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Initiative to address HIV through community dialogue



From top: Women during a past march on sensitising people on stigma against those living with HIV. A community group in Migori during a past meeting.

Pictures: Reject Correspondent and Ivy Ndeiwu

By IVY NDEIWO

It is estimated that out of the 39.5 million Kenyans, 1.6 are living with HIV. There are no clear records of prevalence rate in the urban slum, however infection rate remains high. This has been aggravated by high poverty levels.

According to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and Aids (UNAIDS) an estimated 34 million people are living with HIV worldwide and about half do not know their status. It is because of this that people are being encouraged to undertake

early testing and take up medication to reduce the prevalence especially in informal settlements in urban areas.

It is because of this that communities of Jamaica, Gatope Mombasa (GM) and Kingstone villages from Mukuru informal settlement are have found new ways of addressing the challenges of HIV and Aids.

They are doing this through Community Conversation (CC), an approach initiated by Concern Worldwide. Orphans and single parenting is on the rise due to HIV and Aids in Mukuru with many still living in denial. There are also others who

know their status but have refused to take Anti-Retroviral (ARV) medication. This is a situation that is being addressed by the situation that the Community Conversation groups are currently addressing.

Sensitisation

Jane Grace, a facilitator from Kingstone Community Conversation group noted that it took intense sensitisation on behaviour change to enable the community's members understand that HIV and Aids is real and not a curse as it was previously perceived.

"From my community, we have managed to take 150 people to different centres to begin taking ARV medication. It is unfortunate that we are still living in denial with very few people going for counselling and testing," said Grace.

She noted that others have refused to take ARV drugs because of stigma

Through the Community Conversation initiative, members of Gatope Mombasa and Jamaica villages have also registered up to 80 people to begin ARV medication.

"We have established a support group for those who are HIV positive.

We support them in what they do so that they can feel part of the society and I am happy to tell you that we do not have bed ridden persons due to HIV and Aids in my community," said Belinda Wanja, a community health worker and Community Conversation facilitator at Gatope Mombasa village in Mukuru.

Such support groups are meant for economic empowerment especially for those living positively. Jamaica Community Conversation members have rehabilitated 10 orphans who lost their parents to HIV and Aids.

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Futile search for a national identity card

By KARIUKI MWANGI

A 52-year old man is a very bitter that he will not be able to vote in the General Elections.

George Mutura Gaitho is now calling for the intervention of Immigration and Registration of Persons Minister Otieno Kajwang to help him acquire an identity card which he has been unable to acquire in the past seven years.

Gaitho, who hails from Kikuyu, Kiambu County, and has not been able to exercise his civic and constitutional rights due to the missing document.

Gaitho, who runs a hotel and accommodation business in Embu town, lost his identity card in 2005. He reported the loss to the police and was issued with an abstract. While this was to enable him get a new identification document, it has actually proved otherwise. It marked of the beginning a long journey in search of a new identity card.

"It has been a very long journey in search of another card, and walking to the Embu West District Immigration and Registration of Person's office has become routine for the last seven years," he says.

Attempts

Gaitho has made several attempts to ensure that he gets another identity card has been marred with errors. Every time, he is given a new identity card all the details remain right except for his three names which are always wrong.

"In all the attempts that I have made, the identity card comes with the name of George Kepher Ouya instead of George Mutura Gaitho, whereas all the other details like the photograph, date of birth, number and place of birth are all mine," he says.

Gaitho pointed out that his seven year



From top: Copies of the waiting cards that George Gaitho has been receiving from the Immigration office in Embu. A copy of the identity card that George has been receiving everytime he applies for one, it come with a different name but all the other details are his.

Pictures: Kariuki Mwangi

quest for a national identity card denied him an opportunity to vote in the 2005 referendum, the 2007 General Elections and 2010 referendum.

He was also not able to register for the March 4 General Election since even then the last attempt to correct the name brought back the document with a 'foreign name'.

Apart from denying him many opportunities to take part in various democratic decisions in the country, the lack of an ID has also locked him out of accessing loans from banks. He cannot also withdraw money over the counter in a bank.

"Right now, I cannot withdraw or send money from an M-Pesa agent either since

they do not allow me to use the photocopy of the previous identity card," he says, adding that the registrar of person's office in Embu has passed the buck to the Nairobi office.

Gaitho now wants the relevant government department to expeditiously look into his issue so as to ensure he can transact all his businesses like all Kenyans.



UN treaty puts Kenya's mining hopes in a bind

By DAVID NJAGI

Kenya's growing fortunes in coal, gold and cement mining will have to meet specific caps if the Government is still keen to tap the international market to trade her wares.

The United Nations has identified all three minerals as major sources of mercury emissions, a toxic metal said to have serious health effects on the human race.

A new report by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) says small scale gold mining remains the chief source of emissions worldwide because mercury is used to separate the metal from the ore.

The toxic metal is also emitted when coal is burnt, while cement production also accounts for a large share of the pollutant.

According to Richard Mwendandu, director of Multilateral Environment Agreements at the Ministry of Environment and Mineral Resources, most mining activities take place within or near lakes and rivers, with the latter washing into the Indian Ocean.

Contamination

"Our studies have established that even distant mining is contaminating lakes," noted Mwendandu. He added: "Informal burning of solid waste is also causing mercury emission."

However, it is the link to contamination of fish and other aquatic life that the *Global Mercury Assessment 2013* report warns that countries like Kenya could be facing a surge in neurological and behavioural disorders as well as soil contamination.

"Much human exposure to mercury is through the consumption of contaminated fish, making aquatic environments the critical link to human health," says the report.

It is from this backdrop that Kenya joining other delegates at the international Negotiating Committee on Mercury (INC5) conference held in Geneva in January.

The conference addressed the growing threat of mercury to the ecosystem and human health, where

emission of the toxic metal has doubled since 2005.

United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) estimates annual emissions from small scale gold mining at 727 tonnes or 35 per cent of the global total.

While this is the case, an estimated 260 tonnes of mercury previously held in soils are being released into the rivers and lakes.

By mobilizing government delegates, the meeting is hopeful that a global legally binding treaty will be reached that will be expected to reduce the world demand and supply of mercury.

"The treaty wants to avoid new mercury in the atmosphere through recycling and safe disposal of solid waste," says Achim Steiner, UNEP director.

This will be good news for expectant mothers and infants who are said to be at highest risk of the toxic metal because health experts advises this group to be on a constant diet of fish and other sea foods.

Deep sea food is said to be rich in Omega 3 fatty acids, a nutritional ingredient that boosts the brain development of the unborn child as well as infants.

According to Dr Brigitte Monda, recent studies have shown that Omega 3 fatty acids are not generated by the human body, hence a pregnant mother has to supplement them from an external source.

"This could explain why children from the fishing communities have a higher intelligence than those from non-fishing communities," explains Monda, who is also an obstetrician and gynaecologist practicing in Nairobi.

Monda explains the chemistry behind is because 60 per cent of the human brain is composed of fats, where 20 per cent of the dry weight is filled with DHA, an ingredient of the Omega 3 fatty acids.

Not only has research linked low IQ in babies to deficiency in fatty acids, a report by UNICEF explained why children in this category are also likely to be born stunted and less productive.

While Kenya has discovered huge deposits of coal in Kitui and Tharaka Nithi counties, Western Kenya leads in gold mining as the Coast region continues to count its fortunes through cement extraction.

Students highlight key concerns as trade and employment

By EVELYNE OGUTU

While many of the East African residents might indicate their key concerns to be food and security, the same cannot be said of students pursuing education in the various universities within the region.

A survey carried out among students from the East African Community economic bloc, trade and employment make the key topical subjects that they are keen on benefiting from the Ministry of East Africa Community.

This was revealed by an analysis done by Connect Vuka Border EAC Inter-University Social Media Campaign that mostly uses Facebook to create awareness around benefits and opportunities presented by the East African Community.

Through the East African Community Facebook page, *Connect Vuka Border and Twitter handle @cvukaborder*, there were 552 posts (29 per cent) around trade and 493 posts (26 per cent) around employment and job opportunities in just three months — September-November 2012.

"There are lots of benefits and opportunities that Kenyans can gain from East African Community Integration if well explored. The Common Market Protocol outlines four freedoms that include free movement of goods, labour, services and capital," says Chiboli Shakaba, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of the East African Community. He adds: "This will significantly boost trade and investments and make the East Africa region more productive and prosperous."

Interest

University students are keen to trade across the Kenyan borders as well as set up and see their business thrive in other East African partner states upon completion of their undergraduate studies.

Raphael Mbatha, a fourth year student and East African Community ambassador from Egerton University notes that most students resort to setting up small businesses right after undergraduate studies. They opt to travel to neighbouring East African countries to purchase goods and sell in Kenya for a profit. All this is brought about by the soaring unemployment levels in Kenya especially after completion of university studies.

"People have discovered that the only way to move forward is through setting up a business. The East African Community presents a good platform for students to harness this opportunity and work in other East African countries," says Titus Kisangau, third year student at Moi University. He adds: "Rwanda, for instance, takes in many of our graduates to work in the country."

Opportunities

Through the East African Community Inter-University Social Media Campaign Facebook page, students discuss and share information on the benefits and opportunities presented by the economic bloc.

Connect Vuka Border EAC Inter-University Social Media Campaign is an initiative of the Ministry of the East African Community funded by TradeMark East Africa that is geared around creating knowledge and awareness of the region's integration as well as its benefits and opportunities. It also encourages students to support the East African Community integration process and challenges them to petition their respective universities to include the East African Community week as an annual calendar activity.

According to Joshua Mutunga, Senior Programme Manager at TradeMark East Africa, there is a lot to tap from the East African Community integration. He encourages the youth to embrace regional development.

Crocodile infested river leave villagers maimed and desperate

By GILBERT OCHIENG

For Otinda Ouma, a resident of Bukhwamba village in Samia District of Busia County, December 26, 2012 will forever remain etched in his mind following an encounter with a vicious crocodile in an attempt to rescue his goat from the reptile.

