

Zara & Mika

Lead Positive Change in their Community

Rehmah Kasule



In Partnership with



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in their Community

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Published and printed in the Republic of Uganda.

Dedication

I dedicate this book to all children around the world. I hope that it inspires you to take charge of your life and lead change in your community. The world needs to hear your stories of courage, hope, and aspiration. Speak up, your voice matters!

Acknowledgement – The Power of Us

Writing and publishing a book takes a team. While I developed a good idea, I needed a team of people to bring it into existence. I am grateful to the team that has provided invaluable support as I worked on this book. Special thanks to the editorial team and the writers Pheona Nakishero and Zura Nakiwoga Mukasa. The graphic designer and illustrator, thank you for adding colour to the book and bringing my ideas alive. I also acknowledge the creative children Asra, Amaal, and Rahma, who supported our rising star singer and poet Kauthar Lukwanzi.

I am eternally grateful to the children around the country that shared their stories with us. The stories are powerful lessons that will empower other children around the world. I am also grateful to the parents that encouraged their children to respond to the call for stories. Thank you all for your commitment.

Illustrated by: Davis Bamwine

Designed by: Patricia Businge

About Mastercard Foundation

The Mastercard Foundation works with visionary organizations to enable young people in Africa, and indigenous communities in Canada, to access dignified and fulfilling work. It is one of the largest private foundations in the world, with a mission to advance learning and promote financial inclusion to create an inclusive and equitable world. Mastercard created the Foundation in 2006 as an independent organization with its Board of Directors and management.

The Foundation was implementing the COVID-19 Public Awareness Campaign 2021, where the effects of the pandemic on individuals, families, and communities became ever-more pronounced across the African continent. The campaign, implemented in Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda, Senegal, Rwanda, and Ethiopia, provides a platform for young people to share stories of resilience, innovation, and volunteerism toward the broader COVID-19 response. The activities are anchored upon the slogan Protect yourself, Protect your family, Protect the community, emphasizing the need for personal responsibility under the hashtag #ItsUpToUs.

For more information on the Foundation, please visit <https://mastercardfdn.org/>; and to learn more about the resilience of young people across the continent during the pandemic, please visit: www.covidhqafrika.com



Message from the Author

Dear children,

My father died when I was young, and life became very tough, but my family never gave up! My mother instilled in us the value of education. Like some of you, I was born a village girl, but I did not become a village woman because I got an education.

In my rural primary school, we had no books. When I went to secondary school, my friends introduced me to the world of books, and my life changed forever! Through reading, I gained knowledge, built self-confidence, started dreaming big, and hope grew inside me. I worked hard and graduated with a first-class degree from a university.

I was only 24 years old when I started my marketing business and later founded a non-government organization, CEDA International. I teach children like you to discover who you are, be proud of where you come from, and dream of where you want to go. I also support children to get a quality education, and become future leaders and entrepreneurs.

Every day, I remind my two daughters that when you dream, you achieve, and no dream is too big. My childhood dream was to study at Harvard University in the United States of America. A few years ago, I fulfilled that dream when I was invited to do a two-year Fellowship, the Advanced Leadership Initiative, focusing on education and the future of work in Africa.

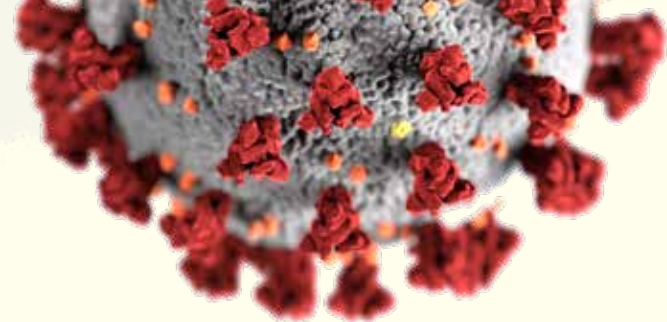
Today, I am creating new African narratives by empowering children to tell their stories through books just like this one. I am committed to supporting children in learning to read. I believe that readers are leaders!

My advice to children everywhere is that your background does not determine your destiny; you can change your future when you believe in yourself, and develop a positive attitude.

Rkasule

Rehmah Kasule





The COVID-19 Crisis

The COVID-19 or the 'coronavirus' pandemic is a deadly flu-like virus that began in December 2019 in China and spread to the rest of the world. Families and communities were facing a great deal of uncertainty amidst the pandemic. While children were not considered at the highest risk of contracting COVID-19, they have been greatly affected by the pandemic in many African countries.

In Uganda and other African countries, children below 14 make up sixty-five percent of the population. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many schools were closed for one to two years. Save the Children estimates that around 5 million children never returned to school. The World Bank also reports that the pandemic has exacerbated the learning poverty and increased the education gap with lingering mental stresses among children. Many children in school are not learning because they lack basic reading skills. The situation is worse for children in fragile contexts like refugee settlements and low-income communities. Children have no reading and learning materials and no tools and platforms to share their stories for emotional support and development. The little content available doesn't speak to children, reflect their realities, or represent their voices. This is about to change!

The COVID-19 Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)



Wear a face mask



Wash hands with soap or sanitize



2m

Keep social distance

About the Book

Kids Voice is a storybook with a collection of stories from children sharing their perspectives and life experiences during the pandemic. This book also provides essential COVID-19 prevention information that empowers children to cope with the impact of the pandemic.

Children will learn from other children's stories of courage, resilience, hope, curiosity, action, and entrepreneurial spirit. The book promotes learning through play and edutainment (education through entertainment). It empowers children to raise their voices, and equips them with critical tools and knowledge to keep positive, read, and learn.

Kids Voice includes learning activities in which children can exercise gratitude, reflection, critical thinking, and problem-solving, to build resilience to cope and thrive. Kids Voice aims to empower children 9-13 years to gain self-awareness, social awareness, and participate in social change by taking charge of their lives, and leading change in their communities.

This book was developed in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation to advance learning, as part of their COVID-19 Public Awareness Campaign 2021.

Uganda's National Curriculum Development Center approved the Kids Voice to empower and engage children in primary schools.

The book is available in pdf, audio, flipbook, and animated version, in more than seven languages, at www.rehmahkasule.com and www.kids-voice.org



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This book is gifted to

“

Your background will not determine your destiny. You can change your future when you believe in yourself and develop a positive attitude.

”

Rehmah Kasule



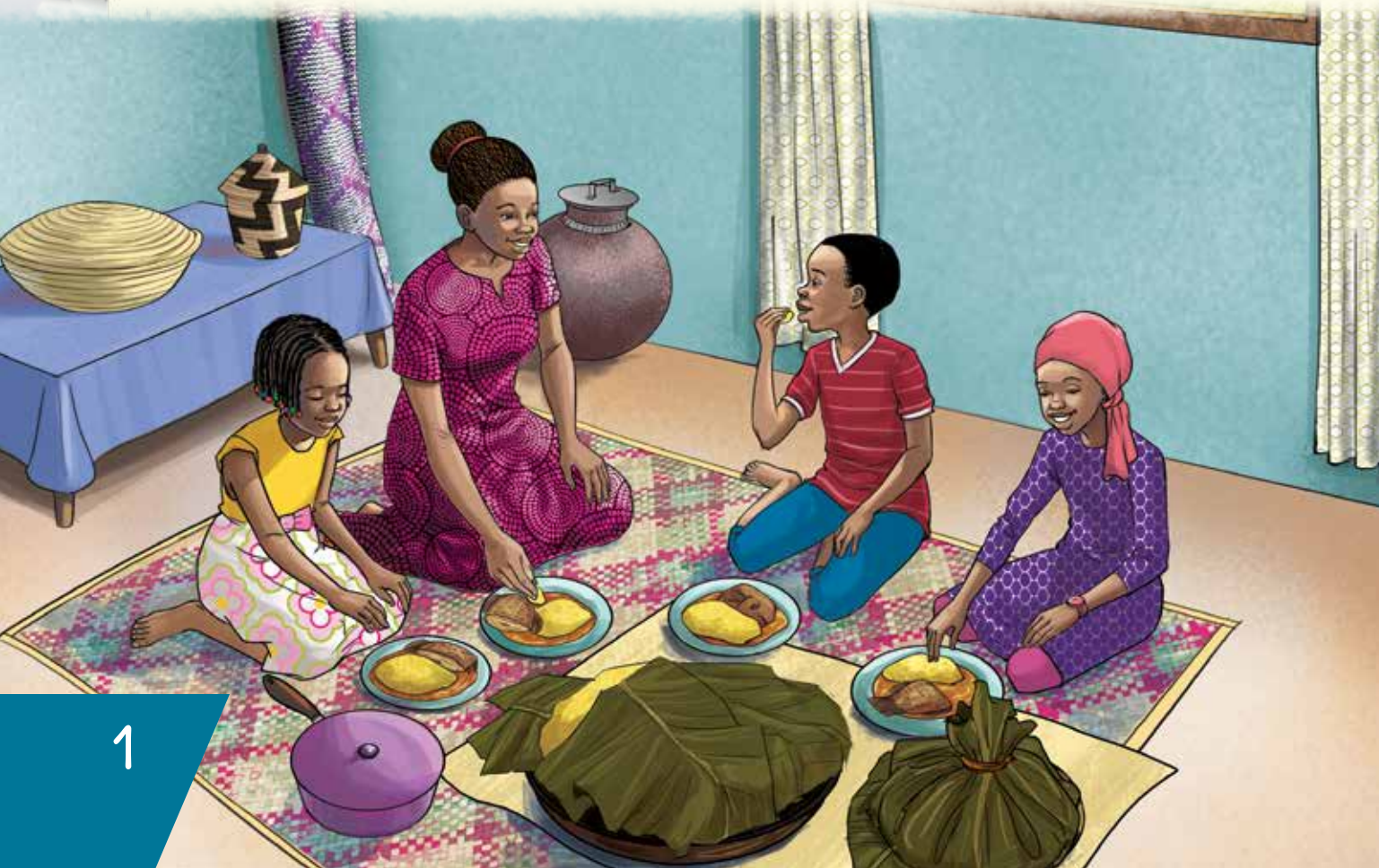
Every Storm Passes

The bright sunshine brings a new ray of hope

It was a beautiful sunny Friday afternoon. The delicious smell of matooke and smoked tilapia in groundnut sauce, filled the Kego family kitchen as they sat down for lunch. The aroma floated out of the kitchen window and disappeared into the neighbourhood. The Kegos lived in Nkumba, a suburb of Entebbe in Uganda.

“This is my favourite meal ever! I could have it every day,” an eleven-year-old Mika said as he enjoyed the creamy sauce.

“It is all you ever make since you learned how to cook, Mika. I can cook a tastier *Luwombo* than you,” said Zara. Zara is only one year younger than Mika, and they were always competing.



Mrs Kego smiled as she watched them. “See, mummy agrees with me. She loves my sauce,” Mika beamed proudly.

“I do, and it’s good for my health,” said Mrs Kego.

They were interrupted by a crash of thunder, and rain began tapping on the metallic roof. Large drops of water dripped down onto the back veranda, and created puddles on the ground.

“Your father will have to fix the leaking roof when he gets home,” said Mrs Kego. She became short of breath as she spoke.

“Mummy, are you okay? Are you sick again?” asked Mika worriedly.

