

#2 MyNetWork



MILLENNIAL WISDOM

We bring you stories of five young people who are changing the narratives in different sectors using their skills and gifts
P.4&5

To establish a security firm, Kinyua says, having some training in this field is important



Samuel Kinyua (left) with his business partner George Ngochorai in their office in Westlands, Nairobi. PETER CHANGTOEK

Passion for investigations pushes criminology graduate to establish own company

BY PETER CHANGTOEK

Samuel Kinyua holds a degree in criminology and security studies from Egerton University and a diploma in theology from Pioneer University. He says he is very passionate about private investigations, which is why he decided to establish a private investigation company in Westlands, Nairobi.

Kinyua started the company alone in 2021, with a capital of about Sh120,000, and brought George Ngochorai as a partner in 2023.

The company is registered as Limitless Security. It specialises in offering private investigation services that include background checks, brand protection, anti-counterfeit, document verification, skip trace, litigation support, fraud investigations, VIP protection and security consultancy.

"I have always been interested in a career as a private investigator. I tried out the government wing of investigations but didn't make the cut. Since it is a passion, I couldn't give up. I decided to try my hand in the private sector. I have always wanted to be an investigator to uncover hidden truths. When I failed to make the cut during recruitment, I heard of Jane Mugo, and there and then, knew the path I wanted to take," says Kinyua, the lastborn among five siblings.

But the journey has not been so smooth. He has faced numerous



challenges, especially in the beginning.

"Registration of security companies in Kenya is a big challenge due to the rigorous vetting. The field of investigations is very volatile since it is highly based on trust. It takes time to earn that trust with clients. Finances are also a big challenge considering the amount of input required to acquire the investigative and security tools," says the 29-year-old.

"As the founder, I am the vision bearer. I am tasked with the key role of business development, and I also have to ensure we offer quality services. Initially, I was the only employee, but I have since employed 16 other private investigators," says Kinyua.

Kinyua's security firm has two branches, one in Nairobi and another

in Kisumu, and the company offers services all over the country.

To establish a security firm, Kinyua says, having some background training in security is important, but hiring qualified and highly experienced individuals is even more important.

"Private investigations is a very sensitive industry. To ensure you give quality and reliable information to your clients, you have to be an expert. Let the people you hire be better than you. Don't be the smartest person in the company," advises Kinyua.

He reveals that his clients range from corporates, mostly law firms, individuals and micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs). He adds that he gets clients mostly through referrals. He reveals that social media has allowed him to create awareness of his brand.

I tried to join the government wing of investigations but didn't make the cut. However, I never gave up,

Samuel



"I started the company after Covid-19, but one of the changes that Covid-19 left was the increased use of technology in investigative work. We now use digital tools of communications and conduct virtual surveillance, where possible," says the entrepreneur.

Kinyua reveals that since the establishment of the company, he has been in business with over 20 companies and hundreds of individual clients.

"I would advise young entrepreneurs in the security industry to develop a unique value proposition by offering unique services that can set them apart from the competitors," he says.

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JOBS

5 easy tips to help you ace your career

BY PAUL KARIUKI

We are three months into 2024. Chances are that on New Year's Eve, you made some career resolutions or goals that you intended to achieve this year. Perhaps, advancing in your present career is part of your goals. Even if you feel like you have lost track of time, you can still achieve your career goals. Here are few tips.

1. Have purpose

Career advisors say it is essential to have a purpose in your career. Purpose is what will give you focus and direction to meeting that career objective. To know if you're moving in the right direction, ask yourself some questions like: What would I like to achieve a few months from now, is it a promotion or a pay raise? When you have an answer, find out what it takes. You may ask for a work appraisal if the organisation doesn't do periodical reviews on individual employees. And if you're struggling in your career, you can begin to plan, prepare, and position yourself for a game changing opportunity, perhaps by advancing or diversifying your skills.

2. Networking matters

A good network of persons sharing similar work ideals as yours will be a career boost. Networking is good as your network sources can recommend you to an employer if an opportunity arises. The reason you're stuck in the same job position could be because there are fewer chances to advance to another level in that organisation, country or industry. Your contacts can share how they handle similar challenges at work, and give you tips that can help you get noticed for a promotion.