"It was around 3pm and I was herding my goats along River Sio when a crocodile suddenly emerged out and grabbed one of my goats. However, I managed to rescue the goat with the aid of the villagers who responded to my cries but unfortunately the goat died from the wound inflicted on it," says Ouma.

Ouma is not the only person who has suffered losses from the marauding crocodile.

Kenneth Odanya, will never forget that fateful afternoon in November 1992 when he was attacked by a crocodile as he was bathing along the banks of River Sio.

"I had gone to bathe in the river on the fateful afternoon when the crocodile emerged out of the water and grabbed me firmly with its jaws throwing me into the middle of the river," says Odanya. It took a two hour struggle with the beast before it finally loosened its grip giving him the opportunity to escape with a fractured hand.

Menace

Odanya who has never recovered fully from the attack 20 years later, told the Reject from his bed that despite spending KSh25,000 to seek emergency medical attention, he feels weaker with each passing day.

The crocodile menace at Bukhwamba and Rukada villages is not a new occurrence to the locals of the area that borders Uganda.

The father of nine says since the attack two decades ago he has gone

through a lot of hardship and is not in a position to perform any physical work especially farming. His wife has been forced to take up most of the responsibilities.

"The injury I sustained 20 years ago has rendered me inactive as I cannot even farm my land leave alone holding a slasher. The situation has forced my wife to play the role of being the bread winner single-handedly," says Odanya regretfully.

He remembers the incident every November and this has placed a lot of psychological stress on him.

"When it reaches that month every year, I fall sick and start having nightmares. I also undergo extreme mental torture because I normally see in a dream the crocodile coming to eat me alive and when I wake up I feel weak and sick all over," explains Odanya.

Victims

That same year two other men fell victim to the vicious reptile with one of them losing a leg and another one his hand.

The two men have since passed on with the last one dying in December last year due to the poison from the bite.

Another victim of attack, a young boy, was killed by the reptile which ate half of his body. It also attacked and killed a young girl.

Victims of the crocodile attack including Odanya included say they have made numerous visits to the Kenya Wildlife Services office in Bungoma and Kakamega but no action has been taken.

"I have gone there on several occa-



Women fetching water and washing clothes from river Sio where the crocodile has been attacking residents and livestock. Below: Kenneth Odanya during the interview at his home.

Pictures: Gilbert Ochieng

sions but the Kenya Wildlife Services officials in Bungoma and Kakamega have turned a deaf ear to our predicament," laments Odanya, adding that the wildlife officials have instead been asking them if they had witnesses and a P3 form.

Odanya says even reported the incident to former Vice-President Moody Awori when he was still the area legislator but there was no response at all. "This has left us with no alternative but to suffer silently,"

he says.

A local resident, Juma Mang'eni says life has become extremely hard for the residents around the entire area considering that they all rely on the river for water for domestic purposes as well as for their livestock. They also use the river for crossing over to Uganda.

"We rely on this river from where we source water for washing clothes and cooking as well as for our cattle considering that we have no bore-

holes," says Mang'eni. He explains: "Majority of the residents use the dangerous point to cross over to Uganda to get to Lumino town and other destinations."

According to Mang'eni, the Kenya Wildlife Services personnel visited the area once and trapped the reptile but failed to go away with it.

"We have left our lives in the hands of God because the authority has opted to turn a deaf ear to our predicament," laments Mang'eni.

Initiative to address HIV through community dialogue

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"We took the orphans to Lea Toto organisation. They have been put on ARVs and are being provided for," said Julia Wangari, Jamaica Community Conversation facilitator.

The Community Communication members have been conducting door-to-door sensitisation and taking advantage of the chief's *barazas* to educate their communities on the importance of early counselling and testing.

The experience is not different in Nyanza Province. In Kasembo and Ramoya villages in

Migori District there are Community Conversation groups.

However, stigma and discrimination are still a real issue that communities are addressing. Nyanza records up to nine per cent of HIV prevalence in the country and this can be attributed to high poverty levels; strong cultural inclination and harmful cultural practices such as wife inheritance.

Community Conversation members in Kasembo village have established family life programmes meant to sensitise the community on HIV related matters. They encourage mothers

to go for antenatal clinics to establish their status. Together with the area chief they have discouraged discos after funerals to control promiscuity. They are advocating for responsible relationships among their children to engage in safe sex by using condoms.

Community Conversation concept was piloted in Kenya by Concern Worldwide in 2010. The approach is aimed at empowering communities to dialogue on the challenges they are facing as a community, provide solutions and action plans on the issues identified.

There are 24 Community Conversation

groups in Migori and Ndhiwa and 29 groups in the urban slums of Nairobi.

Through Community Conversation, Concern plans to address disproportionately high vulnerability and risk to HIV among children affected with HIV and Aids in nine villages in Korogocho, 48 in Mukuru and 12 in Mathare. All the three slums are within Nairobi. It will also look at 42 villages in Kisumu East District, 30 villages in Migori and 18 villages in Homa Bay County.

The writer is the Communication and Documentation Officer, Concern Worldwide.

Intricate land ownership will affect construction of Taveta County headquarters

By ALBERT MUTUA

Even as Kenyans get ready for the General Elections, many questions remain answered that make a majority feel that they should not be taking part in the polls.

Many people living at the Coast feel that they have not had their independence as they are still under colonial laws. The laws in which they are operating and living has left them in a desperate position.

However, even as the county government take effect, Taita Taveta may not have a headquarters. The land in Mwatate, which was marked as the central place in Taita Taveta County for construction of county headquarters is located in a sisal farm still reeling under colonial rules.

This is especially true for the people of Singila Majengo for whom the new Kenyan laws. It was after the World War One between 1914-1918 when King George the sixth (VI) of the United Kingdom gave Sir Charles Sydney Goldman, a professional big game hunter, the land stretching from Voi to Taveta on the lowlands of Taita. Through this Sir Goldman formed Taita Conciliation Limited (TCL).

The main activity of Taita Conciliation Limited was the sale of elephant tusks among other big game trophies. When a world ban on sale of ivory was instituted, Sir Goldman reverted to large-scale sisal farming.

The huge chunk of land under which this farming was being done was given to Goldman by King George without consultation with the natives who were the rightful owners of the land.

Native land

In short, King George was instrumental to the forceful grabbing of the natives' land. To legalize the ownership of the land, Sir Charles Sydney Goldman was given leasehold Grant/Title No. I.R.2682 with a term of 999 years from April 1, 1927 as shown on Survey Plan No. 23542 and 23543 for LR No. 3880 and 3881.

These two parcels of land measured 60,265 acres, which were exclusive of several 120 feet wide road reserve, totalling 195 acres together with 325 acres in respect of railway reserve, 100 feet on each side from the centreline of rail. Two deed plans namely for L.R 3880 and 3881 were signed by Surveyor general on March 11, 1920.

In 1930, Sir Charles Sydney Goldman was issued with Grant/Title No. LR 3883 with a lease term of 999 years running from May 1, 1930 to May 1, 1929 in respect of LR 6924. The parcel measured 10,073 acres as shown on survey plan no. 28967. This land was to the south of LR No. 3880/4 as Grant/Title No. LR 3383 with the deed plan indicates.

In order to help in the management

of the large sisal estate in Mwatate, Goldman invited a retired Major Leyzell. Local leaders M. W. K. Mengo and Jimmy Mwambichi filed complaints to the then colonial government about lack of land by natives while Goldman held large chunks of land.

The colonial government consented and the natives were partially allowed to exploit part of the land. It is during this partial ownership of land by the natives that conflicts emerged periodically.

The then District officer, a Mr Stringer, in the company of Tribal Police (presently known as Administration Police) failed to remove the indigenous locals from part of the land bordering Taita Conciliation Limited estate but the local people resisted and chased them away.

After the Second World War, there were several incidents where some leaders were arrested and taken to Voi. A large number of supporters and delegates visited Voi and several complaints were recorded. Some leaders were freed while some were jailed for six months in Mombasa.

Peace

The East African Standard newspaper in 1945 carried an article of Sir Charles Goldman directing Major Leyzell to learn co-exist with the natives (TAITA) and live in peace. From that time Major Leyzell made peace with the natives and was accepted by the natives as a white elder.

In 1950, Teita Concessions Limited was issued with Grant/Title No. LR No 9 with a term of 99 years from January 1, 1950 in respect of LR 9487 measuring 55 acres as Survey Plan No. 66894 (F/R. No. 79/86) showed and authenticated by the Surveyor General on July 30, 1957.

The purpose of this land title was for the construction of a dam from which the African inhabitants of Taita district of the Coast Native Land Unit were permitted to extract water for domestic use and for their livestock.

As conflicts between the natives and Major Leyzell increased, the local leaders formed a movement called Taita Hills Association (THA), with Mr Fredrick Maseghe became the first secretary general.

The Association became one among likeminded associations in Kenya, which were petitioning the British Government to intervene in the land issue.

In 1963 Teita Sisal Limited was issued a grant title No. L.R. 19682 with a term of 965 years and 10 months from July 1, 1963 in respect of LR No. 11378. This parcel of land measured 3,344 acres as shown on Survey Plan 79938 following sunder of some land through I.R. No. 2682/7. This land is on the south of LR no 3880/4.

All grant/titles were returned to the Republic of Kenya after indepen-



dence in on December 4, 1964. In 1964 the then Member of Parliament, the late Danson Mwanyumba, was quoted by a section of the press confirming a breakthrough that led to discussions and negotiations which was led by Sir Isaac Wolfsan.

This marked the beginning of lands conflicts in Taita Taveta County, which has claimed lives of the Taita Taveta people with their families through generations.

Sometimes later, Goldman, the original benefactor, had given the land specifically for hunting. He was a hunting sportsman and the land was rich in fauna with all kinds of animals, a delight of the hunter.

In the early 1940s Major Leyzell took over the estate from Goldman. He inherited an estate which had little infrastructure. Goldman was a hunter and had a little time if any for proper planning of structures.

