

Through my eyes



The Story Behind Mtetezi: Daughter of Tomorrow.



AFRICAN WOMEN'S
RIGHTS ADVOCATES



Mtetezi the Film

Mtetezi was made possible through the generous support of the Firebird Foundation, which fully funded the production. Their belief in Frontline-led advocacy enabled AWRA to bring this story to life on a global stage.

In 2025, the African Women's Rights Advocates (AWRA) released its debut feature-length documentary, *Mtetezi: Daughters of Tomorrow*. This groundbreaking film shines a light on the realities of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), child marriage, and the systemic barriers to education while amplifying stories of courage, resilience, and transformation from women and girls at the frontlines.

More than a documentary, *Mtetezi* is a movement. It honors the voices of survivors, activists, and families who dare to challenge harmful practices and imagine a different tomorrow. At its heart, the film calls us all to act, reminding the world that every girl deserves a life of dignity, safety, and opportunity.

The journey of creating *Mtetezi* was long, demanding, and deeply transformative. It took the AWRA team, our partners **I_REP Foundation** and the production team to the most interior parts of West Pokot County, to Nairobi roundtable.

The story also traveled across borders to New York, where AWRA engaged in global advocacy during the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW); and finally to London, where Domtila Chesang presented her groundbreaking research Report "**exploring the persistence of FGM**" at King's College London. It was here that the *Mtetezi* trailer was first unveiled to an international audience, marking the beginning of the film's global journey.

In March 2025, we were honored to host our first premiere in partnership with the British High Commission at the High Commissioner's residence. This powerful evening brought together an audience of over 100 , including diplomats, survivors, government officials, activists, partners, and allies uniting diverse voices in solidarity to end FGM and all forms of violence against women and girls.



Genesis

In the dry plains of Masol Ward in West Pokot County, life moves to the rhythm of survival. Families here depend almost entirely on livestock. The land is harsh, opportunities are few, and education is often a distant dream.

It was here, during the filming of the documentary *Mtetezi*, that we met **Faith**. Faith was 11 years old, one of nine siblings, and a **twin** to her sister, **Pauline**. Their parents were pastoralists, like most families in the area. Two of their older sisters had already been cut and married off. Another sister, Tecla, followed after the twins.

But Faith was different.

She was the only child in the family attending school.

Or at least she was supposed to be.



“ I knew this was rarely just about a uniform. I had seen this pattern before. A girl leaves school “temporarily,” and within months, or a year or two, she is cut and married.

Domtila Chesang

East Africa Coordinator
AWRA Group



When I first met her in the village, I was told she had not been to school for two weeks. The reason sounded simple: Her school uniform was old and torn.

But after ten years working and advocating on the front lines of grassroots communities, especially my own, and conducting grassroots studies, I knew this was rarely just about a uniform. I had seen this pattern before. A girl leaves school “temporarily, and within months, or a year or two, she is cut and married.

I knew this was a time bomb.

So we decided to follow and document her story.



The next day, we returned to the village and visited Faith’s home.

we met her parents and all the family members. They welcomed us warmly. They were honest, open, and deeply vulnerable about their situation.

After a long conversation, the truth emerged. Faith had been chosen to go to school. But Pauline would stay home.

Their plan was painfully pragmatic. Pauline would grow up, be cut, and then be married off. The dowry from her marriage would help pay for Faith’s education.

This logic was not new to me.

Years earlier, a man from another part of Pokot once told me something that had stayed with me ever since. He said:

“My sister’s dowry paid for my school fees. That is how I became educated.”



A Difficult Choice

Faith's parents told me they wanted their children to go to school. But there were other challenges.

The nearest school in the village was poorly resourced. It lacked enough facilities and competent teachers. Many remote communities like Masol face not only economic hardship but also structural & Infrastructural neglect.

Education exists, but not always in a meaningful or accessible way. After a long discussion, we reached an agreement.