3. Be focused

Make good out of every bad situation. Your career may not be rewarding, or the work environment may be demotivating. You can still excel by staying focused on achieving success. With your determination and work ethic, you may end up mentoring others and they may adopt your approach to work.

4. Develop yourself

You may have planned to take a new course, but a clash of schedules or other personal commitments end up derailing you. You can still take that course and advance in your career by invest in evening classes or online and correspondence studies. Ensure there are no conflicting interests in your schedules. Academic and professional advancements would greatly boost your career and personal growth.

5. Embrace technology

That job you've coveted could be less glamorous before the end of this decade as technology becomes the market disruptor, especially with the rise of artificial intelligence. All is not lost, though. Knowing which direction the wind of technology is blowing and aligning yourself to that direction will help you stay marketable. Find out which new courses you can invest in so that when disruptions happen, you can quickly adapt and be retained even if your organisation is laying off staff.

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BY MICHAEL OCHIENG

DAMSEL

Where: Netflix

Genre: Fantasy, Adventure

In the mystical world of *Damsel*, chivalry takes an unexpected twist. Millie Bobby Brown, known for her captivating performances, leads this fantasy film with a fierce determination that defies the traditional damsel-in-distress trope.

Elodie (Millie Bobby Brown) and her younger sister Floria (Brooke Carter) reside in a remote, snow-covered community facing dire circumstances. Their castle is crumbling, and

they're down to selling drapes for sustenance. But hope arrives in the form of a royal proposal: Elodie is to marry Prince Henry (Nick Robinson), with a handsome dowry that could save their land. Elodie is destined to be sacrificed to a menacing dragon lurking in a cavern.

Millie Bobby Brown shines as Elodie, blending vulnerability with steely resolve. She's no helpless maiden; she's resourceful and determined. The production design and costumes are sumptuous. The wedding scene is spectacular, and Elodie's bridal gown holds hidden significance. The Drag-

on voiced by Shohreh Aghdashloo is exquisitely menacing. Elodie's survival tactics turn the film into a thrilling adventure.

Despite its subversive premise, the script lacks depth, and some performances feel lackluster. The film's magic is diluted by cheap-looking CGI, and the action sequences become monotonous. *Damsel* reinvigorates the fantasy genre, offering a gutsy heroine who saves herself. While it stumbles at times, its playful commentary and unconventional twists make it worth a watch. Dive into this fiery adventure and witness Elodie's transformation from damsel to dragon-slayer.

The Hustler After his narrow escape from Abuja, Safara decides to lie low like an envelope, until Mr Li calls

I had to lay low until called out by loans

BY MIKE SAFARA

I have had to maintain a very low profile these last three weeks – staying in the house with curtains drawn, keeping off all social media, letting mobile phone calls go unanswered – because of a WhatsApp message I got from Tasha Sande once I landed back in JKIA.

“Lay low, Michael! They are very annoyed back in Nairobi that you didn’t come back with their cargo, and let yourself get busted at Mohammed Mutala airport.”

“I didn’t even KNOW those suitcases had anything other than Naija fabric,” I had angrily texted back. But since Tasha had already thrown me under the bus, I had no desire to debate my innocence with some peeved ogas, asking for their ‘unga’ from Abuja.

So I lay low like an antelope, emerging from disturbed sleep where I dreamed that I was locked away in the notorious Kirikiri ‘Mox-i-mom’ prison in Lagos.

Several times every night I awoke from my sleep covered in a cold sweat.

I had a *kibanda* guy called Collo Omollo deliver my egg, *ndazi* and chai in a flask to my flat every morning, another *kibanda* lady called Njeri bring chapati *madondo* to the house for lunch, then once it was dark, I’d sneak to the shopping center and buy *mutura* from a chap called Muturi, and a quarter of cheap gin I would put in black sugared tea nightly to knock me off

– but still the dreams persisted.

Every day I sat down to watch three hours of one of my favourite TV programmes, *Law & Order*, SVU – typical episodes featuring a congressman falsely accused of soliciting underage girls for sex, a news anchor making an on-air accusation of sexual assault against her boss and a dangerous gang leader ordering an attack on my TV heroine, Olivia Benson, head of SVU.

This made me think of Tasha in Abuja. How is she? Why did she do this to me?