Major Leyzell embarked on an ambitious expansion on the now sisal estate to make it not only productive but also manageable. When he took over, Major Leyzell found the living quarters of his predecessor and administrators at a Mess. He found these not to be good enough.

The villagers knew the location as Ikorongo ja Mwananga. This was the official residence of Major Leyzell.

Leyzell was not happy with the official residence location. Being a man who was in good books with the locals, he summoned the elders for a talk. Under the great tree, the official meeting place, he requested the elders to offer him land on the slopes of Singila Hill in Mwatate District of Taita Taveta County.

It was an ideal situation because the Railway Station was just a stone throw away. He complained that the Mess was infested was mosquito. It was in a densely forested area, a natural habitat of malaria carrying anopheles mosquito. Leyzell was a friend of the community.

Gifts

Whenever he took an overseas leave to Britain, he showered the old men with blankets made in England among other gifts. He was also an ardent community works contributor.

The elders agreed to offer him, on a temporary basis, the location he had at heart.

Leyzell did not only build his residence at the site but also built his storage for Marobota (sisal bales) near the railway station. This hormonal relationship between the residents of Singila Majengo continued unabated till independence. Most of the communi-



A village in Singila Majengo where residents have been denied ownership of land. Below: Children from the village playing.

Pictures: Albert Mutua

ty members were Leyzell's employees.

Leyzell did not live to enjoy his new residence as he was reported to have died soon after Kenya got her independence. The management of the now vast sisal estate lies in the hands of incumbent managers.

According to a Mr Mnjala, in 1972, an investor known as a Mr Kyriaz, a Greek took over the estate. He registered it as Teita Sisal Estate (1972) Limited. Soon after this change of management was complete, the troubles for Taita Taveta people began.

Being ignorant of the previous history of the estate, Kriazy thought that the land on which his house stood was the estate's land. He thought the land belonged to the predecessor. The surviving elders, those who were present when the late Major Leyzell made a pact with elders concerning the issue informed him but the directors just ignored them. Instead, Kriazy even became more annoying.

To put a mark on his authority, The directors denied the locals water from the Age Dam (Ndiwenyi), a place where the Taita ancestors had watered their cattle since the beginning of the century.

"Our animals were not allowed to drink water like in the past and so we had a hard life style in our ancestral land," recalls Mnjala. He adds: "All our footpaths were closed with security at the gates. Nobody was allowed to construct a permanent house with blocks."

The cattle, which were grazing around or near Kriazy's compound,

were confiscated. The old footpaths leading to the dam were closed. The directors banned the community from building decent dwelling houses.

Kriazy allowed them to construct only reed-thatched structures, knowing they were of impermanent nature. This was to send a clear message to the Singila Majengo residents that they had no say over the place. The directors started to build workers' quarters in Singila Majengo.

They reported to the police about what they were told and the threats they got from the sisal estate but nothing happened.

Grievances

"We took our grievances to the police and other leaders but our cry fell on deaf ears. The police post that is located at the sisal camp was positioned at a place where for anybody to access police services, they had to be allowed first by the security of the sisal. It is the same thing today. We cannot get to the police because they are closed inside a sisal firm," says Mnjala.

Learning for pupils was hindered as they had no paths after being locked out by the sisal management. They only depended on the hand-outs from friends and relief food for their day-to-day living.

These people are now appealing to the Government through the county government to help them get their land back. They fear that the colonial rules will hinder construction of the County Government headquarter in Taveta.

Violence breaks family over daughter's spinal disease

By **STEPHEN AKUNO**

A breakfast of porridge is what ushers the family of Abishag Wanjue, a single mother of four in their one roomed shanty in the outskirts of Soweto slums in Kayole.

The challenges that Wanjue is going through and the twist and turn of events that define her family life are what seem to have pushed the struggling family to zero.

Initially Wanjue owned a grocery business that was doing well. The earnings from the trade enabled her to fend for the family well.

However, the birth of her daughter, Angela Waceke, who is now two years old, changed everything. When Wanjue gave birth to Waceke on December 12, 2009 at Tumaini Clinic in Kariobangi South, she did not notice any problem with the baby.

When Wanjue's husband went to visit her at the clinic (Tumaini) when she had just given birth to Waceke, it was his reaction and change of attitude that made Wanjue suspect that something was wrong.

"My husband just looked at the baby, kept quiet and walked away not to be seen again at the clinic. He did not even bother to explain to me what the problem was," says Wanjue.

The nurses at the hospital were surprised at her husband's behaviour but Wanjue had to downplay the whole issue.

Waceke was born with spina bifida, a medical condition where one's spinal cord is damaged leaving them paralysed and unable to move their lower limbs.

Her husband's rush departure meant that Wanjue and the baby could not be discharged from the clinic as she had to cleared the bill of KSh500. Her attempts to convince the nurses at the clinic to release fell on deaf ears.

Futile attempts

With no money on her, Wanjue had to leave her identification card behind before she could be discharged. When she got home, her husband did not bother about her or even the baby's condition. Waceke had by then developed a big swollen wound on her back which was oozing with pus. Due to the baby's critical condition, she had to be rushed to Kenyatta National Hospital (KNH) where she was referred for specialised treatment.

Her attempts to get money from her husband were futile. She had no option but to look for other means to get money to take Waceke to hospital.

"I had to borrow KSh500 from a neighbour and rush Waceke to Kenyatta National Hospital, without any support from my husband," says Wanjue.

She had to leave her other three children behind under the care of their father who was not even bothered about them.

At the hospital, she could not be attended to because she did not have relevant documents for the entire medical process. She had no choice but to take Waceke to a clinic in Huruma on getting information that there was a free medical check-up which was taking place at the facility. Unfortunately, by that time she got to the clinic, the exercise had ended.

Wanjue was referred to AIC Kijabe Hospital where doctors commenced treatment on Waceke and managed to remove the fluid and pus from her spinal cord which was the cause of the swelling on her back. The doctors also carried out an urgent operation on Waceke. They had to insert a tube (catheter) on her spinal cord that would remove the fluid from her back.

"The catheter would also help in controlling fluid from her spinal cord. The doctors said if the fluid got to Waceke's brain it would lead to a condition known as hydrocephalus," explains Wanjue.

After the successful operation, Waceke was discharged from the hospital. However getting home was another major challenge because Wanjue did not have money for transport. A social worker at the hospital donated KSh1,000 to enable her get home.

Things were not easy. At home things had gone from bad to worse. Her three children, whom she had left behind under the care of their father, were being mistreated. To escape the wrath of their vio-



Abishag Wanjue and her two year old daughter Angela Waceke at her house in Soweto, Kayole. Below: Abishag's children outside their house. Pictures: Stephen Akuno

lent father, the children would spend most of their time in neighbours' houses.

David Kiragu, Wanjue's first born was not always lucky as most of the time he bore the brunt of being physically abused by his father.

"My husband, who was always violent when drunk, would constantly beat Kiragu, 13, for no reason. At times he would hit him with household items such as cups and brooms," explains Wanjue.

"Sometimes he would hit me claiming that I had not done my homework or when he found out that there was no food in the house," explains Kiragu, adding that he would at times be beaten on the face.

Due to and the physical abuse Kiragu would run away from home to find solace in the streets around Mutindwa market in Umoja Estate. Many times Kiragu would go to the streets in the evening after school. There are also days that he would miss school and just stay out in the streets.

"It forced me to go out there to look for him before I took him back to school something which Kiragu did not want," explains Wanjue.

Sometimes other street boys who Wanjue met while she went to look for Kiragu would lie to her of her son's whereabouts.

"At times he would disappear for two weeks without coming back home or even going to school," notes Wanjue.

Kiragu says it is the fear of meeting his father who would beat him for no apparent reason that made him behaviour like that.

Setback

As Wanjue, her son and their father's relationship kept deteriorating, the family got another setback when Waceke developed pneumonia and malaria. Again this time she had to be taken to Kenyatta National Hospital for treatment. The child was admitted for three months and nobody cared to visit except for Kiragu who managed to go twice.

"I do not know how he made it to the hospital but he told me that he just boarded a bus to Kenyatta Hospital and that is how he came to see me and Waceke," says Wanjue.

Back at home mistreatment and beatings continued for Kiragu and his siblings. "We were scared most of the time when father came home. We kept away from him most of the time because he beat me up whenever he came home drunk," narrates Kiragu.

His sojourn in the streets for two weeks was not comfortable either. Here he met all sorts of bullies and other streets urchins who beat him up whenever he failed to abide by their rules. Accompanied by other street boys, they would walk all the way to Mlango Kubwa near Eastleigh Estate collecting plastic containers and metals before they would sell them to dealers. They would use the money raised to buy food while the rest would end up in the hands of other street bullies.

Drug abuse

"The money we got would be used for buying things like drugs such as bhang, glue, (khat) miraa and a type of aeroplane fuel known as 'msi' in sheng," explains Kiragu.

The young boy was ushered into the world of drugs and forced to consume everything his friends used.

"We would be forced to sniff glue, chew khat and smoke bhang under the watch of other older street peers who would beat us if we refused," Kiragu narrates.

"Besides, they would set targets and other restrictions for us to meet. In a day after collecting plastic containers and metal bars, they expected KSh60 from each one of us, failure to which they would threaten to kill us," recalls Kiragu.

On coming back from the hospital, Wanjue learnt of her children's mistreatment and disappearance through neighbours. Fortunately she managed to find Kiragu who was not willing to go back home and face the wrath of his father.

Wanjue decided to report the matter to the area chief who wrote 12 summonses to the man none of which was honoured. He only deserted them not to be seen again to date.

"Sometimes he would come home from work, change his clothes and leave without saying where he was going," recalls Wanjue. However, this stopped the minute the chief asked to see him.

The house in which Wanjue was staying attracted six months' rent arrears of and the landlord was forced to evict her.

With nowhere to go, Wanjue developed courage and approached Kiragu's head teacher at Kifaruru Primary School who gave her KSh1000 and advised her to look for somewhere else to stay.