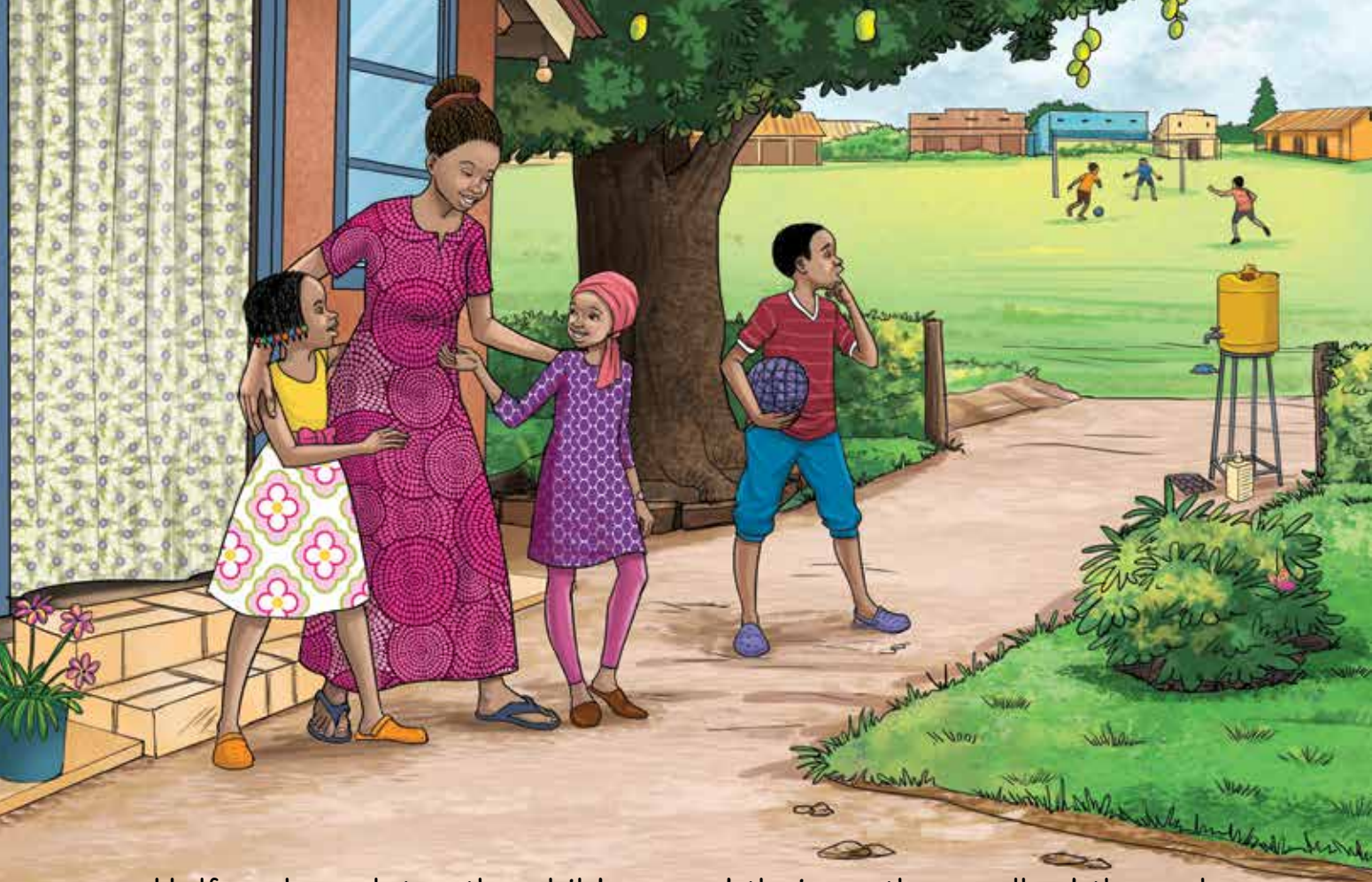
“I am not sick anymore,” said Mrs Kego, “but it may take a while before I feel like my usual self again.”

Mrs Kego had contracted COVID-19 a few weeks earlier. Although she recovered from the illness, she was still weak. The doctor had recommended taking walks and sitting in the sun every day, to help her get back on her feet.

Outside, the rain slowed to a drizzle almost as quickly as it started, and the sun began to glisten through the golden raindrops.

“Grandmother used to say this happens when a lion is giving birth!” seven-year-old Susan chimed, as she peered out the kitchen window. “Can we go outside for your walk, Mummy?” asked Susan.

“After washing the dishes, we can all go out and get some sun,” said Mrs Kego.



Half an hour later, the children and their mother walked through the back door of their red-bricked house, to the large mango tree in the compound. The children were happy to be out in the sun. Susan playfully pulled Zara's headscarf, and they started to run around.

Mika watched some children playing in a field in the distance.

"I really miss playing football with my friends," he sighed.

Since the COVID-19 forty-two-day lockdown, set by His Excellency the President of the Republic of Uganda, the children had not been out of the home.

"I know but staying at home helps us stop the spread of COVID-19," said Mrs Kego.

"Can we play games if we keep a distance and wear masks?" asked Susan.

"Shaa! I've never seen anyone play football with a mask," Mika objected.

"Maybe we can play here in the backyard," said Mrs Kego.

"Obviously, my team will win," Mika boasted playfully.

"We'll see about that," Zara snapped back.

Although Zara didn't like football, she never backed down from a challenge. So she teamed up with Mrs Kego to play against Susan and Mika.

The game was competitive. Zara scored the first goal, darting down the compound and dribbling the ball as fast as possible. Just minutes later, she scored a second goal.

"Mummy, I have homework to do," Susan said before the match could start again.

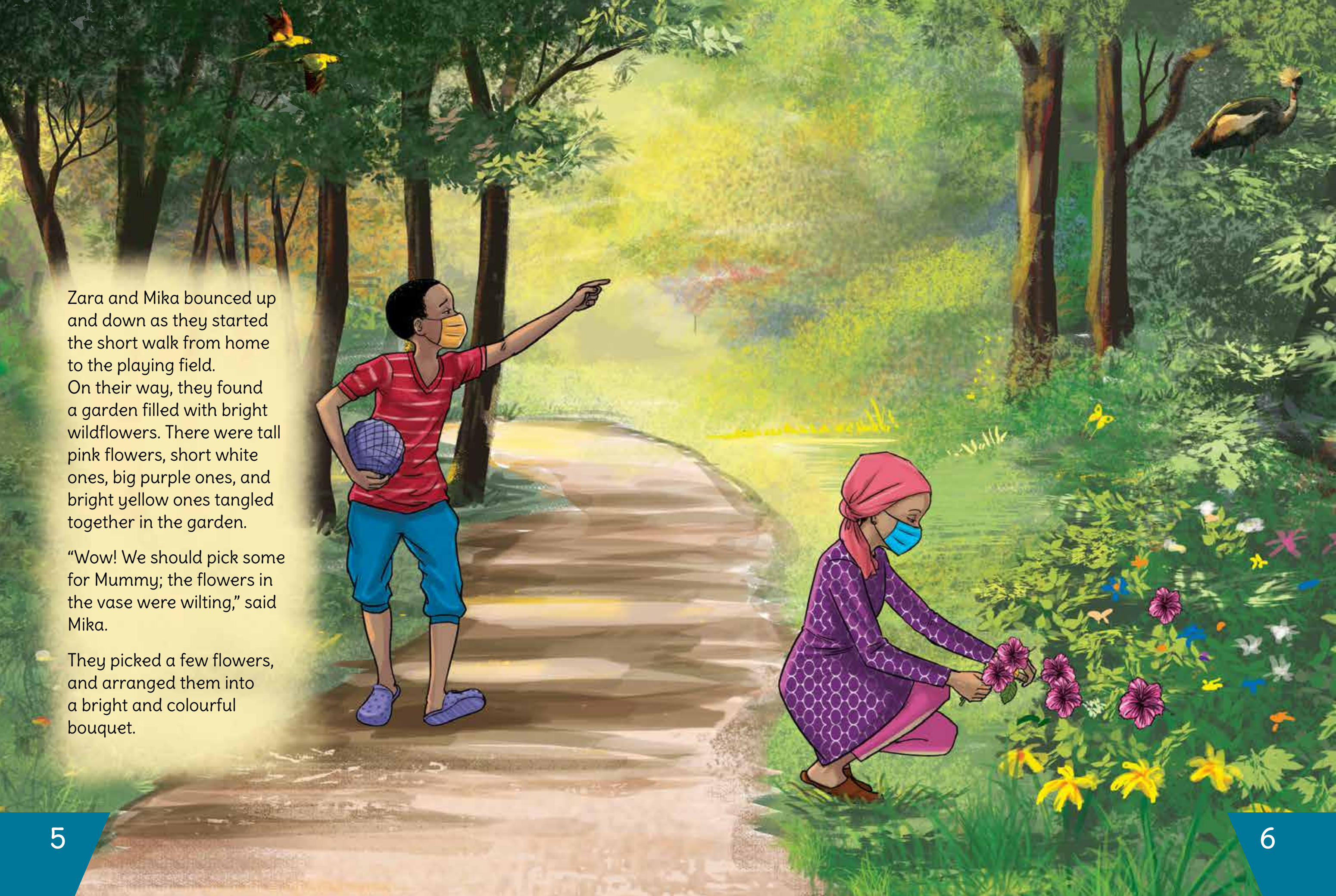
"It's because your team is losing," remarked Zara jokingly.

Mrs Kego laughed. "No, let's go inside. That's enough activity for me, too."

"Mummy, can Zara and I take a walk down the road?" asked Mika. "We'll only say hello to our friends from a distance."

"We shall wear our masks the whole time," said Zara and pulled one out from the pocket of her patterned purple dress.

"Okay but be careful, and remember to wash your hands when you come back. Here, please buy some fruits on your way home," said Mrs Kego, giving a five-thousand-shilling note to Mika.



Zara and Mika bounced up and down as they started the short walk from home to the playing field. On their way, they found a garden filled with bright wildflowers. There were tall pink flowers, short white ones, big purple ones, and bright yellow ones tangled together in the garden.

“Wow! We should pick some for Mummy; the flowers in the vase were wilting,” said Mika.

They picked a few flowers, and arranged them into a bright and colourful bouquet.



Gratitude and Journaling

Reconnecting with friends in the community

A few minutes later, Mika and Zara carefully crossed the little wooden bridge that led into the neighbourhood playground. There, they met Mika's school friends Alice, Abdu, and Justin. They touched elbows in greeting, just like their parents and teachers taught them to do since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Do you want to join us, Mika?" asked Justin.

"Yes!" responded Mika eagerly.



He hadn't seen his friends for quite a long time. When his mother fell ill with the coronavirus, they were not allowed to go out. Everyone was quarantined to keep safe. He was happy to be out again, finally playing with his friends.

"Who is this cute girl?" asked Alice.

Alice is ten years old, just like Zara, and eager to make new friends. While Zara wore a headscarf, Alice's hair was styled in Bantu knots.

"This is my cousin Zara," said Mika. "When my Uncle and Aunt died, my parents brought Zara home to live with us."

"Yes, I remember when you had to go to the funeral. I'm so sorry, Zara," said Alice.

"*Asalam Aleikum, Zara,*" Abdu greeted her.

"*Walaikum Salaam,*" Zara replied.



After introductions had been made, Mika asked his friends what they had been doing while school had been closed.

“Nothing much. I sometimes feel sad,” said Alice. Her parents couldn’t afford to pay for online classes, so she missed a lot of school work.

“You aren’t alone,” said Zara. “I saw on TV that millions of children in Africa have been out of school since the pandemic started. Some children, especially those in refugee camps and rural areas, don’t have reading materials.”

“I’m glad that school will be open next month,” said Mika.

“Yes,” Alice agreed. “Now, I don’t have to worry about repeating P.6 next year, but I am behind on schoolwork,” lamented Alice.

“I have an idea!” Mika exclaimed. “We get notes from our online classes. I will ask Mummy to print them so we can share them with you and Abdu, to catch up on schoolwork,” said Mika.

“Wow! That will be great,” said Alice. “Thank you, we are so grateful, Mika.”

Zara scrunched up her face as she thought, then shouted, “Let’s play the gratitude game!”

“What type of game is that?” asked Abdu.

