



Jamii Thabiti

Towards a safe and secure Kenya

Tapping into wisdom of elders for peace and security

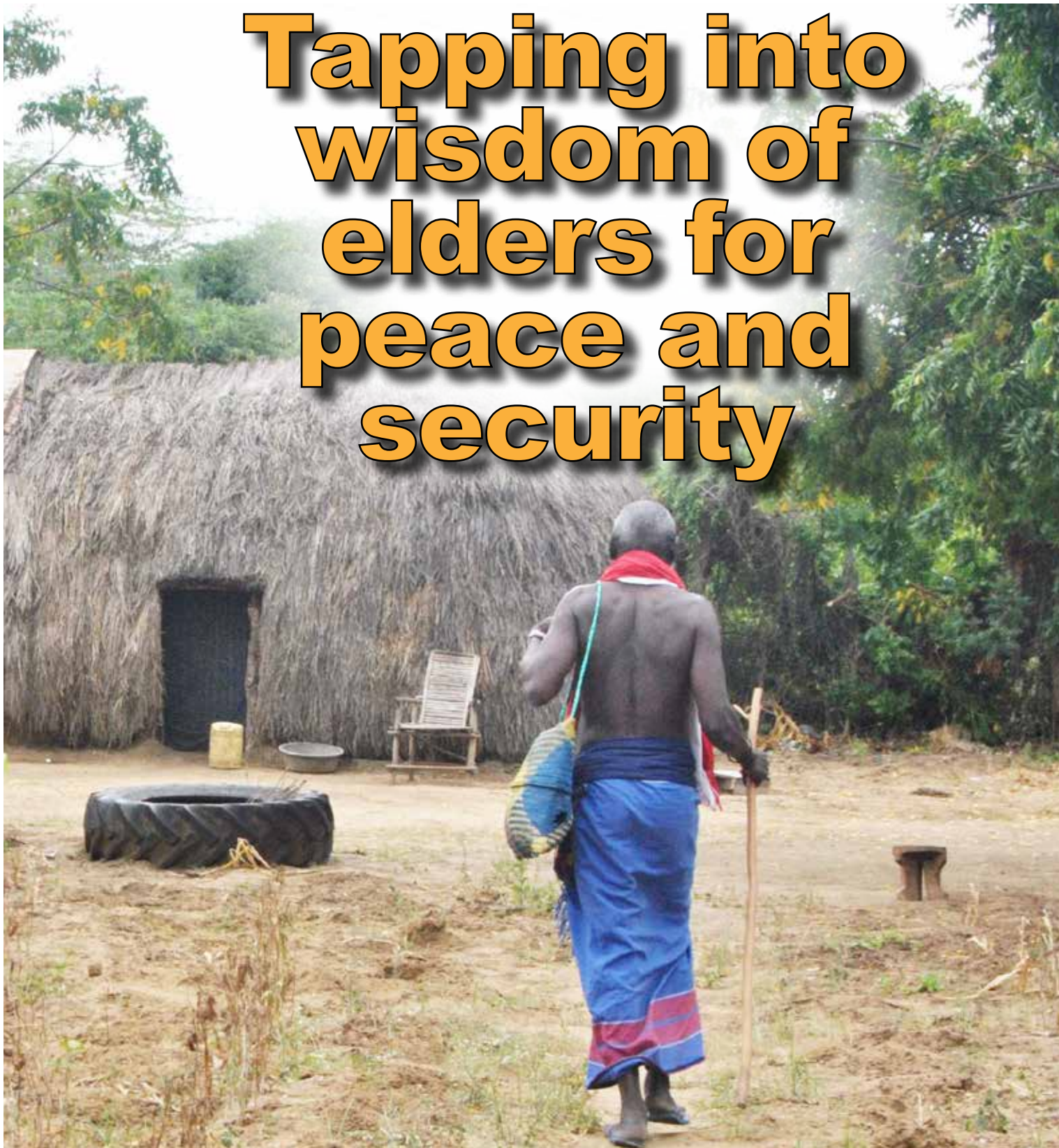
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Red flag raised over reorganising of militia groups in Mt Elgon



About the Jamii Thabiti Programme

The Jamii Thabiti Programme is about improving community security and safety. It intends to reduce levels of criminal violence, inter-communal violence and violence against women and girls by working with authorities, service providers and civil society organisations at national and county levels.

The Programme will build on the achievements of improved legislation and police accountability as well as new peace and security architecture at the county level. It will provide a more people-centred, long-term approach to peacebuilding, police reform and community security.

International support

Jamii Thabiti Programme is being supported by the United Kingdom through the Department for International Development (DFID). It is being implemented by Coffey International in partnership with 30 organisations working closely with the Government of Kenya, including both national and county level institutions.

Objective of the Programme

Jamii Thabiti will ensure a measureable improvement in the ability of national and county level institutions to tackle violence against women and girls, crime and inter-communal conflict, resulting in improved safety and security institutions at the national level and in eight counties of Kisumu, Bungoma, Kilifi, Kwale, Nakuru, Baringo, Wajir and Mandera.