And the big question in those three weeks – how long can I afford to lie *doggos*?

Then last Saturday, my alarm woke me up at 6am!

No, it was my phone ringing (I no longer needed alarms as I went nowhere).

Mr Zhao Li was on the other end. “Mike, come to Vienna hotel in Nakuru by noon. We have to talk about repayment.”

Damn! I thought – “His Sh160,000 loan is due!”

I dressed in my red jacket and gray khaki trousers – Would I become one of the men known by my one outfit like ‘Safara Koti Moja Nyekundu’ in a short while?

Then I went to an old chum’s called Ash to hire a Lexus LS to go with to Nakuru.

If there is one thing I have learnt in life, it is that when you want someone to lend

With my Air BnB biz backfired, and the Abuja import idea dead as a dodo, I could not afford to spend money on a hotel. Where will I get 135K in a week to repay Mr Li?

Mike Safara



you money, or else postpone paying off a debt, it is best to look like you don’t need the money – or that you can comfortably clear your debts in the near future.

So I painfully paid the 10K (cheap for the car) for a 24-hour car hire, then gunned it to Nakuru, where I picked up Mr. Zhao Li from his cosy but small Sh5,000 a day hotel somewhere in town.

“Big car, Mister Maiko Safara,” the small man said, climbing in the passenger seat.

“Small hotel for a big man, sir,” I said, wondering why a man worth a few million dollars, now in Nakuru to build a second Gong Dong Mall, was living so cheap.

“I always t-lie to live very frugally, Safara,” Zhao Li said. “Seek-let to my money!”

I had learned something important – but still thought if I ever got that much liquid cash, I would live like a King – big house, fast cars, spending large, out with Chrome, in with Dom Perignon. Travel too, different places in the world. But not Nigeria!

We went to one of those lovely hotels by the lake, where the moneyed can enjoy lunch and drinks with a breeze, and in his usual way, millionaire Li came straight to the point. “Maikol, you owe me some money from December.”

“160K, yes,” I said, and swallowed hard.

“One-sixty-four back then, as I lend you the money in dollar,” the Chinese mall magnate said.

I picked my phone up and used the calculator. “In that case, Sir Zhao, I owe you just Sh134,000, considering the gains the shilling has made.”

Zhao Li smiled admiringly at me: “You should pray Shanghai Composite, the Futures market on currency Be may as that

is, Safara, you return loan by April 1.”

After I had dropped him back at his modest hotel, my head was in the swirl of a worry whirl all the way back to Nairobi (with my Air BnB biz backfired, and the Abuja import idea dead as a dodo, I could not afford to spend money on a hotel).

Where will I get 135K in a week to repay Mr Li?

Of course I could always default, as ours had been a deal made by mouth, not contract! But there would be consequences. Zhao Li was too rich and too gentle to send “debt collectors” to auction me (or threaten to break my knee), but I would forever be cut off from the only source of credit I now had (having failed to repay a small loan from my bank app, which I thought I would afford after Abuja).

Again, I cursed Natasha for getting me into this darn money fix.

“I should have known that girl is nothing but trouble,” I said as I drifted off to a gin-tea soaked sleep. Plus, she was still incommunicado. I was awoken in the small hours of Sunday morning by a phone call – the caller ID flashed ‘Safari Safara.’

“Look kid bro,” I answered groggily, “If you’re on a Sato night nonsense with the cops, I’ve no colour for jail bail!”

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MyNetWorld Cover Story

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Joseph Nguthiru, 25, HyaPak

Joseph is the founder of HyaPak, a startup that seeks to eliminate the water hyacinth menace that has affected more than 20 hectares of waterways in Kenyan lakes. He uses the weed to make items like wrappers, straws, tumblers, and party plates, to serve as biodegradable alternatives to single-use plastic products.

The inspiration to start HyaPak came when Joseph and his classmates took a trip to Lake Naivasha while he was still a student. During their visit, they were trapped in the middle of the lake by hyacinth for several hours.

"It was a very frightening experience. It was also sad to watch fishermen who had been in the waters all night struggling to exit the lake due to the weeds," he remembers. Joseph and his classmates, who were engineering students, decided to take action. They decided to kill two birds with one stone by using the weed to make alternatives to single-use plastic items. That way, they could reduce the numbers and amount of water hyacinth, while at the same time controlling the use of plastics.