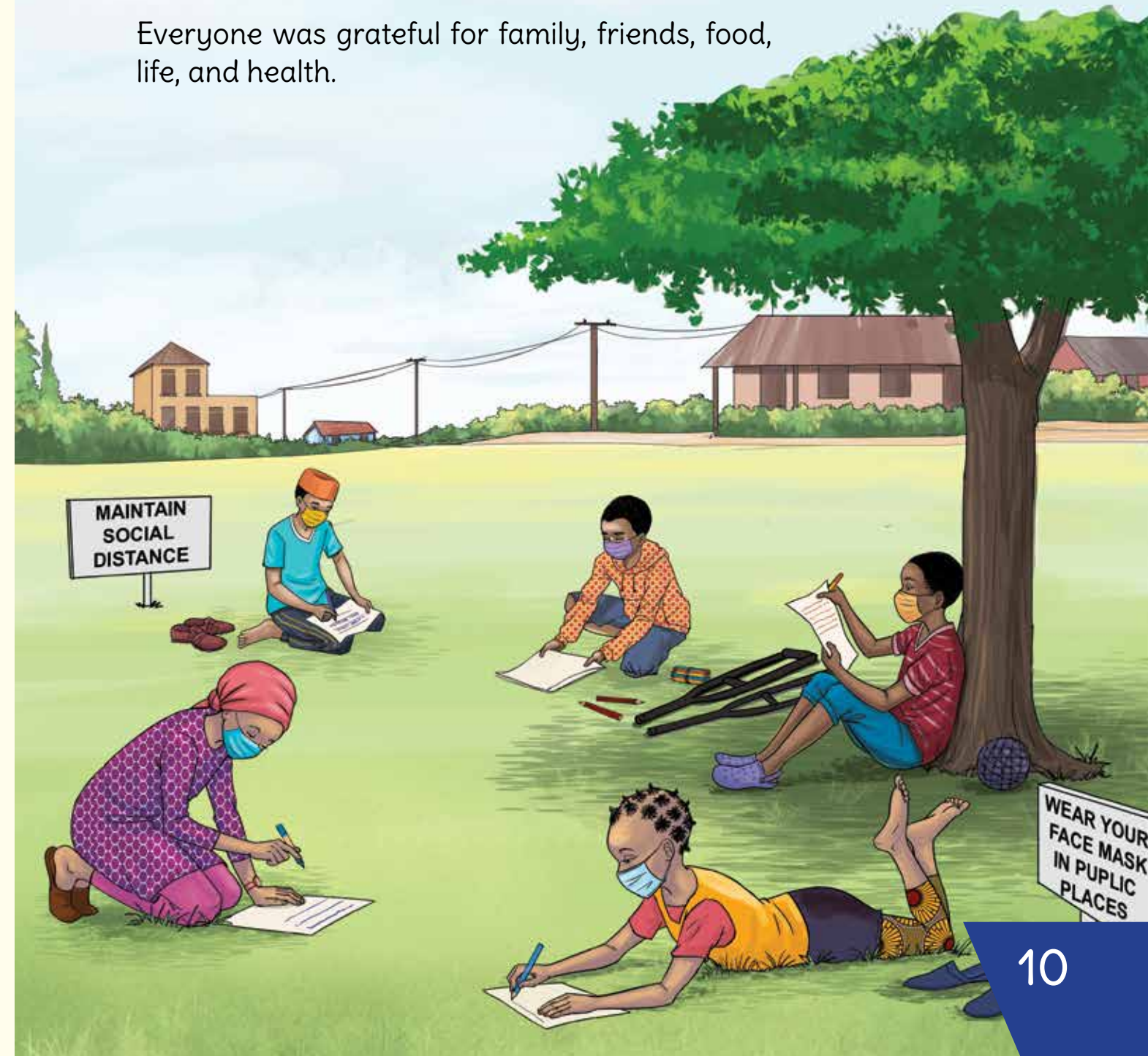
“Every day, you write down ten things you are grateful for in a book,” Zara explained and added, “My Aunt Madina taught me the game when my parents were sick.”

“But we have no books here,” Abdu said.

“Let me run and get some paper, pen, and markers from home. My house is just over there,” Justin volunteered.

He rushed home and returned with paper, pens, and markers. The children sat in a circle on the grass and created their gratitude lists. Then, they read their lists out loud.

Everyone was grateful for family, friends, food, life, and health.





Knowing who You Are

The Who am I self-affirmation

Mika shot up like a ray of light. "This reminds me of an important question!"

"What is it now, Mika? Not one of your crazy stories again!" joked Zara.

"No, no, no. Let's think about it for a minute. *Who am I?*" Mika invited his friends to reflect with him. "We spent time reflecting on this question during the school prefects mentoring programme: *Who am I?*" explained Mika.

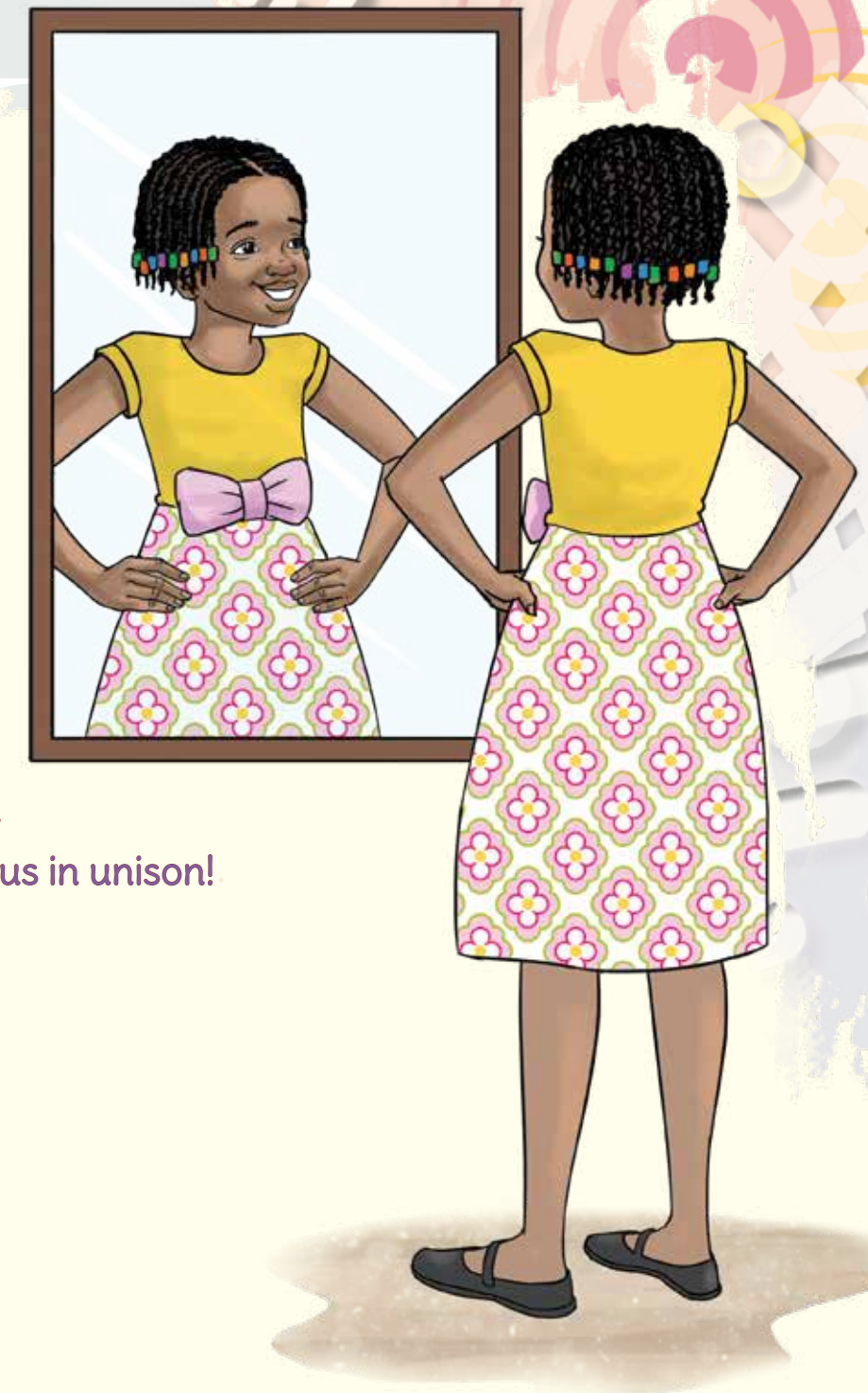
"That's obvious! I am a boy," said Abdu.

Zara smiled. "You are much more than just a boy. Your dreams, passions, and where you come from, are also part of who you are," Zara said.

"Yes, our mentor said that if you know who you are, you will get what you want," added Mika.

Zara asked Mika to share the exercise they do every morning when they wake up. Everyone looked to Mika for as he demonstrated the "**WHO AM I?** self-affirmations".

"You must look in the mirror and ask yourself this question. Use as much energy as when you are cheering at a football game," said Mika. "So, when I ask who am I, you all reply." Mika guided them.



"Who am I?" asks Mika.

"I am a star," they chorus in unison!

"Who am I?"

"I am a champion!"

"Who am I?"

"I am a leader!"

"Who am I?"

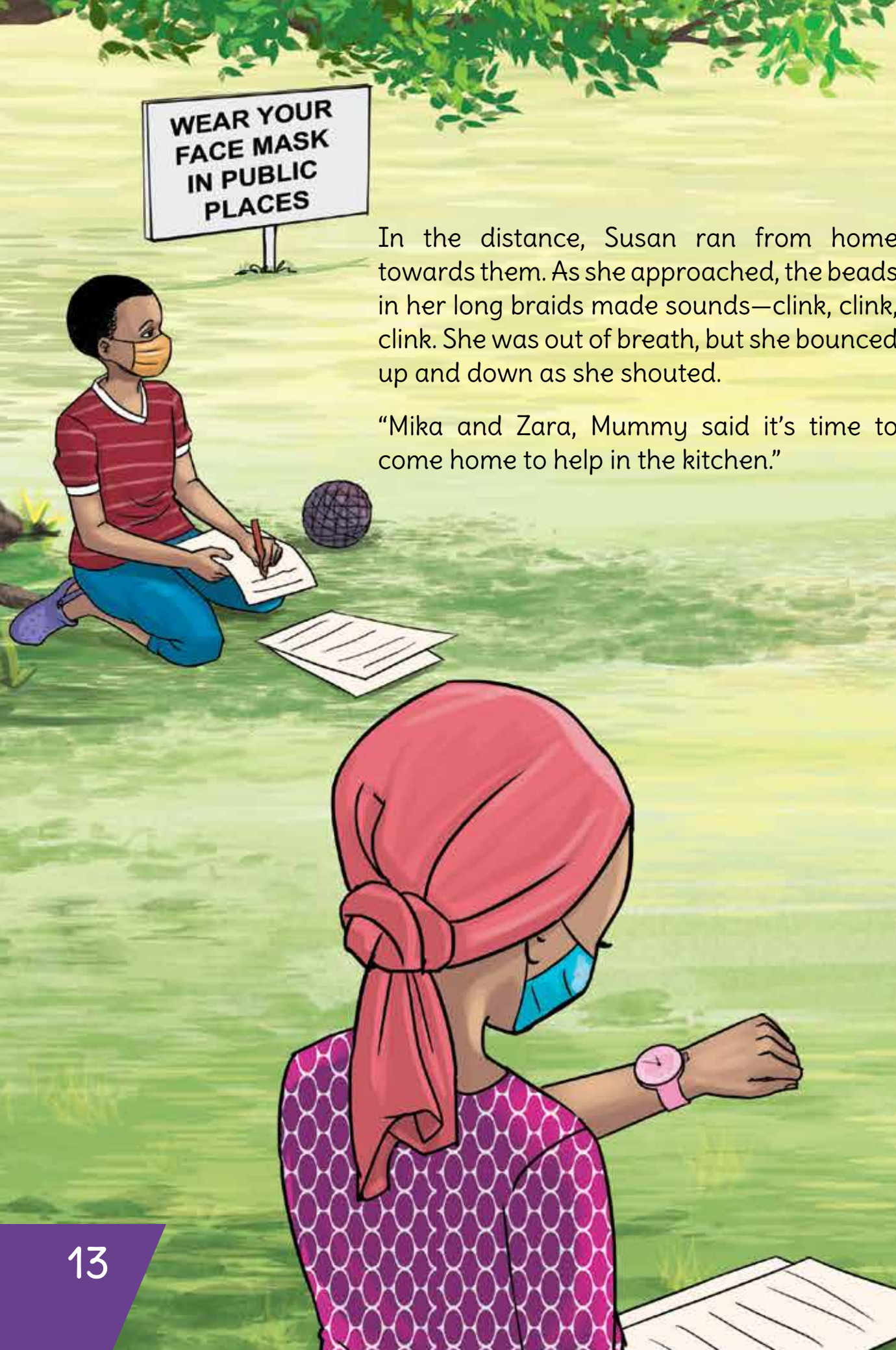
"I am a winner!"

