

## Gugu

*It started out a normal day. My mother and I went to sell fruit at the market. Back then I went to school. I had books and a uniform - we lacked nothing. My mother worked hard and took care of us. Life was good.*

*On this day, my mother was hit by a car. Just before she died, she said 'Gugu, look after the children when I am gone'. This was a heavy burden. I tried hard to care for them, but it was so difficult by myself.*

*We went to live with my stepmother, but she was abusive. My siblings were beaten and not given food. I was not able to concentrate at school. I wondered what my stepmother was doing to them in my absence.*

*I decided to leave school and get married so someone could care for us. But I gave birth and realized I had added another burden to myself. I had to care for my husband, provide for my child and look after my siblings as I had promised my mother. This was a really difficult time. So many people were dependent on me – my husband did nothing. We were often starving.*

*I had avoided the market, but I eventually returned to the spot where I used to sell with my mother. Life was still hard, but there were also bright days when I could imagine better things ahead.*

*I came back from the SAGE storytelling workshop feeling positive. Meeting girls in similar situations reminded me that even though we are not in school, life should not end. I was motivated to join SAGE and for the first time I thought I could be successful. In Zimbabwe people pursue formal education right the way up to graduation and then... no jobs! People with skills can generate income today.*

*SAGE showed us examples of women doing different kinds of work. The ranger was my favourite. I realised that of course girls should be able to do jobs that boys do – we should not look down on ourselves. So, I taught myself to roof a house! Then I trained to be a security guard. This gave me so much pride because it showed I was courageous and reliable. I walked out of my marriage to concentrate on my work and family. People respected me, and my siblings were safe.*

*I met a new boyfriend who said he wanted to marry me, on the condition that I left my job. I was in the dark, thinking about the struggles during my first marriage. I remembered my mothers' final words, asking me to look after my siblings. How would I support them?*

*We seemed to be at a dead end, but then my boyfriend invited my siblings to live with us and offered to take care of them. I gave up being a guard because the pay-off was having everyone I loved under one roof. We married and lived together happily, but I still felt sad about my job. We had a conversation about me going back to work. I put my case across, I said that a woman cannot just sit! It is a wasted opportunity!*

*My husband decided I was right. He gave me money which I immediately invested. Now I am a businesswoman selling clothes and groceries. My customers like me because at SAGE we were*

*taught to live peacefully with others. I also learnt to read and write much better than I could before and do the kinds of calculations I need to make my business a success: it's all because of SAGE.*

*The thing that is different about SAGE is that in school, teachers move with the ones who were most capable. At SAGE they teach each individual until they are capable. They will not give up on you. Being employed while still learning really helps me move forward. This is my path now. Let's just say I won't let go of SAGE!*

*So, now – this is me – a businesswoman. I want people to see me as an empowered woman, and part of an empowered couple. And life continues, as it does, bringing me joy.*



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Gugu was engaged with the storytelling research strand of the SAGE (Supporting Adolescent Girls' Education) Project in Zimbabwe between 2019-2022. SAGE is a Girls' Education Challenge initiative funded by the FCDO. This is an edited compilation of stories Gugu shared with the research team over four years. The storytelling research strand was led by [Dr Alison Buckler](#) and [Professor Liz Chamberlain](#) (Open University, UK), and [Dr Faith Mkwanzani](#) (University of the Free State, South Africa). You can find out more about SAGE research [here](#), and the storytelling aspect [here](#).