



Tribute to Hon. Maina Wanjigi, Founding Chairman of SOS Children's Villages in Kenya

The late Honorable Maina Wanjigi, was a distinguished politician, entrepreneur, and philanthropist. At SOS Children's Villages Kenya, we honor him as our Founder and the longest-serving Chairman of the Board.

Our journey with Maina began in 1970 when he attended an international youth conference in Vienna, Austria, an event he chaired. During a visit to Imst, Austria, he encountered the SOS Children's Village concept, which resonated deeply with his own childhood experiences in rural Kenya. Raised by his paternal grandmother and father after his mother's absence, he empathised with children facing neglect, poverty, and instability.

Struck by the absence of SOS Children's Villages in Africa, despite their success across Europe, Asia, and Latin America, Maina Wanjigi saw an opportunity. He was acutely aware of the social transformations sweeping across Africa, eroding traditional family structures that historically cared for orphans. Urbanization and rising individualism reshaped societal norms, challenging the cohesive fabric that once supported vulnerable community members.

In 1971, Maina initiated the first SOS Children's Village program on the continent. With support from SOS Children's Villages International Founder Dr. Hermann Gmeiner, Secretary General Dr. H. Reinprecht, Deputy Secretary General Dr. Egon Hofreiter, Austrian Ambassador Dr. Georg Reisch, and dedicated colleagues from Germany, Denmark, Holland, and Norway, construction commenced on the inaugural children's village in Nairobi's Buruburu area in 1972. By 1973, this visionary endeavor welcomed its first children into 16 family houses, providing a nurturing environment for up to 150 children.

During his 27-year tenure as Chairman of SOS Children's Villages Kenya from 1972 to 1999, Maina Wanjigi oversaw remarkable growth and expansion. Additional villages were established in Mombasa in 1979 and Eldoret in 1990, each with 12 family houses. Under his leadership, Hermann Gmeiner kindergartens and schools in Nairobi, Mombasa, and Eldoret were founded, alongside the Nairobi vocational and technical training center.

The seed planted by Maina Wanjigi in the early 1970s profoundly impacted over six thousand children, transforming their lives in ways that transcended imagination. Many of these children grew to become pivotal figures in Kenya, the region, and beyond, embodying the enduring legacy of Maina's vision and compassion.

Through the creation of jobs for SOS mothers, caregivers, staff, teachers, and instructors, Maina not only provided employment opportunities but also prevented countless family separations, ensuring stability and continuity for vulnerable children. His legacy extended beyond statistics or material monuments—it resided in the fabric of countless lives woven together through love, care, and opportunity.



As we bid farewell to Maina Wanjigi, we are reminded of the countless hearts he touched during his 92 years on this earth. His immortality lives on through SOS Children's Villages Kenya, a living testament to his unwavering commitment to children and community.

In Maina's story, we find inspiration and hope for a future where every child has the chance to thrive and contribute meaningfully to society.

In the words of Maina Wanjigi himself, "All good men and women must take responsibility to create legacies that will elevate future generations beyond our imagination."

Rest in eternal peace, Chairman. Your legacy continues to guide and inspire us all.

Ms. Susan Kiama
Board Chairperson
SOS Children's Villages in Kenya.

Walter S Odhiambo,
National Director,
SOS Children's Villages in Kenya.