"Who am I?"

"I am a brilliant African child!"

They giggled excitedly and raised their arms in a fist.

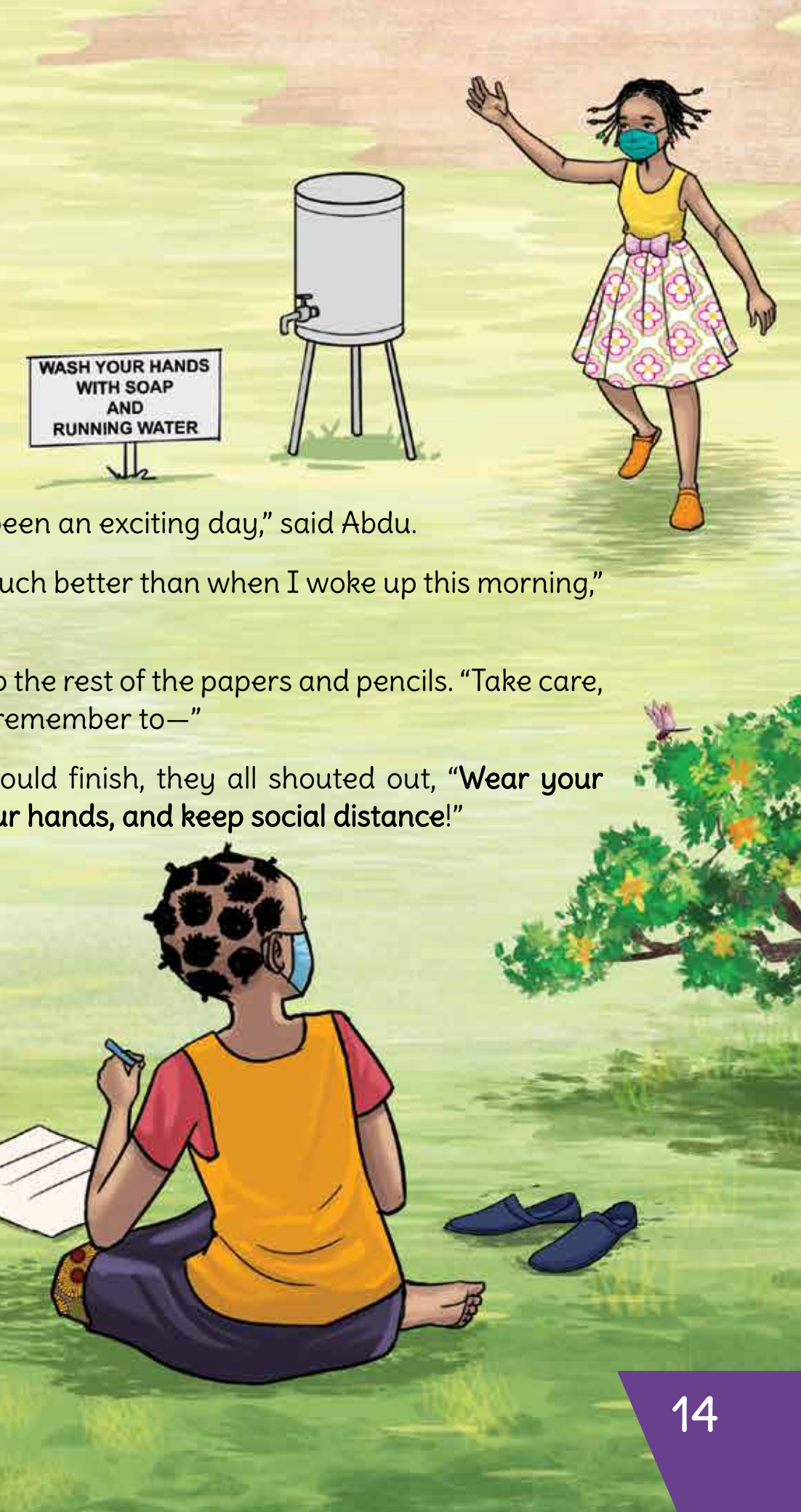
"Once you do self-affirmations, nothing can put you down," Mika told them.



WEAR YOUR
FACE MASK
IN PUBLIC
PLACES

In the distance, Susan ran from home towards them. As she approached, the beads in her long braids made sounds—clink, clink, clink. She was out of breath, but she bounced up and down as she shouted.

“Mika and Zara, Mummy said it’s time to come home to help in the kitchen.”



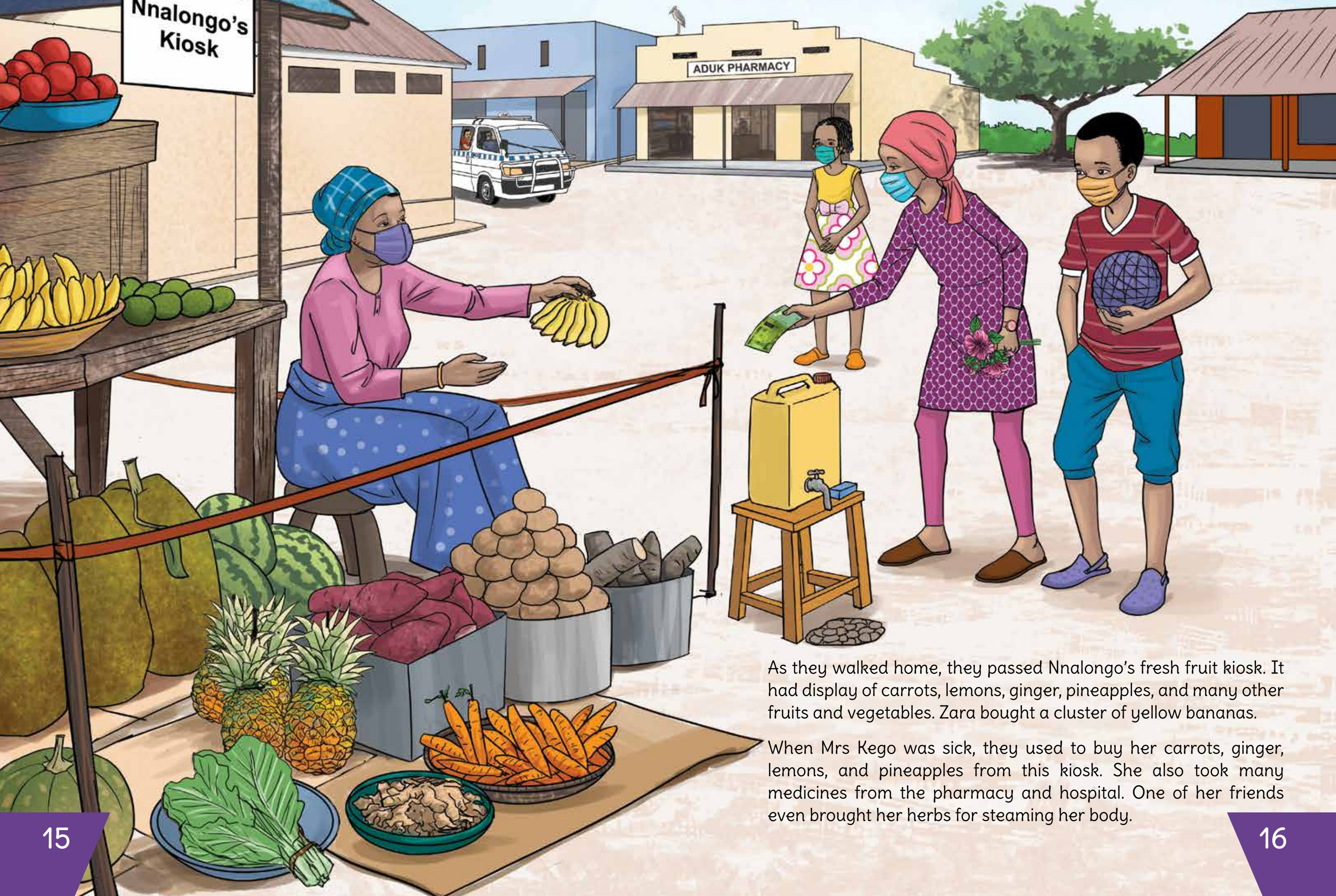
WASH YOUR HANDS
WITH SOAP
AND
RUNNING WATER

“Bye. This has been an exciting day,” said Abdu.

“Yes, I feel so much better than when I woke up this morning,” Alice agreed.

Justin picked up the rest of the papers and pencils. “Take care, keep safe, and remember to—”

Before Justin could finish, they all shouted out, “**Wear your mask, wash your hands, and keep social distance!**”



As they walked home, they passed Nnalongo's fresh fruit kiosk. It had display of carrots, lemons, ginger, pineapples, and many other fruits and vegetables. Zara bought a cluster of yellow bananas.

When Mrs Kego was sick, they used to buy her carrots, ginger, lemons, and pineapples from this kiosk. She also took many medicines from the pharmacy and hospital. One of her friends even brought her herbs for steaming her body.

It was a scary time for the family. Luckily, no one else caught the virus. They were always careful to wash their hands, wear masks, and keep social distancing. They also made a roster for the house chores so that Mrs Kego wouldn't worry about housework.

The children watched from the side of the road as a boda boda, carrying a passenger, zipped past, leaving behind a film of dust. Everyone was rushing to beat the 7pm curfew. They started walking faster.

When they got home, the sun was setting in the sky, and Mrs Kego was waiting outside for them. Before entering the house, she told them to wash their hands at the outdoor tap.

"How long are we supposed to wash our hands?" asked Susan.

"For at least two minutes," said Zara.

"We can sing the alphabets A, B, C... to Z, five times to get the time right," Mika added.

After washing their hands and the bananas, Zara gave Mrs Kego the bouquet of wild flowers. Mrs Kego was so pleased. She picked out a pink flower from the bouquet, pinned it in her hair, and showed them how it matched her pink dress.

Susan walked into the kitchen to put the bananas in the fruit basket.

"Auntie, something smells so good," Zara smiled.

"I know. I have made something special for you. Now, go and freshen up for dinner. Take a shower and change your clothes," said Mrs Kego.





Speak Up, Your Voice Matters

Learning new tools to overcome fear

At dinner, the children were surprised to find new food on the dining table. It looked like chapatti, but was much wider and not as thick.

“Daddy, what type of food is this?” Susan asked Mr Kego.

“This is *Injera* from Ethiopia,” Mr Kego replied.

“It is delicious,” said Mika.



“Can you guess what else Ethiopia is famous for?” asked Mr Kego.

“I know! Coffee!” Zara exclaimed. “Like Uganda, coffee is one of Ethiopia’s biggest agricultural exports.”

“Very good, Zara,” Mr Kego said with a proud smile.

“Taata Mika, tell us about your first day back at work after the lockdown,” said Mrs Kego. Her husband quietly explained that many businesses were still closed, and few people were in the city.

“The pandemic has slowed down the world, but it has strengthened our family,” he said. “We have an opportunity to eat meals together,” said Mr Kego.

Before going to bed, Mr Kego reminded the children that the COVID-19 virus is still widely spread. He insisted that they must always keep their masks on at school.

“But Daddy, what if the teachers can’t hear us through our masks when speaking?” asked Mika.