After graduation, however, they gave up on the concept and each pursued separate internship and employment options. Thankfully, they jointly submitted an entry into the TotalEnergies Startupper of the Year award, and they were selected to join the programme.

Through mentorship from the Chandaria School of Business and Innovation, Joseph learned how to manage a business, and in 2022, he left his internship to launch HyaPak.

"Our aim is to create jobs while protecting the environment. The water hyacinth is harvested by fishermen in Lake Naivasha, and transported to our facilities at Egerton University where it is dried and crushed into fine powder. From there, we use machines and additives to mold the weed into the final products," he says.

Joseph and his partners work in collaboration with government agencies such as the Kenya Bureau of Standards (KEBS), National Environment Management Authority (NEMA), Kenya Forest Research Institute (KEFRI), and National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI), Kenya Industrial Research Development Institute (KIRDI) and Kenya National Innovation Agency (KENIA).

HyaPak was recently awarded The Best Innovation in Water, Food, and Nature Systems at COP 28. Before that, the startup was also awarded the Best Manufacturing Startup in Kenya, and is ranked among the top 30 startups in Africa by Yale Africa Startup Review. It is also the Total Start Upper of the Year.

Joseph is a graduate of civil and environmental engineering at Egerton University.

We are changing the narrative in various sectors

BY MARGARET MAINA

Young people are often touted as the future—future policymakers, future practitioners, and future leaders. Their mastery of innovation and gift of creativity can aid in resolving some of the challenges we face in our society today. Here are stories of four young people who are changing the narratives in different sectors using their skills and gifts.

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Having spent their entire lives immersed in technology, young people possess prized technical skill sets that can help transform the world

Their fresh perspectives and headstrong values can bring about more efficient operations in any sector

Deborah Kisongochi, 31 BR Advertising and Marketing Agency

At the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, Deborah Kisongochi ran an MPesa shop and boutique, and her business was greatly affected.

During the lockdown, as she aimlessly browsed through social media, she had an epiphany—why not create a social media space where people in quarantine in Bungoma County, her hometown, can buy and sell locally-made goods? After all, they had the products, but they were unable to open their shops to clients.

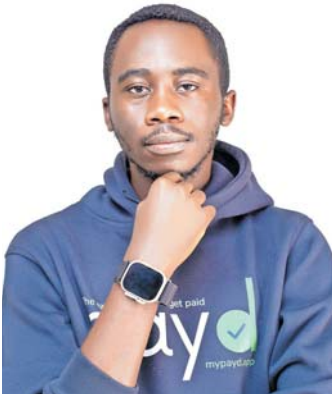
Her next thought was, "What about those who are looking for houses and properties?"

This led to the founding of Bungoma Rentals, BR Advertising & Marketing Agency, an advertising and marketing firm with its headquarters in Bungoma County. She started the business in 2020 as a digital marketplace that provided business owners and real estate enthusiasts with an online marketplace for buying and selling goods.

Through this platform,



Changing the narrative in for entrepreneurs nationally and globally



Benaiah Wepundi, 21, Payd

Benaiah quit law school, attended a software engineering boot camp at Power Learn Project and Moringa School, and then established Payd, a Kenyan-based startup backed by Mozilla Africa that provides gig workers in Africa with payment aggregation, management tools, analytics, and insights to transform their hustles into sustainable income sources.

While creating Payd, Benaiah's desire was to develop a platform that would serve the dynamic gig economy, which includes young people with variable revenue streams engaged in a diverse range

of occupations.

He was also a member of the gig economy and had experienced great difficulty in keeping track of payments and documentation, so he understood the difficulties small businesses and individuals faced in the digital arena.

Payd offers clients access to sensible, secure payment options that are tailored to their needs.

The startup was fortunate to acquire a Sh4.5 million grant from Mozilla, which has been their primary source of finance. They had also raised Sh400,000 through bootstrapping.



Charles Oduk, 31, Beba-Beggie

In 2013, Charles witnessed theft and fraud situations in Nairobi's CBD while running errands with a friend. While riding in a public bus, his bag containing his laptop was stolen. The pain of losing his valuables made him think of ideas on how to offer dependable, affordable, and easily accessible short-term storage solutions.

