

A portrait of Fatuma Adan, a woman wearing a white and black patterned headscarf and a green and gold patterned dress. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is a solid orange color.

FATUMA ADAN

The voice of hope in Marsabit

By Lucy Kilalo

The challenges women in her community face overwhelm her at times. But Fatuma Abdulkadir Adan is determined to influence change, however little. A newborn girl child in northern Kenya is rejected from the moment she slides out of her mother's womb. During her lifetime she will be subjected to heavy domestic chores, little, if any, education, female genital mutilation and early marriage to a man usually many years her senior. This notwithstanding, she will be at risk of sexual violence, hunger and malnutrition and internal displacement occasioned by conflicts rife in region around the use of land and water, cattle rustling and severe tribal animosities. This state of affairs is what drives Fatuma, 30, to seek creative ways to ease the lives of fellow women in her community.

The first born in a family of five, Fatuma, was born and brought up in Marsabit where she also went to school. Her determination for success saw her graduate with a degree in law from Moi University. Fatuma later earned a Chevening Fellowship and studied for a certificate in Shariah and governance from the University of Birmingham, in the United Kingdom. She is the founder of Horn of Africa Development Initiative (HODI); a human rights based local nongovernmental organisation (NGO) that seeks to change the lives and livelihoods of her people. HODI is also involved in peace building as well as offering alternative livelihoods to the poor and the marginalised.

But Fatuma's world was not built in a day. Like other women in her community, she still faces the insurmountable challenges; only that she never allows them to put her down. Her challenges keep shifting with the developments in her life. "Being a young, single professional woman is very challenging in my community. The fact that in this part of the world my work is the kind left out for only men does not make matters any better," she says. Today she stands out proud among her people and