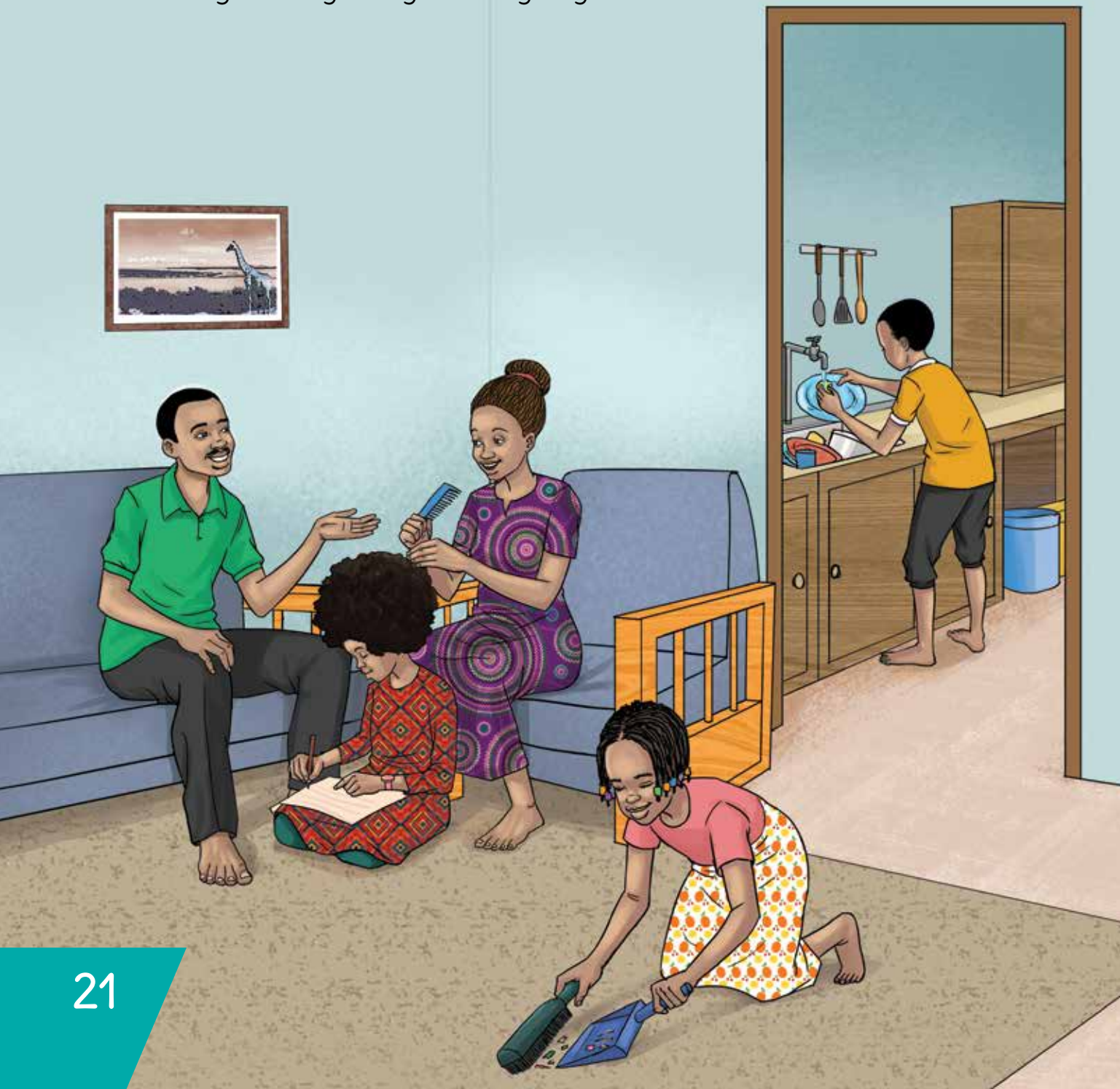
“Just raise your voice when you speak. Show them that, even with a mask on, you can speak up and be heard,” explained Mr Kego.

“We should practice. I can even sing aloud with a mask, listen” said Zara and then began singing a song.

"I love that song. It reminds us to take charge of our fears, no matter what," said Mika.

"You are right, Mika. It also encourages us to keep dreaming." Zara added and started to sing loudly.

They all sang along before going to bed.



"I'm a rising star,

I'm extraordinary,

I dream, yes I dream,

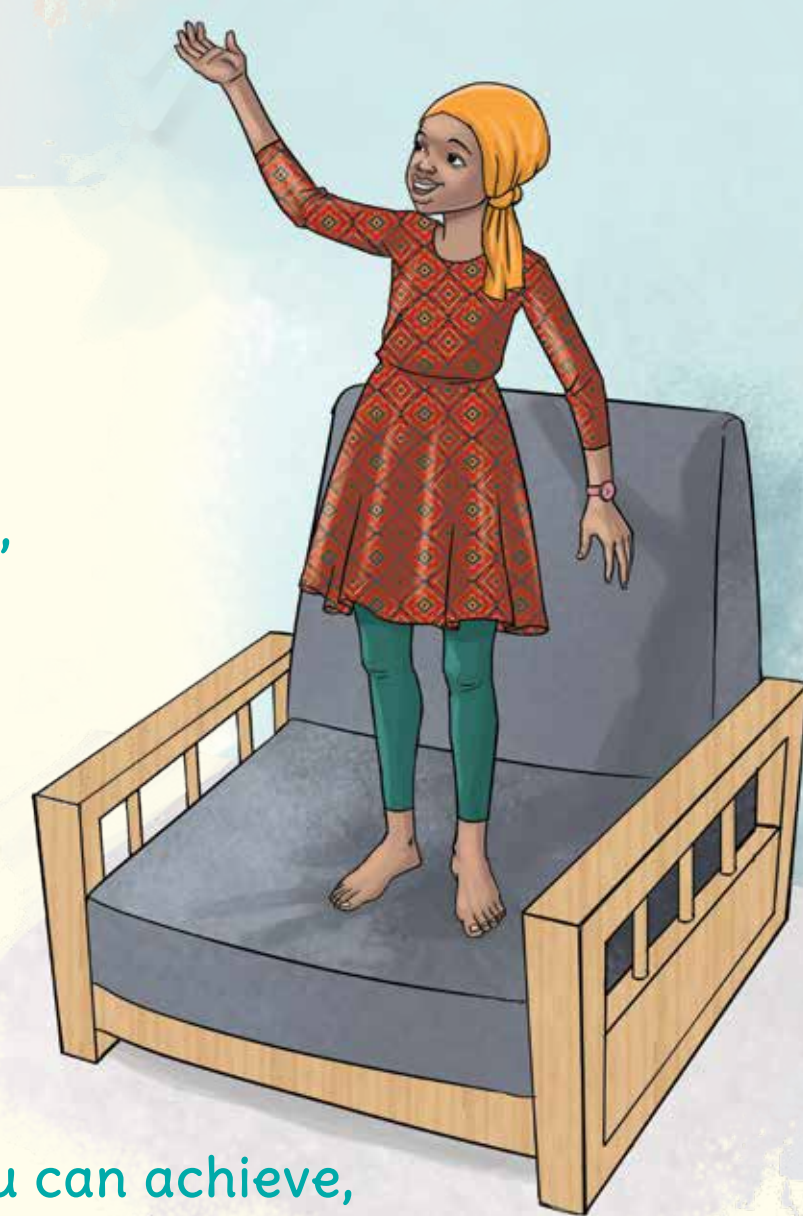
I dream because

I'm a rising star.

I have the courage,
to embrace my fears,
I reach for the stars
to realise the power
of my dreams.

When you dream, you can achieve,
discovering what it means to live free and rise up
more than you have dreamt inside.

Deep within each heart,
there lies a magic spark that lights up your
imagination, changing to greatness,
to realise the power of your dreams."

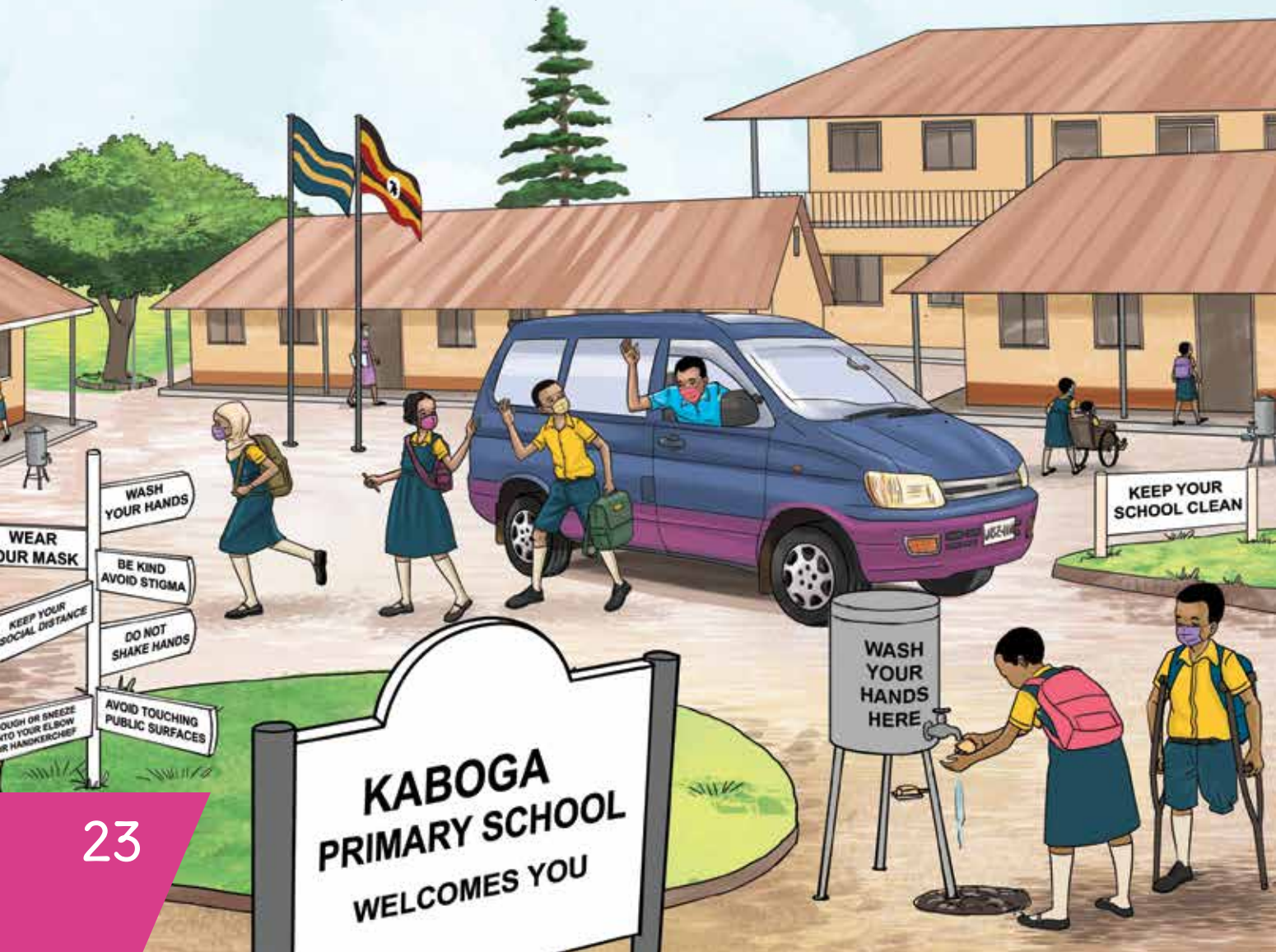




Compassion Reduces Fear and Stigma

Sharing and learning from Children's stories of resilience

Finally, after six months of being out of school, Mr Kego dropped the children off at Kaboga Primary School early in the morning. There were placards at the school entrance and assembly grounds, reminding people to wear masks, wash hands, and keep social distance, to prevent the spread of COVID-19.



The first day of school was breezy and cold, but the children were excited to be back after the lockdown. They shyly greeted each other with distant high-fives and elbow bumps. They stood metres apart from each other as they began the morning exercise.

After singing the school anthem and saying a prayer, one of the teachers – Ms Akwi – welcomed them back to school and took them through some basic information about COVID-19 and how to keep safe. She asked them to pair up with a buddy, pick a chart, and tick the right boxes.

Susan's friend, Mariam, was absent, so she had no one to pair up with.

"Teacher, why hasn't Mariam come to school today?" Susan asked.

