



SOS CHILDREN'S  
VILLAGES

## Meet Mama Gitahi: The First SOS Children's Villages in Kenya Mother Whose Love Transformed Countless Lives



Magdalena Wairimu Njoroge, affectionately known as Mama Gitahi, holds a special place in the history of SOS Children's Villages in Kenya.

Her journey as the first SOS Mother is a testament to her unwavering dedication and profound impact on the lives of countless children.

"I was given the name Mama Gitahi after my first child at SOS Children's Villages in Kenya," Mama Gitahi shared, reflecting on her early days at the organization.

She vividly remembers when she joined SOS Children's Villages on the 4th of July, 1973. With a background of a trained teacher in primary and nursery schools, Mama Gitahi brought a wealth of knowledge and experience to her role as an SOS Mother.

"I did not go through training like other mothers because I had been working with children," Mama Gitahi explained.

Her passion for guiding and nurturing children led her to apply to SOS Children's Villages. Before her official training, Mama Gitahi's dedication had already caught the attention of Tony Herrnegger, the first Village Director.

He kept her updated on her application progress and arranged a meeting in Tigoni, where they conversed in Kiswahili about her journey ahead.

In January 1973, Mama Gitahi welcomed her first two girls from Masai land. For five months, they resided in Tigoni. On July 4th, 1973, Mama Gitahi and her children officially moved to SOS Children's Village in Nairobi. She became the nurturing mother of House 4, embracing her role as a mother.

Among the many children she cared for, one holds a special place in her heart. "Gitahi from Nyeri was brought to me as a small baby and I raised him from infancy," she shared. It was through this cherished bond that Mama Gitahi earned her beloved title, Mama Gitahi, a name that continues to resonate with love and care.

Throughout her career as an SOS Children's Villages Mother, Mama Gitahi stayed true to her guiding principle of understanding each child individually. "When you raise children in a house, you have to understand the children individually, and once you do that, everything will be fine," she emphasized. This personalized approach allowed her to provide the love, care and guidance that each child needs.

Mama Gitahi's wisdom extended beyond her immediate role as a mother. She recognized the importance of teenage boys and girls having separate spaces to foster growth and development. "I suggested that when children reach a certain age, especially the teenage years, the boys should be separated from the

girls," she explained. This arrangement allowed the children to interact with peers of the same gender while still benefiting from the guidance and support of the mothers.

After decades of devoted service, Mama Gitahi retired on December 5th, 1994. However, her connection with the children she raised remains unbreakable. "The connection between mother and children cannot be broken," she affirmed. Mama Gitahi continues to keep in touch with each one of them, cherishing the profound bonds they formed.

When asked about her encounters with SOS Children's Villages founder, Hermann Gmeiner, Mama Gitahi's face lights up. "I have met Mr Gmeiner several times when he came to visit us at the village," she shared warmly. "He was a kind and happy man who loved everybody and was always willing to help a child in need." Her admiration for Mr Gmeiner was so great that she knitted two sweaters for him, which he cherished dearly.

To this day Mama Gitahi remains connected to SOS Children's Villages in Nairobi, where she continues to leave an indelible mark on the lives of children and families. During her visits, she takes the opportunity to connect with other SOS Mothers, exchanging conversations and experiences and offering words of encouragement.

Reflecting on her remarkable journey, Mama Gitahi shared, "Being an SOS Mother was not just a job; it was a calling. I had the privilege of shaping the lives of children, instilling values and witnessing their growth into remarkable individuals. It fills my heart with immense joy and pride."

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