"I decided to move to a slum in Soweto-Kayole in order to find a cheaper house and also for Kiragu to avoid meeting his father who he feared would beat him up," she says.

Wanjue and Kiragu were both counselled by the head-teacher who kept monitoring his progress in school.

When she relocated to Soweto, she met a good Samaritan who accommodated her for free for the first two months. "The old woman told me to start paying her KSh1000 for rent in the third month after I had settled down," says Wanjue.

Although she has found peace after moving to Soweto, Wanjue is happy that Kiragu is not missing school and that he has stopped going back to the streets.

Her major worry now is the children's education which she finds difficult. Each term she has to pay KSh4000 in order to keep Terry Njeri, her third born daughter in school.

Food is also another major challenge many a time the family has had to sleep on an empty stomach.

"Sometimes I just prepare for them porridge which they take as part of their breakfast and supper," says Wanjue.

Once in a while, she has to go out to look for casual jobs. The best she can do is attending to people's farms where she gets KSh300 per day, an amount that is too little to sustain the family.

Business

On a lucky day, the owner of the farm where she has worked can allow her to carry home some vegetables which she sells at a kiosk outside her house which has been empty.

"The vegetable business always does not do well due to stiff competition," says Wanjue.

"On a lucky day, I can manage to get KSh100 which I use to buy other commodities such as flour and sugar for the children," she says.

Though she is not in formal employment, Wanjue has joined a support group that brings together persons with disabilities for the sake of her daughter.

Despite these challenges Wanjue has not lost hope and believes that God will open doors for her.

"I am optimistic that soon I will be able to go back to my grocery business and that my children will live a better life," says Wanjue.

She is appealing to well-wishers to assist her in the treatment of her daughter so that she too can have a bright future. She would also like help in getting a job to enable her sustain the family.

Government set to vet beach operators

By KIGONDU NDAVANO

The government seems to have taken a very strong decision to deal with the harassment of tourists at the beach. In Mombasa, a major programme to vet beach operators has been launched. According to Tourism minister Ben Maazo has come up with the major project that is expected to vet all beach operators at the Coast starting in Mombasa.

"We must ensure that those dealing with tourists along our beaches are good people not associated with criminal activities, hence the reason behind the vetting process," Maazo explained.

The project is being implemented to improve security on beaches, which the government has in its policy papers identified as one of the major tourist attractions in the country.

Overseeing the vetting, the Coast Regional Tourism Officer Lydia Anyimba says: "The vetting of beach traders in Mombasa will be extended until all people are covered."

Although there have been protests from some of the beach operators that the government was hastening the exercise in a bid to leave out some of them, the directors assured "the ministry does not want to see any beach operator locked out of business, but we want to ensure decency at the shoreline".

"It has never been our intention to bar anyone with legal business hence the need for possible extension," notes Anyimba.

With Mombasa pioneering this major project, there is also need for the same to be extended to other areas along the coastal strip from Lamu to Kwale where the problems of harassment of tourists has remained as a major drawback to marketing of the Coast as a safe and comfortable resort.

According to Sebastian Muasya, chairman Malindi Tourist Market Association, although it is hard to control trade at the beach, there is need to gradually remove non-tourists from the beaches and relocate all to a designated market to ensure beaches are areas of leisure and not trade.

Malindi Tourist Market hosts more than 400 stalls and curio traders. It has been recording poor business over the years, something that is

attributed to the fact that while some traders are in such markets, others are allowed to undertake hawking activities on the beaches, hence offering unfair competition to the licensed traders who pay for rent for their shop and other facilities including business licenses.

Already, the Mombasa and Coast Tourist Association (MCTA) has received a grant from United Nations

Tourism Organisation, which it plans to spend on capacity building. The Coast Director of Tourism indicates that the vetting of beach operators will enable Mombasa and Coast Tourist Association draw a budget before it engages beach operators.

"The overall goal is to ensure that we have beaches that are friendly to all holidaymakers," says Anyimba.

Those vetted are required to produce original identity cards, two passport size photographs and a certificate of good conduct from the police.

According to Mohamed Parowa, chairman Mombasa Boat Owners Association, they have been unable to acquire the certificate of good conduct because of the KSh1,000 fee required as fees. They say these charges are too high for some traders.

"The vetting is coming at a time when incomes from the industry especially for small scale traders have been quite poor hence even the KSh1,000 which may look as a small amount is high," says Parowa.

Vetting

He adds: "Business is low. We cannot afford to part with KSh1,000 for the certificate. We pray that the Government reschedules the vetting until after General Election." The vetting is also bringing in new demands from the various traders, all directed to the Government and organisations like the Kenya Wildlife Services (KWS) which manages various marine parks at the Coast.

North Coast boat operators and owners have protested at continued failure by Kenya Wildlife Services to offer better working environment at the beach. "We lack social amenities like public toilets and basic health facilities which could be used for emergency cases that might occur at the beach yet Kenya Wildlife Services collects levies from us," protests boat operator Idd Asumani.

While all agree that poverty and opportunity seeking has led to a



Josephine Richard, a stall owner at the Malindi Tourist Market dusts curios at her shop Trade in the market has collapsed with sales dropping to less than 5 per cent every week.

Picture: Kigondu Ndavano

large influx of people fighting for incomes in the Coast beaches, majority of the shorelines including Malindi and Watamu cannot sustain more beach workers and bad working practices are on the increase. In Watamu, many established curio sellers and beach operators are registered and belong to Watamu Marine Association.

The traders who include groups such as Umoja Curio Sellers, Watamu Safari Sellers Association and Watamu Association of Boat Operators have been well organised for years and wear uniform and carry official identity cards. However, the growing number of non-registered operators (or "beach boys" as they are locally known) who trade without any legal documents have been causing a scare to the hoteliers. The traders cause problems for tourists, local hotels and the registered beach operators.

Blue Bay Hotel manager Walter Kondik, whose guests have had problems with beach traders in the past hopes that the cooperation between the Hoteliers, Tourism Police Unit officers and registered traders will be strengthened to ensure illegal traders are removed or licensed and be forced to respect guidelines in dealing with tourists.

Watamu Marine Association has a special sub-committee made up of hotel and beach operator members

who work closely with the Tourist Police Unit and Kenya Wildlife Services, the aim of keeping Watamu beaches free from illegal beach operators, tourist harassment, drug trafficking and child exploitation. Watamu Marine Association has developed a number of initiatives to address these issues.

Customer care

There is also a customer care training programme through which hoteliers pledged to provide registered beach operators and traders with training in good sales and customer care techniques.

According to Osman Mwambire, an official of the Watamu Boat Operators "the training will help beach operators to be more professional when dealing with tourists and benefit the guests, hotels and traders alike".

Mwambire observes: "Developing good working relations and partnerships like this between hotels and beach operators helps Watamu Marine Association realise one of its goals, which is to promote high quality tourism and preserve Watamu as a world class tourist destination."

Watamu Marine Association has also developed a code of conduct for beach operators. "This is a new and innovative document which has been agreed upon and supported by hotels and operators defining their roles and responsibilities. It also deals with visi-

tors," says Mwambire.

Guests are also encouraged to report any form of harassment immediately to hotel security staff, the Tourism Police Unit and Kenya Wildlife Services or uniformed traders.

Apart from the individual organisations now working to ensure smooth operations of tourism related business at the Coast, the enactment of the Tourism Bill will solve some of the major problems afflicting the management of the beach destination.

Following into Balala's footsteps, Maazo, who is the current Minister for Tourism is already in the process of establishing a Beach Management Committee to steer better management of the beach destination and ensure of its safety, cleanliness and disciplined operation of formal business.

The committee, he says, will meet with stakeholders and come up rules and regulations to govern future business along the beach and weed out criminals.

Maazo notes that he is happy with the beach operators who had formed formidable associations with members observing internal ethical standards.

The groups, he says, should name and shame intruders and unethical individuals peddling drugs, harassing tourists and committing other social ills along the beach.

Tourists are no longer at ease on the Kenyan Coast

By KIGONDU NDAVANO

"Ciao amica," a heavily built young man greets an Italian female tourist at Malindi's Casuarina beach. The tourist just emerging from Blue Key Hotel is in her swimming costume and seems to be more interested in diving into the enticing waters of the Indian Ocean, perhaps just a day after her arrival.

The young man has a small bag and just as the Italian tourist starts to step on the waters of the sea, the man removes a pack of necklaces and a small booklet and attempts a conversation with the tourist. "Vuio comprare qualcosa di bella (do you want to buy something nice)."

"No lascia mi in pace, io voglio soltanto nuotare (no leave me in

peace, I am only interested in swimming)," answers the tourist who now appears to be irritated.

The young man, now clearly a beach operator attempts another trick. "Per favore, se tu non piace comprare qualcosa, vuoi fare safari (Please friend, if you do not want to buy something, do you want to go on safari)?"

By this time the tourist seems disgusted and literally runs into the shallow waters of the ocean and starts swimming.

Simply described, this is harassment of tourists, an occurrence which is slowly eating into the beauty of Kenya's beach tourism. Such scenes are enacted in many beaches along the Coast. The Government and ho-

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A section of the Casuarina beach in Malindi. Picture: Kigondu Ndavano

Billionaires Club hopes to contain tourist harassment

By KIGONDU NDAVANO

Malindi is soon expected to gain up market accommodation and perhaps start to host some of the wealthiest people in the world in the Billionaires' Club owned by Italian business mogul Flavio Briatore.

The Billionaires' Club is now in its final touches and should be ready for occupation any time soon.

According to a manager at the Lion in the Sun also owned by the Italian billionaire, the Club's 25 units have all been sold to some of the richest people in the world.

"The demand for the units at the former Jumbo Club Hotel near the Malindi Marine Park was too high and many wealthy people were turned away," says Philip Chai, manager at the Lion in the Sun.

There are fears that the world's richest people may not really enjoy their homes due to harassment from beach operators. Stakeholders in the industry are keen to ensure that the harassment is dealt with firmly so that the destination benefits from the inflow of capital once the world's richest holiday makers start to flow here and even acquire property.