The teacher explained that Mariam would not be returning to school, as Mariam's family had been severely affected by COVID-19. When Mariam's sister returned from boarding school, they didn't realise that she had the virus, so she spread it to most of the family members, including her father, mother, and aunt. While the rest of the family recovered, Mariam's mother died.

"Mariam's sister must feel so guilty for spreading the virus to her family," Abdu says.

"Contracting COVID-19 is nothing to be ashamed of. However, when people make a sick person feel guilty, that is stigma," Ms Akwi said.

"How can we prevent stigma towards COVID-19 patients?" Abdu asks.

"By spreading facts about COVID-19 instead of fear, and by being kind and supportive to the patients and their families," Ms Akwi answers.

The children ran to class. In Mika's class, Ms Akwi asked the children to share how COVID-19 had affected them.

Alice spoke first. "I have seen the situation at home change," she said. "When my father's business closed, we couldn't afford good food anymore. My parents' attitude changed too. Now, they are angry and fight all the time."

Mika raised his hand and added, "I watched on the news that in countries where schools remained closed, some children were abused at home."

"Yes, domestic violence was high during the lockdown," Ms Akwi agreed. She explained that parents should be held accountable, and that some parents went to prison, but many children are too scared to talk about it.

"That's so sad. Children should speak out!" Zara said. "I have an idea. We need to support other children to become more assertive and resilient."

"That's a brilliant idea," Alice replied. "Did you hear the story of Ayitte from the Busia border? She overcame domestic abuse, and is helping other children in her community, both in Uganda and Kenya."



With the teacher's permission, Alice read Ajitte's story to the class. It was so interesting that, when the bell rang, the children didn't immediately scatter like usual. Instead, they waited for Alice to finish reading, each one wrapped up in the story.



The Positive Things Around Us

Children remain committed to learning

When they got home from school, Zara, Mika and Susan sat around the table to finish their homework and check notes in their books. It was not easy, but they were more than pleased to have schoolwork to do again.

Later that evening, they decided to play a crossword puzzle of about the pandemic. Zara filled in the answers as Mika and Susan peeped over her shoulders.

"How is 'dance' relevant to the pandemic?" Susan asked, pointing out the word.

"It is a good way to cheer people up during the crisis," Zara replied.



“Oh, yes, I remember Mummy was excited about the ‘Jerusalema’ dance challenge,” said Susan. “Maybe we can make up our own dance challenge, using traditional Ugandan dances like *Maganda*, *Ding Ding*, and *Runyege!*”

Zara started singing a song they could use for the dance. “To realize the power of my dreams. As the world gives us its best, we shall stand high, girls, boys rise up...”

Mika and Susan began to create a dance routine, as their parents clapped and recorded a video of their performance. Once they stopped singing and dancing, Susan took a long piece of orange paper and spread it on the table. She began to write.

“What are you writing, Susan?” asked Mika, peering over her shoulder.

Susan asked them to come up with the good things happening around the country. The pandemic was scary and many things changed, but there were also many good things going on around them. Mr and Mrs Kego added to the list, until the paper was full of positive points.

The three children hung the paper on the wall and took a photograph using Mr Kego’s phone. The whole family was happy and hopeful as they went to bed that night.



Hope for the Future

Shifting mind-sets to keep hope alive

On Saturday morning, when the breeze was cold, and the grass wet from the night rain, the Kego family sat together on the front porch. The children watched Mr Kego as he flipped through a copy of the Saturday newspaper. The front-page headline was a story about the COVID-19 Vaccine.

“Uncle, could you tell us more about the vaccine?” asked Zara.

“I watched the Minister of Health on television saying that vaccines reduce the spread of COVID-19 and make the symptoms lighter,” said Mika.



Mr Kego nodded in agreement, "Mika is right."

"Then can we be vaccinated, Daddy?" asked Susan.

Mr Kego shook his head. "Not yet. The government is trying to get more vaccines for citizens, but children under 12 years cannot get it yet. This is why you must be careful and observe the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to keep safe."

"And what are the SOPs, children?" asked Mrs Kego.

In unison, the three children sang, "Wash your hands, wear your mask, and keep social distance."

"But uncle, are the vaccines safe?" Zara asked, frowning in concern.

"Yes, Zara," Mr Kego replied. "The scientists who came up with the COVID-19 vaccines, have worked on similar vaccines behind the scenes for many years. The vaccines are safe."

"Are you vaccinated, Daddy?" asked Mika.

"Yes," Mr Kego replied.

"What about Mummy?" asked Mika.

"Not yet. The doctor advised her to wait a few months after getting the virus. This is to make sure the Vaccine works properly."

Mr Kego flicked to the back of the newspaper, where he saw a children's quiz. "Here, get some pencils and paper. There were some questions here about vaccination. I would like to see if you know the answers."

They started writing as Mr Kego read out the 10 questions. Finally, they shared their answers.

Zara teased Mika, who had got seven correct answers. Susan knew little about vaccinations, but Mr Kego promised to share more in the evening after shopping.

With fresh knowledge about vaccinations, the children excitedly hopped into the car to go to the bookshop. Zara jumped in the front seat, causing Susan to frown because her usual place in the car was taken.

Mr Kego saw the frown on Susan's face and told her that one can't always get what one wants in life. The children should be grateful to be able to go to school in a car, whereas many others walked to school.



The Power of Us – Stronger Together

Shaping the future we want to see

The new week started with much excitement. At school, Zara and Mika shared their idea of supporting other children to catch up on schoolwork, with their teacher. They planned to gather study materials for children who didn't have access to them.

“What a great idea!” teacher Akwi said. She encouraged them to work together to make this their school-learning project for the end-of-term celebrations.

In the following weeks, the children formed a “*Let Children of Uganda Learn*” club. The children worked together to develop a storybook to help other children cope with the pandemic. They also gathered learning materials and used reading books, for distribution to children around the country.

One day, the children decided to bring materials from home, to make masks for distribution. The floor of the class was messy with cut up material. The children carefully cut the shape of masks from the approved materials, while their teacher quickly sewed them up with the portable sewing machine she had brought in for the day. After two hours of work, the children were exhausted but happy with the progress of their project.



“Wow, this is so beautiful. Look at what we have created. Everything has come out well,” Zara excitedly said and then yawned.

Mika stretched his hands. They were sore from all the cutting and writing. As the children started packing and cleaning up, they realised how much they had achieved working together.

“That’s called the Spirit of *Ubuntu* – it’s a South African word. It means ‘I am, because we are.’ See how much we have achieved as a team,” said teacher Akwi.

“That sounds like the Luganda word *Obuuntu*, right?” asked Zara.

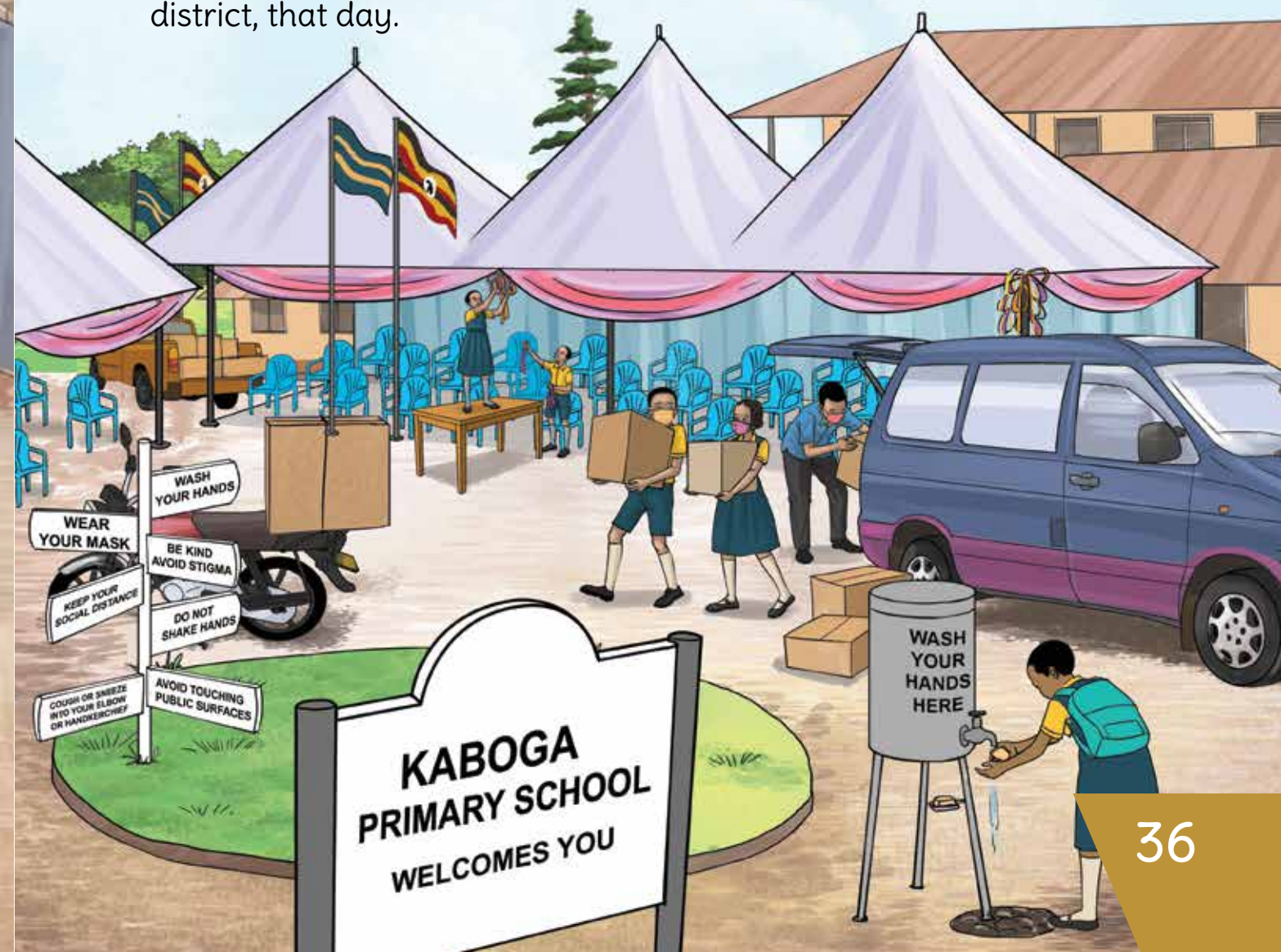
Teacher Akwi agreed with Zara’s observation and reminded the children of the importance of working together to build their families and communities.



In the following weeks, the children's excitement grew as the day for distributing boxes of materials approached. Finally, on the big day, Zara, Mika, and Susan woke up early in the morning, and chatted excitedly as they were driven to school. At school, children of the club loaded boxes of storybooks, masks, and study materials into their parents' cars, to distribute to different areas of town.

Mr Kego, Mika, Zara, and Susan delivered boxes to children's centres in Katwe and Nateete. The children there were so happy to receive the gifts, that they danced and sang.

On the other side of town, Alice and her parents dropped off boxes in Nakawa. Abdu and his parents delivered boxes to children in Kawempe. Many other children and parents assisted in delivering much welcomed boxes of materials to other centres around the district, that day.



The following day was the end of term celebration. When the children arrived at school, they eagerly shared stories about the previous day's activities. It looked different. The compound was full of cars and boda bodas, offloading bags and boxes. Some children put the final touches of decorations on the tent by adding ribbons, pots, and flowers.

It was an exciting moment for the children, to understand they could make a difference individually, but created even more of an impact when they worked together.



The bell rang, and the children assembled in the main open auditorium to start the school day celebrations. Parents, teachers, and children watched the performances. Mika was the Master of Ceremonies for the day. He welcomed the audience and announced that they had successfully supplied learning materials to seven thousand children across the city. The audience gave loud applause and ululations at the news.

Mika introduced the first act. Susan led the fashion show, followed by Zara, Alice, Abdu, Justin, and the other children. They exhibited a selection of Ugandan and African fashion styles, bags, and jewellery. The crowd cheered as the children did funny poses and walks. It was a truly enjoyable day.





