**My destiny is greater than my HIV status**

Next Saturday is World Aids Day, when we

show our support for those living with HIV

and remember those who have died. As

part of this, we feature the story of Mary

Nyokabi, who attempted suicide thrice after

she found out that she had the virus, but is

now a beacon of hope for other women

**BY JOYCE KIMANI**

kimani@ke.nationmedia.com

Mary Nyokabi tried to commit suicide thrice after learning that she was HIV-positive.

She reasoned that her life was going to end soon anyway, so she might as well get it

over with.

“Testing positive was like being handed a

death sentence; I have never felt so helpless in my life. I just wanted to die and rest in peace,” she recalls.

Mary had contracted the virus from her husband but was unaware of it until he confessed on his death bed. The stigma associated with HIV at that time, 13 years ago, made her feel cheated and unworthy to live.

The then 25-year-old therefore tried to kill herself by taking rat poison. Mary had already swallowed the poison when her mother walked into the room and saw her holding the container.

The older woman gave her daughter milk then rushed her to the Rift Valley General

Hospital, where doctors managed to get the poison out of her system.

But Mary was far from happy that her life had been saved. After being discharged from hospital she came up with another plan. During a trip to the Thompson falls in Nyahururu, she tried to jump off the cliff into the raging waters below, a distance of more than 70m. But her uncle had been following her and when he realized what she wanted to do, he quickly pulled her back from the edge of the cliff.

Undeterred, Mary tried to get herself knocked down by a car a short while later. She

lay in the middle of the road but the vehicle swerved to avoid hitting her. After some time she gave up and went back home. She finally came to the realisation that she was alive for a purpose and decided to soldier on, for her sake

as well as her two daughters’.

In 2007, Mary found another reason to live when she met a HIV-positive man who swept

her off her feet. The couple had a sumptuous wedding and it seemed like life had taken a turn for the better. But wedded bliss did not last long because the couple kept arguing, especially about their children, so Mary opted out.

This time though, she was determined not to become a victim of her circumstances. She

picked herself up and decided that she would be the best woman that she could be, come

what may. To support herself and her daughters, she started a small salon.

Then when she heard the stories of many

HIV-positive women in the Kwa Rhonda area of Nakuru, where she lives, she co-founded the

Daughters of Grace ministry to help them. The group has more than 20 regular members, the oldest of whom is 63 years old while the youngest is only 17.

The women hold their meetings every Tuesday in Mary’s house. They engage in chit chat, songs and occasional dance as they counsel