The anticipated programme results include effective response to conflict and insecurity; improved policing; reduced gender based violence and better crime statistics.

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A Chonyi religious leader addressing a meeting organised by the Coast Interfaith Council of Clerics to address the border dispute between Chonyi and Kauma communities. PHOTO: COURTESY OF CICC

Council of Clerics leads team of elders in resolving border conflict

BY JAMII THABITI WRITER

The conflict over the Ngombeni–Vyambani boundary that lies between the Chonyi and Kauma communities has been going on for almost 30 years.

Going as far back as 1988 when the Electoral Commission of Kenya was drawing out constituency boundaries and Bahati was hived off Ganze Constituency, the two communities have known no peace. The fact that the electoral body changed the traditional boundary has remained a bone of contention and the two communities have been at loggerheads ever since. The protracted conflict that has seen no end

on sight even after the Coast Regional Commissioner Nelson Marwa promised that the national government was going to mediate and bring the issue to a peaceful conclusion.

Promoting reconciliation

However, with the Jamii Thabiti Programme of improving community security and dealing with inter-ethnic conflict, a small light is shining at the end of the tunnel.

Coast Interfaith Council of Clerics (CICC), a Jamii Thabiti partner working in Kilifi County is trying to bring the two communities together to bring to an end the protracted

conflict.

The Coast Interfaith Council of Clerics has conducted various activities through Jamii Thabiti Programme with the aim of improving communities’ capacities in addressing inter-communal conflicts.

“Some of these interventions have been geared towards addressing the inter-ethnic conflict between the Chonyi and Kauma communities over the Ngombeni–Vyambani boundary,” says Mary Mwangi, a Programme Manager at the Coast Interfaith Council of Clerics. She explains: “The conflict was previously directed to governmental institutions for resolution without much success.”

Voice of reason

“The conflict has raised a lot of concerns both at the county and the national level hence Coast Interfaith Council of Clerics was given the responsibility of ensuring that this matter is resolved using the inter-ethnic dialogue strategy,” says Mwangi. She adds: “The religious leaders are taking a leading role in this process so as to be the voice of reason to their communities as they strive to see this matter resolved.”

The forums target elders from both communities but have brought on board youth and women to be part of the conflict resolving process.

“Through these on-going deliberations, the elders agreed to nominate a few of the council members to sit in the dialogue forums together with religious leaders, women and youth as well as civil society organisations working in the area and ward administrators in resolving the matter,” explains Mwangi. She notes: “This team will act as the steering committee for all the processes until the matter is resolved.”

A series of dialogue forums are expected to be held which will be a build-up of one activity to the other for the purposes of maintaining momentum until a lasting result is achieved. **JT**



One of the elders giving his views on the Mabanga Peace Agreement at KIE Hall as others listen keenly in a meeting hosted by Jamii Thabiti partners among other key stakeholders in Bungoma County. PHOTO: COURTESY OF COMMUNITY FOR DEVELOPMENT SUSTAINABILITY

Alternative dispute resolution: Solution to peaceful coexistence

BY JANE GODIA

In 2008 as Kenya was rewriting its constitution, the role of elders in alternative dispute resolution was raised.

Parliament discussed the importance of elders as people who make up the informal governance systems and structures work in communities across the country.

One Member of Parliament stated: “Elders are important and cannot be ignored because they resolve all conflicts in the villages and within the community. In parts where there are no police stations or courts, elders are the custodians of law.”

He reiterated: “They are the ones who do

mediation, peace keeping and resolve issues that exist at that level. They play a critical role in peace building, mediation and conflict resolution.”

Voice of the community

It's these elders from every village that end up forming the Council of Elders within communities where they belong. They are viewed as custodians of culture and voice of the community, hence seen as the ones with the wisdom to guide the people and have the ability to advice on how society or a particular people should live.

The Council of Elders has an upper hand in resolving disputes that occur within

communities where they live. In Kenya, the Council of Elders have been known to intervene with success where there has been an impasse especially one that threatens peace and security. They use Alternative Dispute Resolution mechanisms as enshrined in the Constitution for negotiation and mediation but use cultural appendages.

It's for this reason, that the Jamii Thabiti Programme partners have included Council of Elders as an important constituency who must be roped in when addressing community safety and security.

Emmanuel Were, a programme officer with **PAGE 5>>**

<< **FROM PAGE 4**the Community for Development Sustainability, a Jamii Thabiti downstream partner in Bungoma County, says they are working with councils of elders through the Problem Driven Interactive Approach to address issues of peace and security in the region.

“There are a lot of issues underground that threaten peace and security in Bungoma County. We are engaging elders from the five major communities in the county to come up with an agreement that will see sustainable peace prevail,” explains Were.

The five dominant communities in Bungoma include the Bukusu, Tachoni, Sabaot, Teso and Batura. The political affiliations in the country, especially during this electioneering period have seen divisions leading to heightened tension in the county.

Political dynamics

In relation to the two coalitions that are dominant, the Sabaot have been seen to be leaning towards Jubilee while all the others communities are pro-NASA.