Rise and Shine

Awards and recognition in Parliament and at the United Nations

The project that the school club “*Let Children of Uganda Learn*” carried out, was featured on television, radio, and in the newspapers. On June 9th, which is Heroes’ Day in Uganda, Zara and Mika were invited to present their project to the Parliament of Uganda, to encourage other children to engage in community service.

On the day, Zara and Mika were anxious but excited to go through security checks and receive their passes to the Parliament.

After their presentation, Zara and Mika got a standing ovation. The Speaker of Parliament presented them with medals for their service and contribution to children’s education. The medals were big metal discs that hung proudly around their necks on ribbons.



The Speaker commended their work, and encouraged them to continue their initiative, and spread clubs all across the country.

Over the next year, Zara and Mika continued to spread awareness, materials, and encouragement, to children across the country. They encouraged fellow students to start clubs in their own schools.

Because of the wonderful social activities, they led, Zara and Mika were invited to the United Nations General Assembly, at the UN Headquarters in New York, United States of America.

From their home in Nkumba, the children had always admired planes as they landed at Entebbe Airport. Mika’s dream was to become a pilot, flying planes in and out of the airport. The night before their journey, Mika and Zara couldn’t sleep. They were looking forward to their first time on an airplane. The next day, they kept looking around excitedly, as they boarded the plane with Mr Kego.

Zara smiled as she fastened her seat belt. She looked through the window and watched Lake Victoria fade away as the plane rose into the sky.



At the United Nations General Assembly, the spotlight was on the Ugandan children as they presented in front of the global leaders. There were so many people in the conference room, and even more watching online from their countries.

Zara performed a poem encouraging children to know who they are, believe in themselves, dream big, and have hope for the future.

Rise and shine with confidence

When your voice needs to be heard

For the seeds of hope lie within it

And in it, you'll bloom with courage

And look upon a challenge

Like a simple step towards growth

You'll rise like the sun

You'll shine through all seasons

For there's no reason

No season for special stars like you

Rise and shine

With consistency, persistence, and resilience.

Next, Mika confidently presented his closing speech. "We are the leaders of today. We, the African children, must work together and have a collective voice. Let's pledge to commit ourselves to service, and lead change in our communities. Let's confidently go out and make our continent proud. We are the generation the world has been waiting for. Remember, if you walk alone, you go fast. If you walk with others, you go far."





Take Action – It's Up To Us

Children pledge to lead change

On the day before their return to Uganda, Zara and Mika met with other child delegates outside the United Nations building, to take photographs. They reminded each other to take care of themselves, wash hands, wear masks, and keep social distance.

Mika challenged the children gathered from around the world to answer a riddle.

“There were three birds on an electric wire; two decided to fly away. How many remained?”

The children had called out different answers and reasons, but the simple answer was that all the birds remained on the wire. The two birds decided to fly but did not act. They had a good idea, but did nothing about it.

“The key lesson is this” Mika continued, “**Take action!** Don’t just think about it, do it! Be part of the change. Speak up and speak out. Your voice and story matter! And finally, always believe in yourself, keep dreaming, have a positive attitude, and work with others. Be the best at whatever you do!”



“**If you walk alone, you go fast;
you walk with others, you go far.**”
African Proverb

END



Children's Stories:

- Hope
- Courage
- Gratitude
- Resilience
- Taking Action
- Entrepreneurship

1 Pro-Activeness

Coping with COVID-19 in the Family

Hannat Namaggala lives in Wakiso District. COVID-19 greatly affected Hannat's family, killing many friends and family members. When her mother got the coronavirus, the children stepped in. At 12 years old, she encouraged her sister to look after their mother. They cooked, cleaned the house, and walked their mum to the hospital to get treatment until she fully recovered. This experience taught the family to work together and value other people around them.

The family continues to collect and give food to families struggling in their community. The family also learnt to save money for unplanned incidences, and the future.

Hannat's message to other children is to have hope for the future. She knows that the commitment to wearing a mask, washing hands, and social distancing, prevented them from getting COVID-19. She encourages other children to commit to the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) when they return to school.

Pro-activeness

2 Young Entrepreneurs

Decided to become a Job Creator

12-year-old Eryn Kembabazi a resident of Kyera, Mbarara District became an entrepreneur. Eryn's courage and creativity helped her through the difficult months when schools in Uganda were closed. Her parents taught her to plant spinach and green peppers. Her Auntie gave her four-week-old chicks, starting her journey into poultry farming. When the chicks grew and laid eggs, she sold the eggs and saved the profit.

A visit to her grandmother in Bushenyi village, gave Eryn an opportunity to learn how to weave baskets, which she sold in her community. Eryn mastered the skill, and taught her neighbours and friends to weave baskets. It was fun sharing the skill with other children in the community.

Eryn's biggest challenge was the lack of meaningful academic work when schools were closed. So she committed to following the free lessons on television and radio, because she couldn't access online classes like other children.

Eryn encourages children to learn life skills and income-generating activities, to prevent idleness. She also encourages parents to buy adequate reading materials for children to use at home, to continue learning.

3 Keep Believing

Selling Sugarcane to Buy Sanitary Pads

Before COVID-19, 13-year-old Stella Nekesa used to receive sanitary pads from school in Kyegegwa District. When school closed, she couldn't access sanitary pads during her menstrual periods. Her mother encouraged her to sell sugarcane from their home garden, to people in the Kyaka Refugee Settlement. The money from the little business enabled Stella to buy sanitary pads for herself and her sisters.

Living in a refugee settlement community, Stella knows the dangers which boys and girls face. She encourages children to stay safe at night by staying home and not wandering around, which keeps them safe from being targeted by unsavoury characters.

Stella's dream is to become a Pediatric Doctor, to treat children in refugee camps who don't have access to proper health care. Every day, after helping her parents with house chores, she reads her books before it gets dark at home, where they have no electricity. She is excited to go back to school to continue her education.

CREATIVITY
CREATIVITY

BELIEVING

4 Taking Action in Community

Donating to other Children

11-year-old Rahma Kamulegeya of Namugongo-Kampala never knew how blessed she was until the COVID-19 pandemic. In June 2020, everything changed when her school started online classes. At home, they had four computers for her and her siblings. However, some of her friends didn't join the online classes because their parents couldn't afford school fees, computers, and the Internet. When COVID-19 started, she was in P4. She is now in P6, but many of her friends are still in P5 because they didn't attend online classes.

Although she missed her friends, being at home taught her many things. She studied online Quranic and Islamic teachings, which strengthened her religion. She also learnt how to clean the house, and loves cooking food with her Mom. She appreciates what it takes to do house chores, and knows that it is their obligation as children.

Rahma cares about other children. Her family collects used items like shoes, clothes, and books and donates them. At school, she encourages other children to give out things they don't use.

TAKE
ACTION

5 Resilience and Hope

COVID-19 Left His Father Jobless

Joel Jakisa's father was a teacher in a private school in Tororo District. When schools closed, he lost his job, and his source of income was cut off for two years. The family's social and economic status changed, and they couldn't afford good meals such as meat, fish, and chicken. So, the family shifted their thinking, and turned to agriculture as a source of income. They worked hard, planted maize, cassava, and soybeans, and sold them.

When schools closed, 13-year-old Joel was a candidate in P7. However, he never gave up on his education. He continued learning at home, revised his books, and got a first grade with eight aggregates.

Joel was worried about getting school fees to join secondary school when school opened. The family was committed to saving money from the crops to take the children back to school. Joel kept a positive attitude, knowing that every storm passes. He is determined to get a quality education to make his family proud.

Resilience

6 Creativity keeps Children Positive

Poetry Opens Possibilities

In Kampala District, at 12 years, Mathew Gerald Mugerwa like so many children in the country got confused about the COVID-19 pandemic and the school closure. At the start of the lockdown, Mathew felt hopeless without his friends and teachers and thought his dreams were shattered.

The school was a significant source of knowledge for Mathew. Still, without school, he turned to his inner strength and imagination, to get the courage to step into the unknown future with confidence. Despite the impact of the pandemic, he took a beautiful adventure to discover the poet in him following, Albert Einstein's famous words, "The true sign of intelligence is not knowledge but imagination."

Over the months, Mathew wrote over twenty poems expressing his fears and dreams about the future. Poetry became his sacred space where he hid from the fears concerning COVID-19 deaths, uncertainties about going back to school, and not having enough food to eat. He is committed to contributing to a new African narrative by writing and sharing his experiences with other children.

CREATIVITY

7 Keeping Positive through Reading

Find Something Positive in any Situation

During the lockdown, Shalom Efata discovered that she liked reading. At 12 years, her love for books helped her overcome the isolation and uncertainties of being out of school. Her mother gave her different books, such as "Rich Dad, Poor Dad" by Robert Kiyosaki and Sharon Leichter. The book encouraged her to become an investor at a young age. When her parents and friends gave her money as a gift for excelling in my Primary Leaving Examinations, she invested it in her crocheting business, in her community in Masaka District.

Shalom read "Adapt or Die" by Peter Abesiga, which encouraged her to set goals for her education and future profession. As a result, she became optimistic about failure by learning to grow and improve from her mistakes. During the lockdown, she learnt more about herself to enhance her skills and attitude toward life.

Her message to other children is to find something positive in every situation, and trust God who gives all wisdom.

POSITIVITY

The Entrepreneurship Journey

Farming and Learning New Languages

Esther Elizabeth Bugosera was bored and idle during the first days of lockdown, with little to do at home in Mukono. So she travelled to stay at her mother's workplace at the Kapchorwa Primary Teacher's College in Eastern Uganda.

At 11 years, Esther started mixed farming and backyard farming in the Kapchorwa fertile soils. She learnt to dig, grow, and take care of cabbage, tomatoes, matooke, Irish potatoes, maize, and onions. She also learnt to take care of cows, goats, and turkeys. She found the courage to start milking a cow, and sold the milk.

With her creative and curious character, Esther learned two commonly spoken languages in the Community - Kupsabiny and Kiswahili. She also got interested in local tourism and visited the Sipi Falls and Caves. These adventures made her appreciate things and the communities around her.

Although she had no computer and was challenged by poor Internet, she was determined to continue learning online using her mother's cellphone, which she shared with her brother.

ENTREPRENEUR

Community Engagement

Returning to School is a Privilege for Refugee Children

Mariam Ukuna is a Congolese refugee living with her parents, brothers, and sisters in the Kyaka II refugee settlement in Uganda. When schools closed in March 2020, her life changed drastically. Children in refugee communities depend on teachers for guidance and mentorship. 12-year-old Mariam couldn't access soap and sanitary pads she used to get from school. Although she missed school and visiting her relatives in other villages, she stayed strong.

One of her classmates got COVID-19, which made her more serious about following the SOPs. She stayed at home, and whenever her parents sent her to the shop, she wore a mask and kept social distance. When she returned home, she washed her hands very well. She also encouraged her siblings and parents to stay safe.

Being at home taught her to appreciate and do house chores. She swept the compound and took care of her young sisters. She learnt to weave baskets for home use, and soon mastered the skill enough to sell baskets in the refugee settlement community. Mariam encouraged her friends to continue learning using the available books to perform well in school.

Community

10 Gratitude & Resilience

Parents Lost Jobs but Family kept Together

Life became difficult for the 13-year-old Mary Immaculate Oyella, from the first lockdown in March 2020. Mary's mother was a teacher at Pope Paul VI Secondary School Anaka in Nwoya district. When Mary's mother and father lost their jobs, everything drastically changed. Her father started a small shop in Gulu town to keep looking after the family.

Mary spent time with her mother at home, where she learnt to dig, clean the house and cook Acholi foods. Being with her mother made her a responsible girl. Mary and her two sisters made a tap using polythene bags, a five-litre jerry-can, and a water bottle at home. The family continued to wash hands with soap to fight the coronavirus. This innovation set an excellent example for other families in the village to set up hand-washing areas in their compounds using local materials, to stay safe and hygienic.

Although Mary was stayed in primary six, the class she was in before the pandemic, she was excited to be back in school. Her family continued to keep positive and determined.

Gratitude

11 Making Money is an Inspiration

Learning New Skills to make Money

COVID-19 taught children critical lessons and gave them an awareness of the social impact in their country. They heard news of teenage girls forced into early marriages, or defiled to become child mothers.