Recently when the Italian billionaire hosted his friend and prospective villa owner at the yet to be completed club, former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, the two had a taste of direct harassment at the Casuarina beach.

Harassment

"The former prime minister and his host had to jog with bodyguards because beach boys remained at strategic points all wanting to beg from them yet they were only dressed in swimming suits," says Pamela Karisa, a beach trader near the Blue Key Hotel along the same beach.

"We have to deal with the harassment of tourists at the beach once and for all and we are firmly with the government in its projects to vet the traders and remove those who want to undertake illegal business at along the shores," Philip Chai, a stakeholder in Malindi's tourism.

Chai who is also the chairman Kenya Hotel Keepers and Caters Association North Coast also manages the Lion in the Sun, a health holiday destination owned by Briatore where the former Italian prime minister was hosted for three days.



From top: The Billionaires club that is under construction in Malindi. Inset: The artistic impression of the club once complete. Italian business mogul Flavio Briatore during a press briefing. Pictures: Kigondu Ndavano

Says Chai: "Beach operators are a major hindrance to tourism and we have been receiving numerous protests from tourists and hoteliers in relation to the harassment visited on tourists by beach operators."

With many hoteliers presently recording bed occupancies of below 30 per cent, Chai notes that unlike in the past when most tourists at the Coast remained on the shorelines relaxing, many presently prefer visiting the countryside rather than the beaches



because of the influx of beach boys.

The Beach operators have been accused of frequently confronting tourists along the beaches. It is claimed they even abuse those who fail to buy their curios or make bookings for safari and other excursions. "Majority of tourists today fear to go to the beaches due harassment which has almost become overwhelming that even the Tourist Police Unit has to be alert throughout," explains Chai.

Although meetings had been held

between the officials from the Ministry of Tourism and the district security team under the local District Commissioner, the harassment menace has persisted.

"Even with all our security meetings, no solution has been found on the matter yet," says Chai.

The stakeholder now wants the registered groups to unite and help the Government in removing those who harass tourists from the beaches. He says the registered organisations

should work closely with the Tourist Police Unit to deal with the bad ones.

"If the Tourist Police officers work with registered groups it will be easier for them to arrest criminals who harass tourists and that will guarantee smooth operations in the beaches where tourists will be allowed to relax and enjoy their holidays.

Chai also petitioned the Kenya Wildlife Services to monitor all the marine reserves and provide a 24 hour security to ensure there was tranquillity in the beaches.

In Mombasa along the Bamburi beach security operations have been successful because the Kenya Wildlife Services have helped streamline operations and created a proper environment for the tourists. According to Chai, Malindi should be fully prepared to start receiving billionaires and harassment at the beach will affect the destination negatively and deny the region the big money associated with the super-rich.

"We have to deal with the harassment of tourists at the beach once and for all and we are firmly with the government in its projects to vet the traders and remove those who want to undertake illegal business at along the shores,"

— Philip Chai, a stakeholder in Malindi's tourism

Tourists are no longer at ease on the Kenyan Coast

Continued from page 6

teliers have been struggling to control the now near overwhelming increase in the number of beach operators patronising shorelines. Hoteliers insist that the Coast of Kenya which mainly markets the beach as one of its most important bait for tourism, could suffer irreparable damage unless the Government deals firmly with the beach operators who include curio traders, safari sellers, marine park excursion package promoters and a cross section of petty hawkers and idlers who include beggars. In some shorelines in Malindi, tourists arriving in the beaches for the first time are shocked at the amount of people they find at the beach.

Consolata Ogutu, a shoreline curio stall owner at the Tropical Village Hotel access road admits that beach operators in Malindi can at times become overwhelming to tourists.

"Sometimes, the beaches in Malindi near the Tropical Village and Blue Key hotels are so crowded with groups of young and old people

all seeking to do some business with tourists, sometimes even the police and leaders of registered operators are overwhelmed by the numbers, yet these groups create a lot of discomfort to holidaying tourists," says Ogutu.

About 15 years ago, the Government realised that tourists needed to be treated with respect. After protests of heavy harassment of the visitors, the Government initiated the Tourist Police Unit to specifically deal with tourist related issues and crimes.

Beach operators

"We welcomed the arrival of the Tourist Police because we know things would improve, but now it seems even they have been defeated by the vicious ways in which beach traders fight to access business and income from tourists," explains Ogutu who has been in beach trade for more than 15 years. However, she notes that beach trade can be done with decency and respect towards tourists to ensure that they are not harassed and that they enjoy their stay in Kenya.

Malindi pioneered the first registered group of beach operators and at one time the cooperation between beach traders and hoteliers was so good that they held weekly meetings to review security and the situation at the beaches.

Hoteliers at the time even sponsored seminars and training workshops for beach operators where experts from the Ministry of Tourism and the hotels would educate the beach operators on how to deal with tourists.

Recalls the former chairman of the Malindi Branch of the Mombasa and Coast Tourist Association

Godfrey Karume: "We held several meetings with beach boys and other beach operators at the Eden Roc Hotel and agreed that we needed to avoid mistreating tourists at the beach if we wanted to entice them to become repeat guests and also advertise the destination to their friends."

The retired hotelier who now operates an up market tourist class restaurant recalls that in those forums, beach operators were very posi-

tive about the tourism industry and knew that continued mistreatment and harassment of tourists would paint Malindi and the Coast in general negatively in the international market.

Increased numbers

"Relations between the beach operators and hoteliers were cordial and for some years, operations were smooth with vetting of the beach boys and other traders being launched after all organisations were encouraged to register themselves if they wanted to do business at the beach," explains Karume.

However, after some years of smooth operations, tourist arrivals fell and hotels saw an increase in attracting huge numbers of Kenyans to the beach.

Karume notes that today an overhaul on the way tourism is managed was required especially in cleaning up the beaches of traders and idlers who remain on the shoreline to specifically harass the visitors by wanting to sell items, beg or even entice them into booking for excursions.

Soya farming set to improve farmers' livelihoods

By TITUS MAERO

The Japanese Government and the United Nations Industrial Organisation (UNIDOR) have established three small scale industries in Western Kenya to process different food products from soya beans.

According to Dr Josephine Ongoma, UNIDOR Projects Co-ordinator, the industries are aimed at encouraging Kenyan entrepreneurs to buy similar machines and venture into processing soya bean products.

"The three industries based in Kisumu, Migori and Malakisi require thousands of tonnes of soya beans to enable them operate at full capacity," said Ongoma. She noted that there is need for local farmers to produce more of such products.

Addressing soya beans farmers at Chakol Division in Teso District, Ongoma said each machine costs about KSh2 million adding that there is need to increase acreage of soya bean farming to create wealth and employment in western Kenya.

"UNIDOR is here to show case to Kenya and the world that these are machines that any entrepreneur can acquire and venture into processing of different products from soya beans," explained Ongoma.

She said the machine in Kisumu processes milk products for the urban consumers, while those Migori and Malakisi machines make soya bean flour for rural people which they then blend with other foodstuff to enhance nutrition.

The small scale industries funded through the Ministry of Industrialization will be run by Kenya Industrial Research Development Institute (KIRDI) to assist Kenya to start rural based industries that will develop the areas identified.

Ongoma noted that it was possible for individual farmers or groups of farmers and organisations to invest in the same type of machines and start to process soya beans as well as put their products in the market.

Potential

"These areas have a high potential for production of soya beans and, therefore, I appeal to farmers to plant the crop in order to sustain the machines," she explained adding that those who acquire the gadgets can locate them anywhere and not necessarily limit themselves.

According to John Achacha, a KIRDI official who accompanied Ongoma, the three industries are an example of what the Government intends to do to spread small scale industries in all counties to spur economic growth and create employment in rural areas.

Michael Akhwale, an Agronomist from Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI) Kakamega Centre who represented the direc-



From Left: Kenya Industrial Research Development Institute (KIRDI) John Achacha, Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI) Researcher Michael Akhwale and Western Grain Growers Association (WGGA) Chairman Dop Okalo during a recent visit at a soya farm in Busia County. Pictures: Titus Maero

tor Dr Francis Muyekho said his organisation in collaboration with International Centre for Tropical Agriculture (ICTA) and the Ministry of Agriculture have developed high yielding quality soya bean seeds through members of a community based organizations known as OKOA to sell to farmers in western Kenya. "This is expected to boost production of the crop," he said.

Akhwale said that through KARI Seed Unit, KARI Kakamega had assisted farmers to multiply clean seed varieties recommended for western Kenya region adding that this came up after

farmers had mixed all the varieties they had received earlier.

"Soya bean farming was initially started in the area to enrich the exhausted soil and reduce striga weed but continued planting of the crop without knowledge of its viability left farmers mixing up the varieties," explained Akhwale.

"The problem caused their crop not to fetch much money as different buyers insisted on particular varieties," he noted.

He explained that with the problem sorted out and a ready market for farmers, it is up to them to produce enough soya beans to sustain

the three industries in western Kenya.

Akhwale told farmers that western Kenya had been allocated a big portion of the soya beans to produce and supply to the industries. He cautioned that unless the local farmers produced the quota they have been allocated, other farmers from Central, Rift Valley and Eastern provinces will take up their quota to supply the industries with the raw material required.

No markets

Dismas Okage, a local farmer and co-co-ordinator of OKOA organization who grows more than three acres of the crop urged his counterparts to produce quality soya beans to supply the industries.

"We have been crying over lack of a market and now we have a regular buyer through UNIDOR and others, it is up to us to produce enough soya beans," he reiterated.

Chairman of Western Grain Growers Association Dobi Okalo said farmers in Teso are expected to harvest 45 tonnes of the first quality seeds which his organization gave them to propagate and sell to other farmers in the region.

Encouraging farmers to grow the crop, Okalo noted that soya bean is a highly nutritious crop grown in western Kenya and parts of Eastern, Rift-Valley and Central provinces.



"The three industries based in Kisumu, Migori and Malakisi require thousands of tonnes of soya beans to enable them operate at full capacity."