“These political dynamics cannot be underestimated because already the Sabaot are calling to cede from the larger Bungoma County. Mapped by for constituencies, the Sabaot want to come up with their own county,” says Were.

He explains: “Through our meeting which is a build up to the Mabanga Peace Accord of 2011, we agreed on a social contract on how to come up with solutions and a memorandum.”

In December 2016, Community for Development Sustainability, Rural Women Peace Link and Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, who are Jamii Thabiti downstream partners as well as Free Pentecostal Fellowship in Kenya (FPFK), Agency for Corporation and Research Development (ACCORD), National Steering Committee for Peace Building



Emmanuel Were, Programme officer at Community for Development Sustainability has been at the forefront in getting the elders from Bungoma to reassess the Mabanga Peace Agreement. PHOTO: GEORGE NGESA

and Conflict Management came together to reinforce implementation of the Mabanga Peace Agreement. They noted that the devolved system of governance under the new constitution was threatening peace by creating a new type of human-resource based conflict.

Were notes: “There are fears and suspicions among the Sabaots who feel left out in the new political dispensation and note that jobs are not equitably distributed among the communities in Bungoma.”

Common agenda

The consortium called for the county government and assembly in Bungoma and Trans Nzoia to pursue a common agenda that would celebrate diversity and promote intra and inter-ethnic peaceful co-existence and cohesion.

In a statement they said: “We are seeking political goodwill and support from the governors of Bungoma and Trans Nzoia counties by having them append their signatures on the social contract in good faith as a sign of commitment to the peace and cohesion agenda.”

The Mabanga Peace Agreement is an important Alternative Dispute Resolution mechanism and will only work if the elders charged with ensuring its implementation avoid taking partisan position. Currently it's noted that elders and key players in the discussions and negotiations for the Mabanga Peace agreement have become partisan and politicised an otherwise noble alternative dispute resolution mechanism and a model for negotiated democracy that would have worked well for the communities in Bungoma ad neighbouring Trans Nzoia counties.

The success of the Mabanga Peace Agreement lies in political and social goodwill of the communities and county governments. The elders must also be trained in mediation skills which they lack, networking, arbitration, early warning system, reporting procedures for complaints, disputes and conflicts. They also need skills building on conflict prevention, conflict management, conflict resolution, conflict transformation and peace building. JT

Council of elders challenged to protect women and girls



Winnie Ogot, during the training for Luo Council of Elders organised in Kisumu County by the Gender Technical Working Group. PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE GENDER TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP

BY JANE GODIA

The Luo Council of Elders are the custodians of law and culture within the community. While many are male dominated the Luo Council of Elders has incorporated women.

The elders give directions on matter relating to the members and often intercede where things are bound to affect unity.

Some of the areas where the Luo Council of Elders has intervened and made a mark in defending widows and orphans on matters of succession and wife inheritance.

In recognition of their noble standing in the community, Gender Technical Working Group, which is a Jamii Thabiti partner in Kisumu County, recognised this role noting that they have an influence in dealing with management and prevention of violence against women and girls.

Incest is an abomination

Kisumu County has been noted to have many cases of violence against women and girls with defilement and incest being in the lead. However, according to Luo traditions and cultural practices it's an abomination for father or uncle to have carnal knowledge of a daughter or niece.

It against this backdrop that the Gender Technical Working Group held a two day sensitisation meeting with the Luo Council of Elders to find ways in which the community could deal with cases of violence against women and girls.

The Jamii Thabiti Programme has identified elders as goodwill ambassadors in addressing violence against women and girls because they can help change perceptions towards the vice.

The Programme is hence building the capacity of the council elders to enable them use existing statutory laws to arrive at resolutions and allow for those whose redress is not enough to use judicial systems.

Speaking at the training for **PAGE 7>>**

Council of elders challenged top protect women and girls

<< FROM PAGE 6

the Luo Council of Elders, Betty Okero of the CSO-Network said Jamii Thabiti recognized the crucial role that they could play towards ending violence against women and girls. She noted the value and importance of elders, religious leaders and women coming together in one voice to talk about peace and condemn violence.

Okero noted: “Although the Luo Council of Elders does not have as much authority as they did in the past, they have the responsibility of working towards regaining the respect they have lost over the years.” She challenged the elders to be honest in solving issues and avoiding politicising the institution which had led to them losing part of the standing they had in the community.

“The objective of this training is to enable us find ways of protecting women and girls against violence at the community level as well as strengthen the Council of Elders to perform its mandate,” said Okero.

The elders were taken through the Luo traditional practices in reference to their mandate. They were also taken through what entails harmful traditional practices, definition of gender, difference between gender and sex, changing gender roles, gender based violence and women’s rights. They were also able to talk about the changing gender roles in modern society and the role they can play in shaping the younger generation.

The elders were told that widows suffer most in cases of disinheritance especially pertaining to land. There was need for the Council of Elders to take care of widows and children and to safeguard their rights.