At 14, Daniela Owomuhendo was one of the few Ugandan children whose parents could afford to buy computers for home-schooling and online study. During the lockdown, she learnt money-making skills by producing and selling door and bed mats. She also baked snacks such as doughnuts, mandazi, and samosas, which her mother helped sell at her salon in Kampala District. She kept her earnings in a piggy bank, with a big dream of starting a confectionery shop to make more money.

Daniela has a creative mind. She has written articles in the Rainbow and TOTO children's magazines to educate other children on preventing COVID-19. She is excited to make a difference in her country through the millions of children that the magazines reach.

INSPIRATION



Activities, Games, Song and Poem

These activities will help you to understand and remember the critical information about COVID-19. You can do the exercises alone or with other children to learn more. Remember to write them down.

“The weakest ink is better than the strongest memory.”
Chinese Proverb



Activity 1: River of Life – Every Strom Passes

This activity is to guide reflections on the two-year span of the COVID-19 pandemic. By mapping out both negative and positive events, support the children to focus on lessons learnt from any challenges faced.

Instructions for teachers:

- Guide children through the following three questions, encouraging them to be truthful and open-minded.
- Explore the use of words, pictures, songs, or poems for express themselves.
- Encourage them to share their answers if they feel comfortable enough.

Materials required: Pen, pencil, markers, paper, or book, glue, scissors, manilla/cardboard.



Questions:

1. What difficulties did you pass through, being out of school during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. How did you manage to go through the challenges?
3. What lessons did you draw from your life, family, and community?



Activity 2: Gratitude and Journaling

This activity will help children reflect on the positive things they have in their families and communities. Children will also learn the essential skill of journaling – writing down thoughts and ideas. Journaling will help to free their minds of negative thoughts, and strengthen their ideas and dreams.

Once they master the skill of writing the things they are grateful for, their mind-set will shift to the goodness around them to see future possibilities.

Instructions for teachers:

- Ask the children to take a moment and think about ten things they are grateful for.
- They should write them down in an exercise book. Encourage them to do this activity every evening before going to bed.
- The teacher should guide the children to develop a class gratitude list. As a practice, children may recite the list every morning before class.



Activity 3: Who Am I?

This activity will help children explore positive words that they can use to describe themselves. This is an exercise to help grow self-esteem, and confidence in knowing who they are.

Instructions:

- Every morning, a child should look in the mirror and ask “Who am I?” And if they have no mirror, they should imagine they are looking at their reflection. In response, they should use positive words to describe themselves. For example, ‘star, champion, winner, beautiful, smart, strong’, etc.
- The teacher should encourage children to refer to how Mika and his friends did the Who am I self-affirmation in this story.



Activity 4: Hop Hope Game

The game helps children dream big, set goals, and give them hope for the future. That's why it's called the Hop Hope Game.

Instruction:

- Children should draw six boxes on the ground using chalk or charcoal, and start playing the Hop Hope game. Each child hops five times on one leg, then lands on two legs. When they land, they say what they will become when they grow up and give a strong reason why. Make it sound authentic and fun.

See some examples below:

Hop, hop, hop, hop, hop, I am a doctor, and I save lives.

Hop, hop, hop, hop, hop, I am a journalist, and I spread positive stories.

Hop, hop, hop, hop, hop, I am a pilot, and I fly people to places.

Hop, hop, hop, hop, hop, I am a mother, and I groom great children.

Hop, hop, hop, hop, hop, I am a police officer, and I keep law and order.

Hop, hop, hop, hop, hop, I am a great Ugandan fashion designer, and I promote African culture around the world.



Activity 5: Word Search

This activity will help children to learn more words about COVID-19. This is a fun way of expanding their vocabulary and curiosity to learn more.

Instruction: Children should go through the Word Search and look for 15-20 words related to COVID-19. The words may be things people use to prevent and treat the virus or what people are doing to cope or manage the crisis.





Activity 6: Positive Things Happening

Children are experiencing different things in their lives and community. This activity will encourage children to think about the positive things around them.

Instruction: Read using the Kego family positive list as an example, let the children list ten things that they have seen or heard in their family and community. The children should be very open, and think broadly about the positive things.

Positive Things Happening

1 Pro-activeness

Children have become more active at home and in their communities.

2 Entrepreneurship

Children and parents are producing sanitizers and masks. Some are doing door-to-door home deliveries from supermarkets, restaurants, and pharmacies.

3 Learning

Teachers deliver online classes and other media; NGOs and the private sector distribute reading and learning materials to communities without the Internet.

4 Social

There is more family time. Some people exercise regularly and have improved personal wellness, including eating fruits and vegetables.

5 Social media

People share critical information on social media, including speaking about mental health and praying for each other.

6 Education

Children work harder to compensate for the lost time and excel in their exams.



Activity 7: Questions and Answers on COVID-19 Vaccine

There is so much confusion and misinformation about the COVID-19 Vaccine. This activity gives children vital information about the Vaccine. This is reliable information from Africa Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC).

Instruction:

- Ask children to get a paper and pen and write down this critical information about vaccines and vaccination in Uganda. Children should share the information with their family and friends to create more awareness.

Q1. How do vaccines work?

A1. Vaccines work by tricking your body into thinking it has been infected with a virus, prompting it to develop an immune reaction to the virus itself.

Q2. Are the vaccines safe?

A2. Vaccines are safe, have no severe side effects, and protect people from the COVID-19 virus. The side effects are mild and may include short-lived flu-like symptoms such as mild feverishness, muscle aches, and tiredness.

Q3. Who are the people that should get the vaccine first?

A3. Healthcare providers are prioritized, to protect them and prevent possible transmission to their patients. Others include the elderly and people with underlying medical conditions such as diabetes. Also, some front-line workers, such as teachers, and people in the service industry like banks, are prioritized.

Q4. Are the vaccines available throughout the country?

A4. Yes, vaccines are available throughout the country.

Q5. Can I stop wearing a mask after I'm vaccinated?

A5. There is not enough information about whether it is safe for people to stop wearing masks. There is the possibility that vaccinated people will be protected from getting sick with the disease, but they may still be infected and pass the virus to others. It is safer to wear your mask in public, maintain social distance, and follow other COVID-19 safety protocols.

For more information, visit <https://africacdc.org/download/questions-and-answers-on-covid-19-vaccine/>



Activity 8: The Collective Hand Clap

This activity will teach children to appreciate the value of working together for better impact.

Instructions:

- Pick ten children to come to the front and demonstrate to the class. First, they all clap with one finger of each hand, then two, three, four, and then five fingers.
- The children should note how even when ten children clap in unison with one finger, the sound is low. The strength of a collective hand clap grows as the number of fingers used, increases.





Activity 9: Poem

This activity will help children use positive words to speak about themselves through edutainment.

Instruction: Divide the class and ask volunteers to read out the following poem. Children can recite it alone or with other children. They may create a recitation competition within their communities to see who does it better. Make it fun as children learn.

RISE AND SHINE

I rise and shine
Like the sun
I rise and shine and believe in myself, for that is the true wealth.
When times change and things get tight
I hold a hand and share my light
Like the sun
I rise and shine.

I rise and shine with confidence,
When my voice needs to be heard
For the seeds of hope lie within it
And in it
I'll bloom with courage
And look upon a challenge like a simple step towards growth.

I'll rise
Like the sun
I'll shine through all seasons
For there's no reason, no season
For special stars like me
I shine towards my dreams
Take charge of my destiny
Use the power of my dreams to light up so many candles
I'll be best at whatever I do

And leave my footprints wherever I go.
I rise and shine
With consistency, persistence, resilience
For the comfort in hope and achievement
Will keep me determined
To always do what's right and true
For me
And those I care for
Those I stand for.

I rise and shine
With my family and community
For the furthest distance is covered
Walking together
I rise to work together
To walk the way of a winner
A go-getter, an achiever.

I shine to lead change.
To create new African stories
For the history and narratives of African children
I shine to lead change
To be a person of honour and integrity
To do my part in making this world a better place to live in
This generation
And the next
I rise and shine.

RISE &
SHINE



Activity 10: Pledge and Commitment

This is an exercise to help children make a firm commitment to shift their lives and lead change in their communities.

Instruction:

- Guide the children to list three things they can individually commit to doing over the next three months for themselves, their family, and to serve the community.

Let them share their list with friends, parents, or teachers, to help them keep to their commitment. At the end of each month, the teacher should ask children to share their progress. Each milestone should be announced and applauded/celebrated.

An example of a commitment is:

I commit to reading six motivational books for three months. I will share the books I have read with my friends.

I commit to



Activity 11: New Words and Reflection Questions

Instruction:

- Guide the children in answering the following questions:



1. What new words have you learned from the story?
2. What did Zara and Mika do to rise and shine?
3. Who else was mentioned in the story?
4. Who is your favourite character and why?
5. What three things did you learn from the story?
6. What parts of the book relate to your life?



Activity 12: Song

Instructions:

- Guide the children to listen to, and learn the following song.
- Encourage them to sing it daily for inspiration to take charge of their fears, and dream big. It can be sung alone or with other children.
- Create a singing competition within the community to see who does it better.
- Make it fun as they learn.

Rising Star Song: The Power of the Dream

Chorus:

I am a rising star; I am extraordinary,
I dream, oh yes I dream, I dream because I am a rising star
I have the courage... to embrace my fears
I reach... for the stars
To realize the power of my dreams, the power of my dreams.

Verse:

When we believe we can achieve,
Discovering what it means to live free and rise up
More than what we dreamt inside,
Deep within each heart, there lies a magic spark
That lights up your imagination changing to greatness,
Changing to greatness
To realize the power of the dream, the power of the dream.

Chorus:

I am a rising star, I am extraordinary,
I dream, oh yes I dream, I dream because I am a rising star
I have the courage to embrace my fears
I reach... for the stars
To realize the power of my dreams.

Verse:

As the world gives us its best,
We shall stand high
Girls, boys, rise up
You are the generation... the world has been waiting for
The world will never be the same without us,
We have the power of the dream. x2

Chorus:

I am a rising star; I am extraordinary,
I dream, oh yes I dream, I dream because I am a rising star
I have the courage... to embrace my fears
I reach... for the stars
To realize the power of my dreams, the power of my dreams.
I am a rising star, I am extraordinary,
I dream, oh yes I dream, I dream because I am a rising star
I have the courage... to embrace my fears
I reach... for the stars
To realize the power of my dreams, the power of my dreams.



Activity 13: Reflect and Learn

Instructions:

- Guide the children to read the children's stories carefully, and look for the lesson in each one. Children should reflect on the stories and share the lessons learnt.
- Take the children through the following questions:



1. Which stories do you relate to and why?
2. What do you learn from the stories?
3. What skills did the children use?
4. What can you do to take charge of your life and support your family or community?

#ItsUpToUs

Zara & Mika

Lead Positive Change in their Community

Kids Voice is a storybook with a collection of stories from children sharing their perspectives and life experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. The book provides essential tools that empower children to cope, create, play and read to develop essential social and emotional learning skills that will last a lifetime.

The book allows children to enjoy and learn from other children's stories of courage, resilience, hope, and entrepreneurial spirit. The book is relatable, representative, and reflective of the realities of the children's lives. The stories are culturally responsive, featuring communities of marginalized children as protagonists. The book helps children read as a gateway to learning, empowering them to stay in school and master reading later in their schooling.

Kids Voice provides practical learning activities in which children can exercise critical thinking and problem-solving skills at home or school. The content gives children space for self-awareness, social awareness, social engagement, and social change.

KIDS VOICE is the embodiment of hope and the positive voices our children were hungry to hear. The African proverb "If you go alone, you go fast, you walk together, you go far" teaches children to do things together. Children are taking compassionate and collaborative actions, the kind of universal behaviour this world needs."

— GERALDINE LAYBOURNE, *Child Advocate and former President of Nickelodeon*

"What a joy to read real stories told by children about their lives and experiences at this time. A great read for kids in East Africa and around the world. We need more books like this to inspire this generation and next!"

— NISHA LIGON, *Executive Producer of Akili and Me and Ubongo Kids*



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