked to read it later.*



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# Bio

Wanjiru Macharia



Wanjiru Macharia trained as a TV producer, but she turned out to be a print journalist, writing human interest stories and features. She is based in the Rift Valley and works as a correspondent for the Daily Nation newspaper.

**“In our Nakuru bureau we are six journalists and only one photographer. This has caused numerous delays to our projects as we keep jostling for his time. Having gone through Internews photography training I am now independent - with my skills and my own digital camera, work has become easy. I also help my fellow journalists and that gives me satisfaction.”**

# A new generation Wanjiru Macharia

Children in Luoland have the privilege of growing up in changing times. It used to be the elders who shaped norms, but in Nyanza, we met some young boys who are leading the way.

The Voluntary Male Circumcision Campaign in Nyanza is targeted at the adults of the fishing community. On a visit to the islands of Lake Victoria we met Master Michael Omondi, who is 9 years old. Omondi had heard the stories of the benefits of male circumcision. He told his mother he thought it would make much more sense to be circumcised now. The boy saw no sense in waiting while he was old if it was a good thing. And as it happens, his younger brother thought his elder brother had a clever idea. And they were both circumcised on the same day.

Because the wounds of the young heal more quickly, the two brothers were soon out playing with their mates again.

At first their friends treated them as traitors – after all, Luos do not circumcise! But then, one by one, boys started calling them aside, wanting to know how it went, whether it was painful and how long it took to heal. The other boys took the stories home and their parent, too, got interested.

“Women come to my house to ask about the process and where I took my sons for the cut. I was afraid at first that people would treat me badly but I am happy that I took the bold move,” says Omondi’s mother, Ms Martha Achieng. Omondi and his brother had become heroes.

In this region, children and adults seem to be at ease with their nakedness as they shower and wash their clothes at the shores of Lake Victoria. It is here that the uncircumcised boys cut noticed that Omondi and his brother looked different, and they wanted theirs to be the same. They had all heard about the stories of male circumcision, and how it would reduce the chances of HIV infection. They were not sexually active yet, but it sounded like a good idea.

In our travels in Nyanza province we realized many boys knew about circumcision. It started as a mission of persuading adult men to be circumcised. The job has just been made easier by having some children lead the trend.

The authorities were happy, because it is far easier to circumcise boys. With adults, one has to counsel them about sacrificing time away from work and about abstaining from sex for six weeks ideally.

“I have not been cut and I do not think I can afford to do it now because I have a family to fend for but I will ensure that all my sons are circumcised to save them from the dilemma that I am going through,” says a fisherman, Mr. Augustine Odero. Mr. Odero regrets not having been circumcised when he was younger, because his condition risked his life and that of his wife.

“I am a fisherman operating from an island far away from home. Once in a while I am lured into spending a night with some of the twilight girls here. At times we get intoxicated and forget to wear condoms,” he says.

Odero is happy that the young ones will have it easier. A small group of boy heroes may just be starting a trend. And their boy children may well be circumcised as a matter of course.



# A new generation

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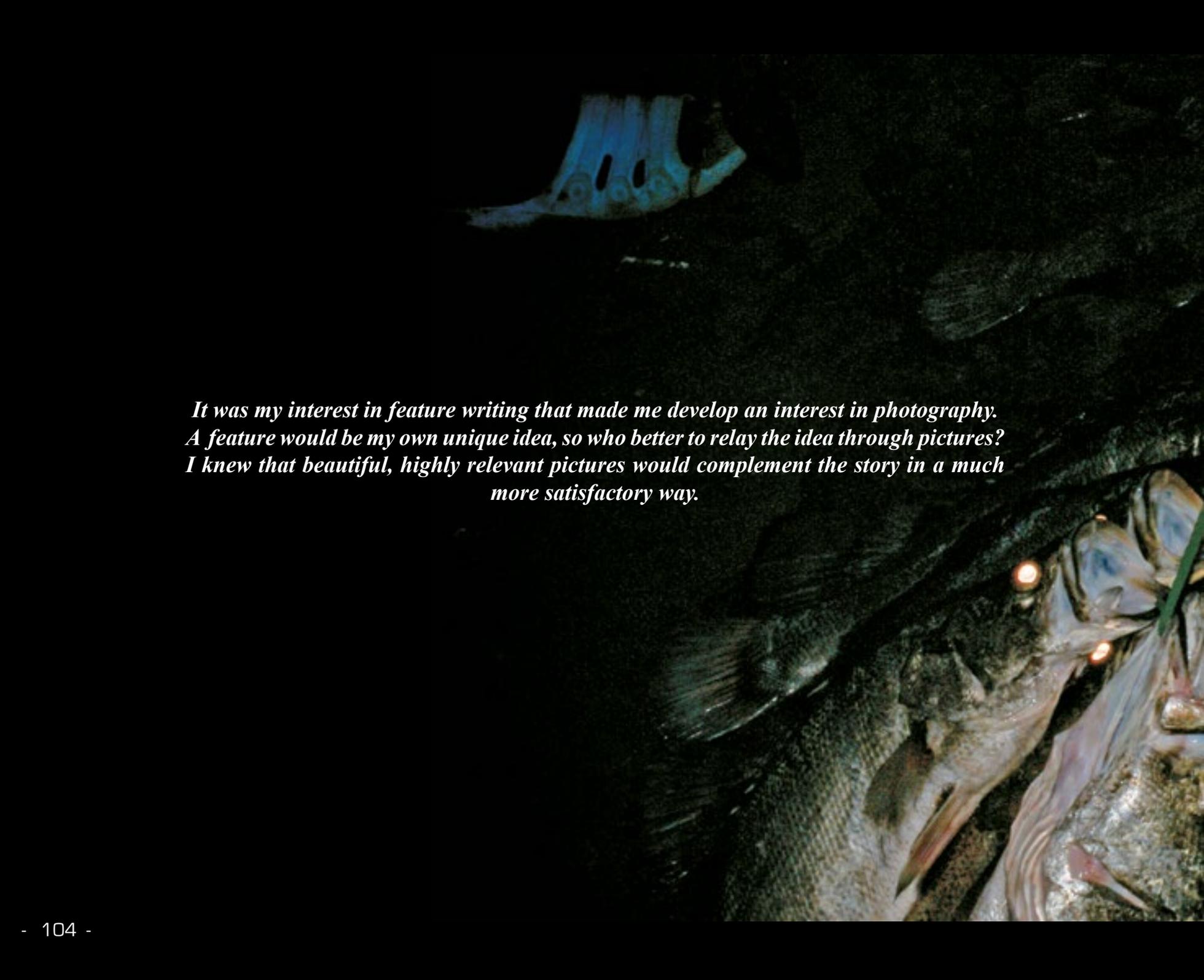












*It was my interest in feature writing that made me develop an interest in photography. A feature would be my own unique idea, so who better to relay the idea through pictures? I knew that beautiful, highly relevant pictures would complement the story in a much more satisfactory way.*



Support for Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision  
in Kenya

The Male Circumcision Consortium (MCC) works with the Government of Kenya (Ministry of Health, National Aids and STI Control Program - NASCOP, National Aids Control Council - NACC) and other partners to prevent HIV and save lives by expanding access to safe and voluntary male circumcision services.

Family Health International (FHI), the Universities of Nairobi, Illinois and Manitoba (UNIM), EngenderHealth and Nyanza Reproductive Health Services (NRHS) and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) are partners in the Consortium.

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