Jacqueline Ingutiah, an advocate of the High Court took elders through the legal frameworks that included the bill of rights, Children’s Act, Extraterritorial Offences Act, Matrimonial Property Act, Sexual Offences Act, Protection Against Domestic Violence



Dorothy Awino, a member of the Luo Council of Elders, during the training organised in Kisumu County by the Gender Technical Working Group.
PHOTO: COURTESY OF GENDER TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP

Act and the Succession Act. She said: “All cultural structures in place must conform to the Constitution and respect human rights” She encouraged the elders to try and solve succession cases and disputes on communal land out of court. However, she told them that rape, defilement and incest are criminal offences which must be sorted out in court.

Harmful practices prohibited

Ingutiah made them elders understand that the Constitution prohibits harmful cultural practices like female genital mutilation, child marriage, wife inheritance and widow cleansing among others. She challenged them about protecting women and girls from all forms of abuse.

On community response and protection, prevention and accountability, the council of elders explored the different structures in place that can support their work.

In the end, it was agreed that for the Luo Council of Elders to be effective, there are various things that must be put in place to end violence against women and girls. **JT**

- 1. There is need for the council to talk to the youth and children to provide guidance on what is right or wrong.**
- 2. Elders should do away with bad or retrogressive cultural practices such as widow cleansing and wife inheritance which are also forms of violence against women.**
- 3. There is a need to revive community advisory and traditional teaching sessions organised by elders to help impart positive knowledge to the youth and adolescents as well as the entire community.**
- 4. Elders need to adopt alternative dispute resolution mechanisms since not all matters should go to court.**

How Zeinab Ali carved her niche mediating conflict in Mandera and Wajir

BY ABJATA KHALIF

Aroving peace ambassador at large for communities in North Eastern Kenya, Zeinab Ali played crucial roles in midwifing peace deals and bringing warring communities together in Wajir and Mandera.

She is among the few Somali women from Northern Kenya who joined women from Wajir led by late peace trailblazer Dekha Ibrahim in pursuing conservative clan elders and convincing them to join peace activities spearheaded by women peace activists.

Their action led to community members like youth, girls and women joining ranks with women peace ambassador and activists in forcing elders to drop their conservative position and joining peace quest that led to signing of Al-Fatah Peace Accord.

Women's role in peace building

The agreement defined peace activities in northern Kenya and brought women to the centre of peace efforts in the region and beyond as is enshrined in the United Nations Security Resolution 1325. The landmark security resolution recognises the important role that women play in peace keeping and peace building efforts.

Ali played crucial role in mediating peace

between warring Ajuran and Degodia communities in Wajir County that led to permanent ceasefire agreement signed between the warring clans who were fighting over a strip of land situated between Wajir North and Eldas constituencies of Wajir County.

End to conflict

She also played lead role in pacifying a violent situation between two Somali clans of Murule and Garreh in Mandera County. The two clans were fighting over a watering point with each clan illegally procuring a cache of arms from neighbouring Somalia and even hiring militias from across the border to assist them claim their position and in the inter clan strife.

Ali has spent many years trying to end clan conflicts in her native Garissa County, and her efforts are bearing fruit.

Tired of the numerous armed conflicts in Northern Kenya where youthful tribal militias roam; stealing, pillaging and disrupting movement of people and goods, she decided that this must come to a stop.

She began by mobilising women from the various clans and together they crafted a way of engaging the warring communities and bringing them to the



Zeinab Ali, is a peace ambassador who has gone through all the
 ABJATA KHALIF



I participated in the radio programme and reminded the community how women came forward and brought a solution to conflict when elders were fanning violence and the youth were used in causing bloodbath. This helped in ensuring they were articulate issues affecting northern Kenya

— ZEINAB ALI, PEACE AMBASSADOR



...e counties in northern Kenya pacifying violent situations. PHOTO:

“ The agreement defined peace activities in northern Kenya and brought women to the centre of peace efforts in the region and beyond as is enshrined in the United Nations Security Resolution 1325. The landmark security resolution recognises the important role that women play in peace keeping and peace building efforts.

peace negotiating table where issues that fanned conflicts were ironed out.

“It was difficult bringing them together because even the women were abusing and accusing each other. I decided to focus on the fact that their sons were dying and hence the urgency to stop the madness,” says Ali who is also the chairperson of the peace committee.

Before such interventions, there was no solution to the conflicts as each clan supported and armed its militia making peace-making efforts difficult, with elders playing the role of instigators rather than being peace makers and mediators.

Formation of peace building committees

Once they were mobilised, the women from the warring clans decided they would be meeting once a day during which time they would come up with ideas to bring the warring sides together. They formed an inter-communal women peace building committee that would engage the community and reaching out to the armed youths who were waging a bloody conflict.

“I knew that if I talked to the women from the various clans, we would find a solution despite the differences and grudges that were fuelling the violence,” explains Ali.

She managed to convince the women to help stop the violence by demobilizing armed youth and leave outstanding issues to a broader committee that would be formed by the two warring clans.

Empowering women through radio

Ali got an opportunity to participate in radio programmes to empower women and youth because she knew the influence of the two constituencies.