He conducted extensive research, and after five years, he came up with Beba-Beggie. This is an automated smart locker that uses technology to provide affordable, accessible, secure, and convenient short-term storage for packages, luggage, and similar items for commuters in Nairobi.

Oduk says the lockers are stationed at various places in Nairobi, including at Reinsurance Plaza, Kenya Cinema Plaza, Mepaluz Plaza, and Head Office Africas Talking 23 Apple Cross Rd Lavington.

"The system is simple to use. Once at the lockers, a user selects either the store or the retrieve option depending on whether they are initiating a storage session or ending one. After deciding on the size of the locker with the store option from small, medium, large, and extra-large locker sizes, a user inputs a valid MPesa number that will be used to send the user a message with a one-time-password and billing during checkout. The locker will then automatically pop open, allowing storage of your valuables," he says.

The product has now served over 700 consumers and has grown quickly since then.

Because of this innovation, Charles was named among 16 finalists in Africa hand-picked to represent the continent at the Africa Prize for Engineering Innovation (APEI) programme by the Royal Academy of Engineering in London-United Kingdom.

My goal is to grow the company into a reliable partner for businesses in Western Kenya,

Deborah

The idea was to develop a platform that would serve young people with variable revenue streams

Benaiah

After deciding on the size of the locker, a user pays, then the locker will pop open,

Charles

700

The number of users that have been served by Beba-Beggie, an automated smart locker that provides secure and convenient short-term storage for commuters in Nairobi.

which began as a Facebook Page, Deborah has conducted several programmes in Bungoma, including digital marketing, where they collaborate closely with businesses to give them an online presence, and equip entrepreneurs with digital skills on how to run their business safely online.

She also advertises products and services from Bungoma County to the world and was the first woman to host the Bungoma Trade Fair in 2022. The second edition was held in April 2023 in partnership with the Ministry of Trade, Bungoma County, and its third edition in April 2024. She won the Champion of Young Entrepreneurs.

Deborah was also recognised with a Zuri Award in the Media Category for her creative support of female entrepreneurs and young business owners in her county.

A journalist by profession, she also teaches digital marketing skills to multiple organisations in Bungoma, works as a virtual assistant managing social media platforms for businesses and individuals to maintain a professional online presence, and mentors young girls on issues related to sex education.

Deborah is a project manager who oversees the Girl Child Advocacy Mentorship Programme in five primary schools in Sirisia Constituency of Bungoma. The goal of the foundation is to ensure that young girls have access to mentorship programmes that will empower them to remain in school.

While acknowledging the difficulties she has faced as a young woman running a business, she finds inspiration in her love for mentorship.

With five employees, BR Advertising and Marketing Agency tailors their costs to fit the budgets of their clients. Therefore, their services cost between zero shillings and whatever a client can pay for.

Her ambition is to grow her company into a reliable partner for businesses in Western Kenya, enabling them to exhibit their goods and services online and offline to increase sales and visibility.



Elizabeth Mwangi, 32, Gwiji for Women

Due to lack of formal education, many women who live in the slums of Nairobi are unemployed. Because of this, most of them opt to offer cleaning services to well-off households to earn a living and support their families.

Elizabeth Mwangi observed this and thought of ways of making it easier for such women to find clients. Together with three others, Elizabeth, created a smartphone application named Gwiji for Women that facilitates real-time communication between cleaners and potential clients instead of spending hours every day knocking on doors in search of cleaning jobs.

Elizabeth is a trained architect, advocate for women's rights, marketer, and volunteer with

extensive experience working in the slums, and is the CEO and Director of Gwiji for Women. This is her contribution to help female cleaners from the slums find consistent work.

The app is being used by about 800,000 women from the slums. By finding work, these women are able to stay away from vices such as prostitution, crime and drug abuse.

Elizabeth had a selfless reason for founding Gwiji. While growing up in the slums, she watched her mother get up early in the morning to go hunt for work, any work she could find to put food on the table. But she would frequently come back home empty-handed.

As she grew older, she came to understand that hard labour, even with willingness and determination, is pointless without good opportunities. This is why she decided to create more opportunities for women so they can take care of their families.