— Dr Josephine Ongoma, UNIDOR Projects Coordinator

Residents urged to participate in implementation of Vision 2030

By ADAM JUMA

The first step towards realising Vision 2030 is to elect good leaders who support and do not oppose the projects.

According to Beatrice Gambo Gender Affairs advisor at the Prime Minister's office Kenyans should shun leaders who oppress Government's effort to implement Vision 2030.

She was speaking during the launch of the Kilifi County Consultative Meeting on the medium term planning in Kilifi.

"Achievement of the Vision 2030 will be determined by the successful implementation of the medium term plans which started in 2008. These plans need leadership that is focused towards the development goal and not self-centred leaders," Gambo observed.

Her sentiments were echoed by Matthew Musyoka, Kilifi County Development Planning Officer, who pointed that 60 per cent of all Vision 2030 projects in the country are to be implemented in the Coast region with Kilifi taking at least a third of all the projects.

"There is need for all the people in the County to prioritize the projects that will be undertaken in the second medium term plan that will see Kilifi shift from being regarded as one of the poorest regions in the country," noted Musyoka.

Poverty

He said emphasis should be placed on reducing poverty which currently stands at 71.8 per cent and improving livelihoods at the community level using all the available resources.

He noted that rivers Sabaki, Nzo-

vuni, Rare, Goshi could be tapped to provide water for domestic use as well as irrigation in the County.

According to Gitonga Mbaka, Director of Transition Co-ordination in the Transitional Authority, the Government was keen in ensuring that everyone contributed towards the success of the region.

He informed the residents that the county integrated development plan would provide the framework to integrate economic, physical, social and environmental as well as spatial planning of the county.

"The Transitional Authority is ex-

pected to facilitate the development for the county government's budgets during phase one of the transitional period after the General Election," said Mbaka.

The county consultation forums are aimed at securing the views of the area residents and county development priorities that will inform the formulation of policies, programmes and projects of the second medium term plans which is expected to cover 2013 until 2017.

The stakeholders prioritised land ownership, education and health as key areas.

Unique beauty pageant for greening the environment

By KEN NDAMBU

It was like any other beauty contest where models battled it out to capture the eye of the judges.

However, the Kitui Miss Environment beauty pageant was done in a unique manner where the contestants had to prove their worth by soiling themselves as a way that would make the dry region green.

Preparations for Miss Environment Kitui County started on a low note but as time progressed many beautiful girls came up depicting the love the youth have for a green country.

The beauty pageant organised by Green Africa Foundation in conjunction with Parkside Villa Hotels and National Environmental Management Authority (NEMA) sought to get young people to plant 10,000 trees.

The contest which attracted dozens of participants was unique because models rarely engaged in 'dirty and tedious' work of reclaiming the environment by planting trees.

According to the chairperson of the organizing committee, Mary Ndumbu, the idea is to raise the community's awareness that it is everybody's duty to care for the environment and replenish the depleted areas.

"There's no better way to achieve this tree planting campaign than get-



Some of the models who participated in the finals of Miss Environment at the Parkside Villa in Kitui County. Picture: Ken Ndambu

ting our young girls to become the ambassadors of our environment," said Ndumbu.

She noted that the initiative is aimed at recruiting locals into a new green culture to increase tree cover in all corners of the county by educating them on which tree species are best suited for what soils and what they need to grow for commercial purposes.

"Response was overwhelming and the models are willing to soil themselves and lead from the front in healing the wounds of Mother Nature," explained Ndumbu.

Contestants who were drawn from

the local universities and middle level colleges battled to be crowned the Environment Ambassador for the county and the KSh20,000 grand prize.

Seedlings

Ndumbu said the 10,000 tree seedlings will be planted in various public places including schools, churches and gazetted land for use by the Kenya Forest Service (KFS).

Green Africa Foundation chairman Dr Isaac Kalua said the seedlings were sourced through support from several corporate bodies and that the initiative is part of the tree planting campaign launched early

this year by President Kibaki.

"If every Kenyan planted trees numbering their years, this means the whole country will be evenly afforested towards restoring our forest cover," explained Kalua.

The drive comes in the wake of reports that the country's forest cover is depleting at an incredible rate of 5.6 million trees daily through charcoal burning, timber harvesting and firewood for schools.

Kitui County is the most affected with depletion of the environment with hundreds of tonnes of charcoal finding its way out of the region.

The Kenya Forestry Service

(KFS) in a mitigation measure has formed Charcoal producers associations so that the charcoal burning is done in a sustainable manner with the producers being empowered to plant trees to replace those felled for the trade.

"There is need to devise ways to entice Kenyans to tree planting as a hobby to mitigate the country from the adverse effects of climate change," observed Kalua.

He said the effects of climate change in the county is faster than in other regions due to wanton destruction of trees through charcoal burning in recent years.

Women get funds to advance their ventures

By MARK MWANGI

Several women groups in Nyeri town and Mathira Constituency were presented with cheques worth millions of shillings by Women Enterprise Fund to help improve their businesses.

Presenting the cheques Anne Mutahi, who is the chairperson Women Enterprise Fund advisory board urged women from Central Kenya to form groups to enable them get the Tujiimarisho loan from financial institutions.

In Nyeri Town Constituency 31 women's groups received a cheque of KSh1.6 million while in Mathira Constituency they received a cheque of KSh6.9 million for 123 women's groups.

"Mathira constituency is the first in Central Kenya to receive such an amount since the Enterprise was started. It shows us that women in this place are working hard to empower themselves," said Mutahi. She added: "Many of them are engaging themselves in dairy farming business. Forming groups is a greatest opportunity as it



WEF Advisory board chairperson Anne Mutahi speaking to the beneficiaries of the funds in Nyeri County. Picture: Mark Mwangi

enables many individuals to handle and supervise the loan effectively," Mutahi urged the women to exploit the loans they get with seriousness. She advised them not to give up even if their ventures fail to workout.

"There are some women who take loans from banks but end up giving up at some point. Some end up giving up due to their business not progressing. Others lose their assets or products they bought with the money borrowed,"

said Mutahi.

She advised that women form groups that will make easy for them to manage their money wisely and effectively.

"We as Women Enterprise Fund are encouraging women to form cooperatives instead of them going to banks which are also ran by individuals who want to make profits," Mutahi reiterated.

According to Regina Muthui, a beneficiary of the loan from Nyeri, Women Enterprise Fund should es-

tablish their own financial institution in order to curtail problems they face when getting loans from local banks.

Mutahi responded saying they have already tabled the proposal to advisory board and they will conclude soon.

"There are claims from some women's groups that there might be a problem when they try to get loans from our financial intermediaries. We will come up soon with a long term solution," reiterated Mutahi.

Matatu owners seek to weed out untrained drivers

By KARIUKI MWANGI

Embu County Matatu Owners Association has embarked on thorough investigations to scrutinise documents possessed by the matatu owners and drivers in the region.

The association is seeking to improve services in the region and will weed out those with fake documents.

According to the association's chairman Robert Munyi, they have invited Kenya Revenue Authority officials to inspect the documents.

Munyi said that the exercise is meant to ensure only qualified drivers and well-serviced vehicles operate in the area.

Addressing the media after a consultative meeting to end the ongoing row between matatu owners and taxis, Munyi said they had decided to instil discipline among their members in order to avoid conflict with the law enforcers.

"We are aware that we have drivers who are operating with fake driving licenses and other documents and it is only through thorough investigations that we can be able to change for the better," Munyi

explained.

The association is committed towards ensuring that the laid down traffic rules and regulations are followed to the letter by punishing drivers who break the law or go against its rules.

"Those who will be found in possession of fake documents will be dismissed from the association and ensure they face the law so that they stop tarnishing the name of the association," he said.

Eastern provincial traffic enforcement officer Martin Asin, who also attended the meeting, praised the association for standing firm and dealing with errant members.

"As law enforcement officers, we are not interested in the wars about who controls the matatu terminus, we are only interested on whether they have the required documents and follow rules and regulations," he asserted.

Asin asked the association and the Embu Municipal Council to consider working together and identifying various terminuses outside the town so as to decongest Embu town which is densely populated.

Women form peace forums to mitigate against regional conflict

By **HUSSEIN DIDO**

Women from pastoralist communities are not usually peace negotiators but not so for Abdia Mohamed who has defied all odds to fit into the shoes of the late Dekha Ibrahim.

Abdia, 30, has kept the candle burning by preaching peace among the various communities in Northern Kenya.

She received head of state commendation on peace issues late last year in recognition of her work in reconciling the communities.

In 2010, Abdia was awarded by the National Steering Committee on Peace Building under the Ministry of Internal Security and Provincial Administration.

Abdia started peace work in 1998 after she completed her secretarial studies.

Inspiration

This was due to the incessant conflicts over pasture, water and inter-tribal attacks between the warring Turkana, Somali and Samburu communities had inspired her into peace work.

"I was determined to ensure that pastoralist communities in Isiolo, Marsabit and Samburu counties live in peace in the region," says Abdia.

Abdia is among a group of women who formed the Women Peace Forum which sought to mediate among the warring communities and step up women's empowerment in the county.

She says change starts somewhere and that is why women in the region have partnered under the Isiolo Working Group, funded by the Safer World International to.

The project is being implemented in Isiolo, West Pokot, Nakuru, Mombasa, Kisumu and Trans Nzoia with the aim of ensuring peace is maintained during and after the elections.

Safer World started working in Isiolo in 2004 when Community Based Policing (CBP) was launched in Kibera slums within Nairobi and Bulapesa in Isiolo.

The organisation has now partnered with women's groups, youth, peace and conflict resolution committees and the Government to implement a project towards mitigating the effects of the election.

Safer World is also keen on reviving community based policing, an approach which brings together police, civil society and local communities to address security concerns.

Achievement

A notable achievement of the approach is improved relations and confidence between communities and police, dissemination of early warning information, reduction in crime and general profound shift in police and communities in thinking about policing.