“I know the potential held by women and youth. I participated in the radio programme and reminded the community how women came forward and brought a solution to conflict when elders were fanning violence and the youth were used in causing bloodbath,” explains Ali. “This helped in shaping public opinion and ensuring they were engaged in political leadership at county and National Assembly to articulate issues affecting northern Kenya.”

Ali notes that the cultural system ignored them when they were searching for peace and only participated in the peace talks when communities endorsed the peace process spearheaded by women.

“They were forced to support the peace process after seeing immense community support towards the women led process,” says Ali.

She reiterates: “We want women to learn from the women-led peace process.” Ali’s efforts to bring peace may be undermined by the fact that some of the youth used as combatants during armed conflict cannot continue with their education due to lack of school fees.

Education key to ending radicalisation

She says bursaries are not reaching needy cases which undermine their purpose. A lot of poor but bright students are wasting away in the villages yet the government has provided money for such cases.

She notes that only through social justice can some of the problems facing the region such as armed conflicts, be eradicated. **JT**

Kilifi County to establish one stop centre for child violation cases

BY LIZ MAKHUNGU

Plans are underway to have KSh10 million Child Protection Unit constructed Kilifi County.

The Child Protection Centre will be the place for children who have been violated to go to and they will be able to get counselling, medication and legal redress.

County Director of Children Affairs George Migosi said the KSh10 million project undertaken by Plan International will be a one stop centre equipped with facilities to address issues related to violation of children.

“The construction of the centre will take six months to complete and the contractor is already on site. The facility has been donated to us by Plan International in efforts towards addressing the plight of boys and girls who have faced any form of physical or sexual abuse,” explained Migosi.

One stop shop for children

The Child Protection Unit will have desks for the police, medical and legal officers to enable timely action taken on cases that are reported.

“We are optimistic that this problem will get proper redress which has not been there over the years,” he said.

The assistance from Plan has been noted as timely taking into consideration the soaring number of child violation cases that have been received by the children’s office within the last one year.

“Between June last year and June this year, we have recorded 7,678 cases of child abuse with child negligence by the parents topping the category of abuses,” he said.

Statistics at the County Children’s Office show that child negligence is still a big problem in the county as it forms 70 percent of all child abuse cases.

“We had a total of 4,091 cases of child negligence, with Malindi Sub-county leading with the number of cases that have been



The Gender Desk at Kilifi Police Station. Plans are underway for Kilifi County to have a one stop centre for dealing with child violation cases. PHOTO: JANE GODIA

reported. It had a total of 2,134 cases that were reported compared to Rabai Sub-county which had the least reported cases at 134 cases,” explained Migosi.

He termed the high number of reported cases in Malindi as a breakthrough since the community has broken the silence. This means progress is being made on efforts to address child abuse.

Alarm raised

However, Migosi raised alarm over the number of underage sexual abuse cases and reiterated that the community must also speak out about these cases.

“For the last one year, we recorded 89 cases of child marriages, 321 cases of defilement and 182 cases of child pregnancy. Ganze topped with 48 cases of child pregnancy followed by Malindi which had 44 cases,” Migosi said.

Malindi topped the list of sub-counties with the highest number of defilement cases where it had recorded 120 cases by June. Malindi and Magarini topped with 20 cases of early marriages.

Soaring number of cases

He said poverty and child neglect by parents was the reason the county continued to record a soaring number of abuses. He also pointed out that boda boda riders were still a hindrance to efforts to end the problem and called on the community in Kilifi to take charge of the situation.

“Hardly a day passes by without a case of child pregnancy being reported. Underage children are becoming young mothers and fathers in a trend that is worrying,” said Migosi. He added: “This can only be solved through a people centred approach.”

Kilifi County police commander Waciira Mathenge called on the community to support police efforts in addressing cases of child abuse.

“Remember every police station has a gender and children’s desk where we capture these cases. We need the community at large to support us as we pursue these cases,” Mathenge said.

He also noted the challenge where witnesses fail to appear in court. “For this reason many cases are thrown out by the courts for lack of evidence.” **JT**



Girls remain most vulnerable to sexual violence including from boys who the law defines as children making access to justice a challenge. PHOTO JOYCE CHIMBI

Law at a crossroads in child to child sexual violence

BY JOYCE CHIMBI

When Teddy Ngige* was taken to court for having sex with a minor, the girl's family had every reason to believe it would be an open and shut case, after all, Julia Mweni* was only 15 while Ngige was 17 years old.

However, the case came with many twists and turns as Mweni stood by her 'boyfriend' claiming to love him and even threatening to commit suicide if anything bad happened to him.

Fearing that the girl might make true her threats, the case was withdrawn. However, this is not a unique case as there are many cases of child to child sexual abuse. But even where the case has not been withdrawn, challenges abound on how to address cases of children who have engaged in consensual sexual.

Mweni's story was told during a recent workshop held by the African Woman and

Child (AWC) Feature Service for journalists based in Nairobi under the Jamii Thabiti Programme.

"Mweni's case is one among many. We are having a major crisis in our courts today in instances where children are in conflict with the law," said Mary Njeri, a lawyer present during the training.