As fresh graduates with no substantial savings, the trio set out to look for funds to kick start their business. Luckily, entrepreneurship was receiving a lot of outside backing at that time in the country and throughout Africa.

African Impact Initiative, a Canadian-based angel investor that funds early-stage African entrepreneurs all over the continent, gave them \$5,000 (Sh668,000) to launch Gwiji. They added donations from family and friends and created a website in 2021, before introducing their services to the market the following year.

So far, Gwiji has served more than 10,000 clients and has garnered both local and international recognition.

Focused Valerie is a student at Madira Girls High School

The 'most promising woman footballer in Kenya'

Q&A

BY TOTO AREGE

Valerie Nekesa is a striker who turns out for Kenya Women's Under-20 team Rising Starlets, and Football Kenya Federation Women's Premier League (FKF-WPL) side Soccer Assassins.

Early this month, she was awarded the title of Most Promising Girl in the Sports Personality of the Year Awards.

She was awarded alongside marathon world record holder the late Kelvin Kiptum, who was posthumously declared the 2023 Sportsman of the Year.

Valerie, 17, had an exceptional year, scoring four goals in the second round of the two-legged qualifier match against Angola in the 2024 World Cup qualifier, where Kenya won 10-1 on aggregate.

A fans' favorite, Valerie gives defenders a hard time. She plays as a modern attacker. She is skilled, quick, and because she uses both feet, she can play both on the right and left wings.

She was born in Bungoma County and raised in Murang'a.

How has your football journey been?

I started playing football in Class Seven, inspired by Arsenal winger Bukayo Saka. After my primary school in Murang'a, I began playing for Murang'a Queens football club in the regional league where I nurtured my talent. I followed in the footsteps of my elder brother, defender Philip Makho-ha, who is also a footballer. He plays for Mombasa Olympic Club.

Former Harambee Starlets coach Alex Alu-mirah scouted me from Murang'a and helped me gain admission to Madira Girls High School in 2022 on a scholarship.

That same year, I won the Golden Boot in the Women's Premier League Division One after netting 37 goals in 22 matches. This helped my team Soccer Assassins

Kenya's Valerie Nekesa in action during Rising Starlets' CAF African Qualifiers for the FIFA U20 Women's World Cup match against Angola at Nyayo National Stadium on October 8, 2023.

gain promotion to the top flight women's league.

In the final match of the season against Kimathi Lionesses at Madira Girls in Vihiga County in 2022, I scored 13 goals as we leaped to a 28-0 victory. That is the highest number of goals I have ever scored in a match in my career.

Your team is currently ranked 10th in the league, why do you think your team is struggling to replicate previous performances?

The league is very competitive. In the top-flight league we meet and play against very experienced players, yet our entire team is made up of students of Madira Girls.

Thankfully, we have survived relegation this season. Next season, it will not be business as usual. I'll make sure I score many goals for my team. Our goal is to win the league so that we can represent Kenya in the Confederation of African Football (CAF) competitions.

How important was the SOYA award for you?

I felt great. I wasn't sure I would win the award, as my nomination had come as a surprise, but deep down I knew I was capable of bringing it home. Sharing the stage with world record holders in various disciplines was a dream come true. It was my first award, and it was a confirmation that I am on the right path as far as my football career is concerned.

Nine is your favorite jersey number; why?

Because I play in position nine and seven, as a winger. My role is to challenge the defenders and score goals, and also create scoring chances for my teammates to score.

How do you juggle between your career and school work?

My team mates and I follow a strict schedule where on weekdays, we wake up at 4am, attend morning preps from 5am to 5.40am. We then have breakfast at 7am, and attend classes from 8am to 4pm.

We train from 4pm to 6.30pm daily before breaking for dinner. We then attend evening preps at 8pm before sleeping at 10pm.

On weekends, we retire at 9pm and wake up at 6am. For away games, we depart a day in advance and return the same day after the match to ensure we don't miss any classes.

Which is your favorite meal?

I am from Western Kenya where people enjoy eating ugali. Any food that goes well with ugali is good for me.

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Valerie Nekesa celebrates after scoring a goal during a CAF African Qualifier match against Angola at Nyayo National Stadium on October 8, 2023.

PHOTOS | CHRIS OMOLLO AND SILA KIPLAGAT





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