PeaceNet Upper Eastern coordinator Hussein Mursal says his organisation in partnership with Safer World trained District Peace Committees and supported local intra and inter-

peace dialogues in Isiolo, addressed issues of small arms and light weapons, supported women peace forums and trained on conflict management.

"People's peace-making perspective is a joint programme by Safer World and Conciliation Resources which has documented opinions and experiences of local people in a range of countries and helped to reduce cases of conflict in the region," explains Mursal.

Isiolo is among the regions which provided European Union with an analysis and programme recommendations based on local people's opinion and experiences.

Mursal intimated that since the inception of Towards Peaceful and Secure Election Project, there have been numerous engagements between community and local security actors, community dialogues/mediation and reconciliations, youth trainings on civic and voter education, joint peace events and media training on conflict sensitive reporting among others.

Relevance

The initiative comes in handy to address conflicts in the area. Isiolo County is still ranked among key hotspots as the country gears up for the General Election despite the fact that killings and raids have drastically gone down.

In Isiolo trade, religion, cultural identity and tradition all blend together to create a fascinating mix.

While the conflict that rocked the area in 2012 remains unclear, fear and intimidation have been fanned along tribal lines, creating despondency in the once well integrated society.

The town has become increasingly segmented along tribal and to some extent religious lines. Neighbours from different tribes who have coexisted harmoniously in the past have become enemies with those considered as minority being forced to move to areas where their tribe is dominant.

While tribal identity is important to some, it is not a cause of conflict in the area. Swahili is the dominant language here. Tribal languages are only spoken at home but when conflict erupts it is not safe for members of certain tribes to pass through areas belonging to others. If they do, they risk being stoned or lynched as the people (though predominantly young



men) of the area vent their fear and frustration on someone perceived to be from the 'enemy' tribe. Retaliatory killings or intimidation has resulted in robbery, rape, arson and more arbitrary killings. Arson is particularly used in areas where people have fled their homes in fear of attack.

The people who bear the brunt of the conflict are not the perpetrators of the violence but families with no connection to the conflict. These are normal families struggling to survive in the tough conditions of the underdeveloped country. Their children go to poorly equipped schools in the hope of a better future than their parents present.

As the new wave of conflict spreads in the area, the women and children flee their homes for fear of what will happen to them if they are caught by their attackers. They end up in churches, mosques, at sympathetic police posts or squashed into the too small houses of friends and relatives in safer areas.

Refuge

These are not aid camps; there are no facilities for all these extra people in the places they have descended upon. They can only stay for a few days before they are forced to return home, hoping the worst has passed. Many go back to find their houses looted or burnt to the ground, losing everything and not knowing how to begin again, but having nothing else to fall back to, no state or organized support.

As at 2012, over 3,000 people were left homeless due to arson attacks. Thousands more have been perma-

"I was determined to ensure that pastoralist communities in Isiolo, Marsabit and Samburu counties live in peace in the region."

— Abdia Mohamed



Women demonstrating on a lorry with placards demanding peace negotiations and security in Northern Kenya. Below: Women join men in reconciling the communities. Safer world supports women in peace caravan in Isiolo town. Pictures: Hussein Dido

nently or intermittently displaced and majority of their children have dropped out of school.

Some of the factors motivating the clashes between the communities may include competition for grazing land, water and politically instigated violence.

However, according to the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC), the ethnic violence being experienced in these parts of Northern Kenya are directly linked to the general election.

NCIC Chairman Mzalendo Kibunjia has warned that unless communities in the region are integrated on time, we are likely to witness the worst violence in the region later this year.

However, Safer World has begun initiatives to restore peace and justice in the county and find solutions to recurrent insecurity. Negligence by the Government, scramble for resources, marginalization in leadership, livestock raids, presence of illegal arms and poor infrastructures have been listed among factors that fan conflict in the area.

Committees

The organisation has also helped to form district peace committees (DPCs). Spearheaded by the National Steering Committee on Peace and Conflict Transformation since early 2000, the district peace committees are expected to provide local mechanisms for identifying, monitoring, reporting

and dealing with conflict in affected areas.

They have received substantial support and endorsement from both state and non-state actors.

Although the district peace committees have had certain successes in dealing with situations of conflict, their efficacy as long-term solutions to conflict is strongly brought into doubt by recurrent conflicts, especially in places such as Isiolo.

The district peace committees and other local mechanisms of conflict resolution have not been effective in dealing with such ethnic conflicts due to two main principles underlying their work.

First, the district peace committees operate from the principle of communal crime and punishment. Under this principle, communities shoulder the burden of punishment for crimes committed by its individual members.

This totally contravenes the liberal regime of justice which, through the Bill of Rights, individualises crime and punishment, just as ownership of private property.

The second principle limits the efficacy of district peace committees as an alternative mechanism of justice and thus guarantors of long-term peace emanates from their composition.

Such committees are chaired by district commissioners and rely on the provincial administration for their survival.

Peace initiatives set agenda for a conflict free election

By **DUNCAN MBOYAH**

When conflict occurs, no one is spared. Everybody will in one way or another get affected by the violence and disturbance. This is why public and private universities in Kenya have realised that they cannot be left out in calling for a peaceful time in the coming General Elections.

Besides providing education, the universities recognise their role in democratisation through students and lecturers some of were agents of change in the 1970s through the 1990s to bring a second liberation in Kenya.

Stung by the changing political situation where violence emanating from the political party primary nominations and sections of ethnic skirmishes, the universities have developed an advocacy lobby to help preach peace among local communities.

In the post-election period of 2007 over 1,300 people were killed, several maimed and property destroyed, universities were not spared either. They too lost potential lecturers and employees as well. Their buildings and other properties were destroyed.

“Better late than never, here we come to help nurture peace in this country,” observed Prof Munyae Mulinge, Dean, School of Humanities and Social Sciences at the United States International University (USIU) during a recent roundtable conference in Nairobi.

Preach peace

Mulinge noted that in helping preach peace ahead of the polls, the universities are now preaching what they teach practically.

He said that the university fraternity and foreigners alike were shocked when violence broke out in the country that has been known as an island of peace.

“We are going to use students to help demonstrate to communities that the youth are useful members of society and should not be hired as gangs by politicians,” explained Mulinge.

The process is to take place before and continue after the General Election. It is being done in collaboration with grassroots peace organisations and is aimed at entrenching the culture of living in harmony and peace with each other.

“Like the scenario in the United States of America in 1865, Kenyans must be in the frontline to say ‘never again’ after unnecessary violence that claimed many innocent lives,” said Freida Brown Vice Chancellor USIU.

According to Brown, time has come for more universities to go further and teach subjects on causes of conflicts so as to equip students with mechanisms of preaching and maintaining peace.

The Vice Chancellor of Maseno University Prof Dominic Mak’Awiti noted that the youth of today need attention as they seem to be evolving faster with demands for survival mechanisms for their economic advancement.

Responsibility

“They receive a lot of information from the electronic media, some not very appealing yet they consume them and at times apply them freely in disregard to the societal harm,” Mak’Awiti observed.

He challenged parents to take up their responsibility by setting a good precedence to their children so as



Houses on fire during the post election violence. Youth demonstrating during the chaos. Below: Jebiwott Sumbeiyu, Chief of Party Peace Initiative Kenya.

Pictures: Reject correspondent

not to get involved in activities that threaten peaceful co-existence among Kenyans.

The Secretary for Cohesion at the Ministry of Justice, National Cohesion and Constitutional Affairs Mr Michael Ndung’u appealed to universities to assist in packaging cohesion concept through research.

Ndungu said that despite developing a guideline on hate speech, the subject is still controversial as many people still do not understand it.

The universities’ peace initiative is dubbed “*Wajibū Wetu* (our responsibility)”. Their goal is to have universities with a culture for change as well as look at innovative ways of bringing together university students and counties in a devolved government.

Under the programme, university students will be trained and short messages on peace prepared to be sent across the counties.

“The programme will engage all universities with county peace committees and county administration by preparing peace messages to be used at the community level after the General Election,” explained Prof Paul Mbatia.

Selected students from the 47 counties will be trained in creating and maintaining peace before and during the elections and the messages will be used for radio transmission in all vernacular languages.

Ford Foundation Regional representative for East and Central Africa Maurice Mak’Oloo appealed to the universities to change to meet the current demand of the society.

He noted that the fight for constitutional reforms had been spearheaded by lecturers and students at the universities, saying that the programme has been started by the right people at the right time.

“The barriers to achieving good governance can only be broken by a

multiplicity of actors and actions,” Mak’Oloo noted.

He observed that through the initiative, Kenya has been accorded an opportunity to make amend with history from the post-election violence of 2007-2008.

Under the programme, the universities have produced a documentary that will be used in reminding voters of the traumatic events of 2007-2008.

The documentary is a mythic story of the relationship between two neighbours whose friendship turns to conflict as ethnic passions threaten to engulf them.

Training

The universities project is not the only peace initiative going on in the country. Peace Initiative Kenya, is also another venture that is looking at non-violent elections especially at the grassroots.

Peace Initiative Kenya is working with communities and women at the grassroots towards mitigating gender based violence which tends to increase during the electioneering period. The project brings together eight organisations that seeks to address gender based violence at the grassroots.

Peace Initiative Kenya is running trainings aimed at creating a more protective and peaceful environment in the run up to the polls.

The project is being implemented to engage communities in the four conflict zones of Rift Valley, Nyanza, Nairobi’s informal settlements and the Coast. It hopes to build seeds to the capacity of women’s groups to advocate for peace in their respective communities.

Being the first of its kind, PIK



engages women leaders, youth, teachers and community health volunteers at the village level in engaging in peaceful activities within their day to day operations. It is also helping them rebuild their lives away from the violence meted against them.

Grants

Through the project, local women organizations are given small grants to help further grassroots action in Gender Based Violence (GBV) and peace building.

Given that those bent at causing chaos mobilises citizens to cause violence in pre and post election periods, PIK aims at supporting a sense of patriotism and nationalism that overrides ethnicity.

It targets to transform the society through continuous engagement with communities to break the cycle of violence, especially in hot spots

The project includes actions around legal aid and clinics for women



and children experiencing violence.