Crimes committed by minors

Children in conflict with the law are those under 18 years who come into contact with the justice system. Most of the crimes committed by minors are known as 'status offences' and are not considered criminal when committed by adults such as engaging in sexual activity.

Njeri was training on the Magnitude and Extent of Violence against Women and Girls as well as the legal and policy responses in place to address these crimes. When the court is confronted by cases whereby both parties are of the

same age as in the case of Ngige and Mweni, this is considered defilement and often the boy takes the blame even where he might be younger than the girl.

This has prompted some quarters to change the narrative and to ensure that it is not a guarantee that the sword will fall on the boy.

There are petitions in court to ensure that in cases of defilement among children, it is not necessarily automatic that the boy takes the blame, but the older among the two children should take responsibility.

Contradiction in law

During the training, issues of defilement took centre stage as journalists queried a seeming contradiction between law and policy when addressing the issue of children in conflict with the law.

Statistics by the Centre for the Study of Adolescents indicate the mean age of sexual debut as 12 years yet Section 8 and 11 of the Sexual Offences Act criminalizes consensual sex between children.

The Penal Code is categorically clear that sexual knowledge of those under the age of 18 years is a crime. However, the National Sexual and Reproductive Health Policy 2015 seeks to provide access to contraceptives for adolescents.

"Policy cannot supersede existing law, a policy though crucial is an expression of desire, a strong recommendation and that is why policies can be very long even 30 pages from which just one section of law can be derived," Njeri explained. She added: "A policy can only succeed where a law in that specific issue does not exist."

Njeri advised the journalists to do due diligence in addressing these cases while also noting that increased coverage of such issues can significantly contribute to creating awareness that sustainable solutions are needed. **JT**



Women peace builders and other activists campaigning against violent extremism in Wajir County. PHOTO: ABJATA KHALIF

Women peace builders countering violent extremism

BY ABJATA KHALIF

Northern Kenya has borne the brunt of violent extremism with blood thirsty terrorists targeting important infrastructure and strategic areas where they intend to register mass casualties and deaths.

A case in point is the attack targeting vehicles plying the Mandera-Wajir route where terrorists hijacked vehicle before ordering passengers to identify themselves based on their religious belief.

In the ensuing callous act they killed several innocent people and ordered other passengers to board the bus and leave.

Wajir is the first county in Kenya to use a new model of women engaging conservative cultural system in bringing peace and making community appreciate the role of women in peace making and negotiations.

Such attacks have been experienced in other towns like Garissa where terrorists targeted Garissa University College and killed 142 students in an incident that left

many others traumatised.

In Mandera town, non-locals have been attacked twice in incidents that left several young men dead.

Experiences differ

However, such gory attacks have not been registered in Wajir County which also shares the border with Somalia and Ethiopia. Wajir security situation indicates they have experienced small scale terrorist attacks.

Local security agents and development experts attribute this situation to the robust community **PAGE 13 >>**

Women in peacebuilders countering violent extremism in Wajir

<<**FROM PAGE 12** policing coupled with coordinated multi-stakeholder approach toward addressing violent extremism. The local administration has been at the forefront of supporting local actions and solutions to security problems.

The new concept brought together all players and actors in the local development, social, economic and administrative sphere into one pool where they shared ideas, plans and review actions. They also incorporated public opinion on way to address the problem and ensuring the new national strategy to addressing violent extremism are in compatible with local responses and community involvement.

Peace building skills

Part of the game changer in all this is the involvement of women in countering violent extremism with the local stakeholders borrowing a lot of thoughts, ideas and entry points from past success initiated by women peace builders in bringing together warring communities that had been engaged in prolonged inter clan-blood bath.

The Wajir Women Peacebuilder's effort was heavily borrowed by the local government administration as a new entry point to mobilising and rallying communities in war against terror and radicalisation.

Women peacebuilders' skills in community negotiation, discussions, reconciliation, mobilisation and advocacy as well as uniting various clans was used as core value and rapid response mechanism in bringing communities together in cutting local terror cells.

“The Wajir concept of fighting violent extremism has proven that communities and women can play a leading role in countering violent extremism and stopping terrorist attacks in towns that share the border with Somalia.”

— AMRAN ABDUNDI, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF FRONTIER INDIGENOUS NETWORK,

“The Wajir concept of fighting violent extremism has proven that communities and women can play a leading role in countering violent extremism and stopping terrorist attacks in towns that share the border with Somalia,” said Amran Abdundi, Executive Director of Frontier Indigenous Network, a women led organisation operating in Wajir County. She noted: “We have received many delegations from neighbouring counties and most of them are from Nyumba Kumi Initiatives and women's groups who want to replicate the concept in their respective counties facing terrorist threats.”

Wajir is the first county in Kenya to use a new model of women engaging conservative cultural system in bringing peace and making community appreciate the role of women in peace making and negotiations.

The idea was brought up by a group of women who met at the local residence of the late peacemaker Dekha Ibrahim. They evaluated various option of bringing warring clans who were engaging in inter-clan strife that threatened to wipe out thousands of people as there were no

reconciliation efforts.

The elders from both warring sides closed hope for negotiations with their nemesis as each clan raised substantial resources in procuring high grade weapons from neighbouring Somalia in settling their inter-clan differences.