Faith would return to school, but not the local one.



We would enrol her in Ortum Girls Boarding Primary School, a school that also serves as a safe centre for girls in our program. There, she could receive quality education and grow in a safe environment.

But before leaving, we made one promise.

**We would come back for Pauline.
Because we all knew that if we did not return, within two years at most, she would likely be cut and married.**

Going Back for Pauline

The story of Faith's family is not isolated. It is the reality of many pastoralist communities whose survival depend entirely on livestock that sadly has been greatly affected by the impact of climate change. Most parents have almost no formal education, and lack skills that could provide an alternative income. under intense economic pressure. families are pushed into impossible choices. For them, daughters sometimes become the only available resource.



Exactly one year later, resources were successfully mobilized through the support of legal professionals who believed in the cause, with fundraising efforts led by partners, The Vavengers. This support enabled a return to the village to document a follow-up chapter of the MTETEZI film.

During this visit, notable shifts in both dialogue and dynamics were observed. The family proposed an alternative arrangement, suggesting that Tecla, the younger sibling, be enrolled in school instead of Pauline. Their reasoning was that Pauline, being older, might face challenges integrating into the formal education system, while Tecla had some prior exposure to schooling and could adapt more easily.



I listened carefully and respectfully. Then I told them gently: "We came for Pauline. But we will gladly take Tecla too"

“LET US GO AND FIND HER.”



On this trip, something else had changed, too. The father now spoke for the family. During our first visit, the mother had led the conversation. This time, the father took the lead. His support made everything easier. But there was one problem.

Pauline was not home.

She had been sent to help her older sister take care of her children.



The father had tried to call the Son-in-law the night before to ask that Pauline return home. But the man had stopped answering his calls and eventually switched off his phone.

So the father turned to us and said:

“Let us go and find her.”



We drove about 20 kilometres until the road ended.

Then we walked.

Another five kilometres on foot, with the father leading the way.



When we arrived, we found about five men gathered outside the home. We suspected they had been mobilised to prevent Pauline from leaving, or perhaps to confront us. But the father stepped forward.

He did not bargain.

He confronted his son-in-law directly, demanding to know why he had ignored his calls and refused to send Pauline back home.

While they spoke, my eyes drifted to the kitchen area(which was outside in the open)
There was Pauline.
She was sitting over a fire, cooking ugali for the entire family.
She did not yet know why we had come.





Seeing her took me back to the testimonies of the women in the Mtetezi film.

We explained to Pauline and her sister seated next to her why we were there. Neither of them had been informed about the plan.

The sister who did not look anything older than twenty years old, yet she already had three children sat there looking weak, frail, and exhausted.

Evidently, This was the life Pauline was being prepared for.

And I could not accept it.

We asked Pauline to get ready to leave.

The same story, The same cycle.

“Girls become wives before they have had the chance to become themselves.”



We began the long walk back to the car. The clouds were already gathering—it was clear the rains had arrived.

Pauline walked with us, and i could tell She felt relieved and happy. I asked her if she would love to go to school as we were walking rain poring on us, She said yes, she wanted to go to school.

The rain was heavy. We were soaked completely, but none of us complained. In that moment, it felt symbolic, like the sky itself was marking the beginning of something new.

**A cleansing.
A new dawn.**





Faith, Pauline Tecla,

Finally, the twins were reunited—and not just the twins, but their younger sister, Tecla, would also join them in school.

It felt like a full circle. It took me back to the promise we made to return for Pauline. Now, both Pauline and Tecla would join Faith in school.

All three were enrolled at Ortum Girls Boarding School.

Today, they are living in a safe environment, studying, laughing, and slowly discovering that their lives can hold more possibilities than the ones they were born into.

Their future is no longer defined by the cycle of cutting and early marriage. Instead, they are beginning to write a new story. And this time, the ending will be different.





watch mtetezi
Daughters of tomorrow
now for free