PIK has created county platforms to convene community members for action around peace and GBV to be presented to regional and national levels.

Media, women urged to promote peace during elections



By **OMONDI GWENGI**

The media has come under scrutiny over its inability to promote peace, reconciliation and nation-building during the electioneering period.

During the 2007-2008 skirmishes, the media was accused of fanning violence sparked by the disputed presidential election.

In the same post-election violence women suffered the brunt of the violence with some being sexually assaulted and raped, while others were injured or killed. Many other women watched as their husbands, partners and sons were killed or maimed in the postelection violence. Many women suffered their marriages breaking up after they were raped while a number were infected with HIV and impregnated in the same assaults.

Things do not look so good today as we are nearing the General Election. The party primaries did not spare women from violence. Both women candidates and voters were victimised for their political stand. What emerged also is that the media failed to give them adequate coverage and tended to concentrate on the moneyed men instead.

According to Farida Salim who contested Kisumu Central parliamentary seat nominations violence and discrimination against women is still rampant going by her experience during the just concluded party nominations.

"Only the brave and courageous women have been able to soldier on," noted Salim.

She was speaking during a media encounter that brought together women leaders from the grassroots and journalists through the Peace Initiative Kenya (PIK) project held in Kisumu.

Sharing forum

The meeting brought together women politicians, peace crusaders and journalists in order to promote peace and stop violence against women especially during this electioneering period.

The main objective of the media encounter was to allow communities and journalists engage to share their experiences and disseminate knowledge on the linkages between electoral processes, conflict mitigation and gender based vio-

lence. The women were also able to share with the journalists the challenges that they face in regards to electoral violence and gender based violence.

This encounter was expected to build the capacity of women's groups to network to advocate for peace in their communities as well as identify peace champions who can be the focal points for early warning.

Campaigns

What emerged from both women candidates and voters was that gender based violence during the electioneering period was still rife.

Salim who came face to face with hooligans during her campaigns said that she was attacked in Nyalenda and her car windscreen was being pulled off by rowdy youth who wanted money.

"The youth insisted that I give them money before I could pass. When I told them that I did not have anything to give them they started pulling off my car's windscreen and its only by grace of God that I managed to drive very fast before it was removed totally," said Salim.

She notes: "Politicians opted to bribe voters openly and the contest was reduced into how much money a candidate was able to dish out to voters during the campaigns while real issues were relegated into obscurity."

Salim regretted that the media has not given women enough space in terms of coverage both in print and electronic media compared to their male counterparts.

"Not all journalists are bad but there are a few journalists who would only put their interest in

"Politicians opted to bribe voters openly and the contest was reduced into how much money a candidate was able to dish out to voters during the campaigns while real issues were relegated into obscurity."

— Farida Salim

Journalists share their experiences at a past media encounter in Kisumu. The media has been urged to give women coverage especially during their campaigns.

Pictures: Courtesy AWC

you in terms of monetary reward," noted Salim.

According to Mary Otieno, a member of Kisumu East Peace Committee, the media was present in the polling stations and tallying centres but they did not give the accurate results of the nominations.

"The media did not give the true picture of what happened during the party nominations," said Otieno.

She urged the media to strive to increase participation of women and youth in the electoral process, adding that coverage of women and youth has been minimal, casual and often negative.

"Media continues to portray women as weak, unprepared and unavailable," noted Oloo Janak, chairman of Kenya Correspondents Association.

Discrimination

He reiterated: "Media should bring up issues that will enable women to be elected in the forthcoming general elections and the electorate should also be informed on the likelihood of constitutional crisis without electing women."

Majority of media houses have been accused of side-lining women's development agenda and instead harping on depressing issues.

These sentiments were echoed by Betty Okero, Director Civil Society Organisation (CSO) Network who said that the media has not given women and youth fair coverage.



"There are cases where male politicians receive more coverage while women and youth are side-lined," said Okero.

Journalists on their part defended themselves by saying that they find men easily accessible for a press conference or an interview compared to women.

During the meeting, it was noted that even though women are in peace committees, they are still not allowed to hold higher positions. In the committees, women hold positions of treasurers and secretaries.

However, with the change being witnessed, these women are hopeful that they are soon going to head these peace committees.

Margaret Odero, treasurer of Kondele Peace Committee is optimistic that Kondele, which has for a long time hit news headlines for violence, is no longer going to be a hotspot anymore.

"These youth are our children and we are the people who can talk to them to shun violence and instead promote peace," Odero said.

No appreciation

Speaking during the same event, Roselyne Onunga noted that the role of women in peace building is never appreciated.

"This can be witnessed in the peace committees where women can only hold position of a treasurer and not chairs of the committees. In case of violence, the women will always think of a broader picture of the society," noted Onunga. She added: "For there to be everlasting peace, women and men should work together."

Peace Initiative Kenya programme being conducted by several partners (African Woman and Child (AWC), Coalition on Violence Against Women (COVAW), Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA), Peace Net-Kenya, Rural Women, Sauti ya Wanawake Pwani and Well Told Story).

The project is seeking to encourage and sensitise communities in the grassroots on the importance of early warning in Gender Based Violence as well as the role of women in preventing Gender Based Violence and enhancing peace during and after elections.

Opinion polls and the media, which way forward?

By ODHIAMBO ORLALE

There is no doubt that Kenyans are monitoring the opinion polls with baited breath as the clock ticks closer to the March 4, General Elections.

All the presidential candidates in the various alliances are not sleeping as they strategise on getting the winning formula to ensure that their favourite presidential candidate and party is in the lead.

The candidates and their political parties want to know how they are fairing as they embark on the home stretch of the campaigns, while the voters and the Government officials are keen to get the feel of the political mood in the country for security and logistical reasons.

One of the biggest beneficiaries of the election fever is the media, which is cashing in by highlighting the opinion polls, election campaign speeches of the presidential, gubernatorial, senatorial, county women's representatives, parliamentary and country representatives as well.

And it is because of the way they have covered the opinion polls in the past that Media Focus in Africa, decided to hold a public forum last month, dubbed media roundtable, to bring media practitioners, pollsters, and consultants to discuss the issues with a cross section of members of the public at Alliance Françoise, in Nairobi.

Adherence

The theme of the forum was: "Are the guidelines for Election coverage being adhered to/ are they enforceable; and do the results of opinion influence the airtime and space given by Media houses to the presidential candidates and the coalition in this election period?"

The panelists were: Angela Ambitho, CEO Infotrak Research and Consulting; Brice Rambaud, director, Democracy and Governance Inter News in Kenya; and Linus Kaikai, Managing editor, NTV. While the moderator was Stephanie Muchai, Article 19.

According to Kaikai, the worry should not be on the opinion polls causing violence, but on Kenyans who have an inconsistent political culture. He cited the 2002 General Elections which was peaceful and confirmed the predictions by the pollsters that Mwai Kibaki would defeat Kanu's Uhuru Kenyatta, to take over from President Daniel arap Moi, and his ruling party which had been in power for 34 years.

Said Kaikai: "It is not the media and/or the opinion pollsters who fan violence, but it is the politicians and leaders who do so for their self-



The panelists from left, Angela Ambitho, CEO Infotrak Research and Consulting; Brice Rambaud, Director, Democracy and Governance Inter News in Kenya; and Linus Kaikai, Managing editor, NTV during the media roundtable. Picture: Odhiambo Orleale

ish interests. We in the media are adhering to the guidelines in elections coverage and opinion polls reporting."

The debate was very heated at especially during the open session when one of the participants said he had no confidence in the opinion polls saying they were manipulate able and were responsible for heightening the public's expectation and leading to the post elections violence following the country's closest fought presidential race.

Said Mongele Kamenche, a University of Nairobi student: "I believe that opinion polls should be banned altogether because they are divisive and can lead to violence. I also believe that we cannot use opinion polls even to rate an MP's performance. I fear that opinion polls can be used to fan violence as we saw in 2007/2008."

He was supported by Linet Maina, a fellow student, who also expressed that the releasing of opinion polls in the run-up to the General Elections

could lead to violence by supporters of their favourite candidate in case he or she loses at the end of the tallying and release of the results.

Exit polls

But the proposal was opposed by David Kaona, who said Kenyans must learn from the best practices in the West where the major media houses like CNN, BBC, and SABC among others use exit polls to know who is winning at the polls and what are the major issues.

On his part, Rambaud said Kenyans had the right to criticise opinion polls, but they should also consider whether they were credible or not. He was happy to announce that his organization, Inter News in Kenya had trained 25 journalists so far to cover, analyse and report on opinion polls professionally, accurately and fairly to help the public understand and embrace the democratic culture of electioneering cycle.

"Opinion polls give the ordinary citizen an opportunity to participate by speaking on the electoral process on his or her views as an expression of democracy. They should also be used to shape policy issues at the national and regional level; and not be confined to who is the most popular presidential candidate and his or her

party."

Political influence

Other participants also raised concern about how the major media houses are covering the elections, saying most of them were privately owned by leading politicians in the country, some of whom were in the presidential race. They raised the issue of impartiality and political interference by the media owners, thus having stories slanted in their favour.

They were also concerned about who owned and controlled the leading pollsters in the country, saying it could have a bearing on how the final outcome was released and presented.

In her contribution, Ambitho defended the pollsters saying they had agreed as professionals to use scientific methodology to carry out their polls, and it was misleading to accuse them of being compromised by some politicians and political parties to favour them.

Said Angela: "As Kenyans, we must appreciate the powers we have as citizens. We all have intellectual powers. If you cannot trust the public with opinion polls, then you are saying you can not trust them to vote! It is a myth that the role of opinion polls is to cause violence and bloodshed."

"Opinion polls give the ordinary citizen an opportunity to participate by speaking on the electoral process on his or her views as an expression of democracy. They should also be used to shape policy issues at the national and regional level; and not be confined to who is the most popular presidential candidate and his or her party."

— Brice Rambaud, Program Director, Democracy and Governance, Internews Kenya



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