The peace builders came up with ideas of bringing together women from warring clans and rallying youths behind their aspiration which worked out successfully as elders felt isolated and left with only armed youths.

Women decided to pick a second strategy of engaging the armed youths by taking their mothers to the frontline and persuading them to leave conflict zones and join other community members.

These efforts worked well as elders felt more isolated after losing their strategic asset which is that of armed youth. Some liberal elders joined the women led peace bandwagon forcing the conservative ones to call for major clan meetings and announcing their readiness to negotiate peace.

Efforts replicated

The same effort has been replicated and put into practice by various local, national, regional and international peace delegations and actors.

With the latest ground breaking involvement of women peacebuilders and their skills sets in fighting violent extremism and radicalisation, the new concept might be an international game changer that could be borrowed by global actors and communities. **JT**

Breaking the silence on violence key for partners



Jamii Thabiti partners discussing how they can highlight issues of violence through various media channels. PHOTO: GEORGE NGESA

BY ODHIAMBO ORLALE

Giving visibility to violence issues remains the biggest challenge facing Jamii Thabiti downstream partners in Bungoma County.

This emerged at a workshop on building communication and advocacy skills of organisations and groups working around violence against women and girls on how to use various communication and media channels to give visibility on various forms of violence and to demand for accountability.

Jamii Thabiti partners in Bungoma included Catholic, Justice and Peace Commission (CJPC), Rural Women Peace Link (RWPL) and Community Development and Sustainable Organisation (CDSO). They were joined by the National Steering Committee for Peace Building and Conflict Management.

They noted that despite challenges they had in some instances established a cordial working relationship with local media houses.

Emmanuel Were from Community Development and Sustainability Organisation, they have a contract with Mukhwano FM, a

local radio station, through which they are allocated one hour every week to discuss topical issues with a focus on violence against women and girls as well as peace and security.

Said Were: “We deal with emerging issues and have held several meetings with elders from the different communities in Bungoma County on peace and security. We use a problem-driven approach to address these issues.” He added: “We also intended to meet the Luo Council of Elders but had to change at the last minute and instead focused on the Mabanga Peace Accord where we engaged the elders from within Bungoma County on issues that are boiling underground.”

Elders from the major ethnic communities — Bukusu, Sabaot, Tachoni, Batura and Teso — had signed the Mabanga Peace Agreement which Jamii Thabiti partners are now using to address issues of peace and security that are emerging.

Following the August 8 General Election, some Sabaot elders felt that they had been side-lined as a community and wanted to secede to form their own county.

Communication and media channels Conventional Channels

a. Print and Electronic Media

1. Newspaper
2. Magazine
3. Journals
4. Charts
5. IEC materials such as Banners, Fliers, stickers, T-shirts, Billboards/
6. Publications/ TV stations in Bungoma
 - West TV.
 - Tandao
 - TV Magharibi
- Radio Stations in Bungoma
 - West FM
 - Radio Mambo
 - Nyota FM
 - Elgon Youth Radio
 - Radio Mukwano
 - BK Radio
 - Sulwe FM

b. Social media

1. WhatsApp
 2. Twitter
 3. Instagram
 4. Facebook
 5. Imo
- ### Community channels
1. Chiefs baraza
 2. Funerals ceremonies
 3. Sports
 4. Elders forums
 5. Council of elders meeting
 6. Religious ceremonies
 7. Family gatherings
 8. Women chama meetings

However, intervention from the Community Development and Sustainability saw them change their mind and agree to meet at the peace negotiation table.

Kinuthia Mbatia from Kimilili District Peace Committee noted that while mainstream media was good at giving visibility to peace and security issues, their obsession with politicians at the expense of other news sources could be blamed for fanning tension.

Vincent Omuonyin, Bungoma County Coordinator for the National Steering Committee on Peace Building and Conflict Management said their work gets complicated when police focus on dealing with demonstrations instead of their core business of providing security to the public.

Said Omuonyin: “There are cases of insecurity in Bungoma County but which are not getting the correct visibility because police are not providing information.”

At the end of the training, the partners noted various communication channels they can use to give visibility to issues of violence. **JT**



Mt Elgon sub-county where it is said that more than 40 militia groups are hiding posing a challenge of insecurity in the entire Bungoma County. PHOTO: GEORGE NGESA

Red flag raised over reorganising of militia groups in Mt Elgon

BY JANE GODIA

With heightened tensions within the current electioneering period, so has insecurity increased. In Bungoma County, the once subdued militia groups are on the rise and fears prevail within the community especially in areas that border Uganda such as Mt Elgon region.

According to Edwin Kilong, a former peace monitor in Bungoma County and a member of the Kimilili District Peace Committee, there are over 42 militia gangs in the county with majority thriving in the Mt Elgon region.

Kilong who was speaking during a training for Jamii Thabiti Partners on Communication and Media Skills on how they can give visibility to violence issues organised by Africa Woman and Child (AWC) Features.



“Cases in Mt Elgon have created an alarm because militia gangs are regrouping and these are said to be politically motivated,”

— VINCENT OMUONYIN, REGIONAL COORDINATOR OF THE NATIONAL STEERING COMMITTEE FOR PEACE BUILDING AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

He said: “These militia gangs are lethal as they are armed with adequate assorted rifles that pose a challenge to the community.”

Vincent Omuonyin, Regional Coordinator of the National Steering Committee for Peace Building and Conflict Management, noted that the political demonstrations that have been taking place in the county and country at large have seen an increase to criminal activities. “Cases in Mt Elgon have created an alarm because militia gangs are regrouping and these are said to be politically motivated,” said Omuonyin noting that crime in Mt Elgon is a major problem and they have received reports of killings, attacks or robberies from the region.

Mercy Jerop of Rural women’s Empowerment Link noted that regrouping of militia in Mt Elgon is an issue of concern. She said: “Women are being accused of harbouring criminals and even keeping the gun for their sons and husbands.”

“Police are more concerned about quelling riots than dealing with other criminal activities or handling cases of violence against women and girls,” said Omuonyin. He added: “Insecurity leaves women and their dependants vulnerable. When a gang attacks a home, the man flees leaving behind the woman and children.” There have been allegations of rape and defilement taking place in Mt Elgon. However Omuonyin noted during this time of heightened political tension access to information is a challenge.”

Kinuthia Mbatia, Secretary of the Kimilili District Peace Committee said people are being threatened as per the outcome of the election results. “They are four constituencies in Bungoma that are being targeted and residents are being accused of betraying the community.

He notes: “People call the administration asking for amnesty in relations to arms and ammunition while in actual effect they just hand over the old guns and keep the new ones.” JT

Know Jamii Thabiti Programme Partners

This is a programme being implemented in Kenya with about 30 local organisations on board. In every Issue, we will be profiling partner organizations. In this issue, we profile the following partner:

Reproductive Health Youth Friendly and Environmental Conservation (RHYFE)

Founded in 2011, Reproductive Health Youth Friendly and Environmental Conservation (RHYFE) is based in Nakuru County.

The organisation was established to respond to the needs of the community and youth.

Within the Jamii Thabiti Programme, the focus areas include addressing violence against women and girls (VAWG) and networking with Jamii Thabiti partners in mitigating criminal and inter-communal violence.

RHYFE's activities are in Nakuru and Baringo counties working with four police stations within each county identified during the baseline survey conducted by the Jamii Thabiti.

In Nakuru RHYFE is supporting the Nakuru Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) cluster monthly meetings to advocate for the implementation of existing laws and policies as well as develop an action plan to mitigate GBV in the county. It has also held sensitization meetings for students in four secondary schools to enhance their skills in responding to violence.

RHYFE has also facilitated an inclusive community dialogue to address violence

against women and girls in the county. It has conducted quarterly community awareness raising forums on violence against women and girls.

In Baringo County, RHYFE worked on emergency election response during the electioneering. It also conducted capacity building for police officers who man gender desks to strengthen their skills on handling cases, counselling and referral mechanisms. There have also been sensitization forums to educate the community on the effects of violence against women and girls.

Within the short period that RHYFE has implemented the Jamii Thabiti Programme, there are a few notable achievements that include building the capacity of gender desk police officers to strengthen their capacity on handling cases, counselling and referral mechanisms. It has been able to train 30 participants — 12 female and 18 male — in relation to this. Through collaboration and skills building RHYFE notes that the Kenya Police through the sub-county offices and gender desks are now more conversant with following up on cases that are reported to ensure justice for survivors.

In collaboration with the Ministry of Health through service delivery points police officers manning gender desks ensure survivors are treated, counselled and cases referred for further investigation. Ministry of health and the police are also ensuring that evidence is properly preserved and protected.

The police officer have also reported incidence where the survivor have been given protection as provided by the law.

RHYFE has held a sensitization forum 300 — 234 female and 66 male — to educate the communities on the effects of violence against women and girls which

was conducted around the four police stations of Eldama Ravine, Marigat, Kabarnet and Nginyang.

Three out of four schools have been reached to ensure that boys and girls gain knowledge and skills on how to engage in dialogue and build their confidence in standing up against VAWG. The students vowed to be ambassadors of change in helping make a difference on matters of violence to ensure girls' rights are respected.

A consultative meeting for Members of The County Assembly to lobby and influence budget allocation to gender based violence recovery centres was held and 30 of them attended. The MCAs were able lobby for budget allocation at the county assembly and as well as have 10 acres of land donated for the construction of centre.

Despite this among other achievements, there were several challenges that RHYFE faced. This included transfer of police officers who had been trained as well as other key service providers at various service delivery points. Deep rooted cultural beliefs also made it difficult for women to freely express their desire and decision making. Most of the elected MCAs are new in the county assembly and therefore not conversant with gender related issues including violence against women and girls.

There were emerging issues in Nakuru and Baringo counties during activity implementation and this included communities feeling insecure as a result of the elections. Separation among couples who are in inter-communal marriages due to political tension as well as cases of displacement due to fears of election related violence. **.JT**