



Government urged to support private schools in informal settlements

By IVY NDIEWO

The latest Global Education Report estimates that 1.4 million primary school children are out of school in Kenya.

The report further indicates that 80 per cent of these children are in Arid and Semiarid Lands (ASALs) and urban slums.

Provide

It blames high poverty levels, cultural practices, attitude and remoteness of the schools as the reasons for the trend.

While the Government strives to provide quality and

free primary education to all children in the urban informal settlements have been disadvantaged because they lack public schools.

"This does not mean that children in urban informal settlements do not go to school, they do but they do not benefit from the Government's free primary education policy," says Catherine Mwangi, Assistant Programme Manager, Education at the Concern International.

Concern International has been in partnership with other education stakeholders that have advocated for the

recognition of complementary schools because they have been serving children from poor backgrounds and in the informal settlements since

2004.

A new education law (Basic Education Act 2013) mandates the Ministry of Education Science and Technology to estab-

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— Catherine Mwangi, Assistant Programme Manager, Education at the Concern International.

Pupils of Soweto Academy in Kibera. Most children living in the informal settlements have to attend private schools due to shortage of public schools. Picture: courtesy

lish special regulations for the registration and support of schools serving poor communities, including urban slums. This law is expected to address the concerns raised.

Concern International is using the new law to provide technical and financial assistance to the Ministry and other education stakeholders.

"This will enable them come up with minimum registration guidelines and standards that will see complementary schools registered and regulated by the Government," says Mwangi.

Validate

The guidelines were validated by a spectrum of stakeholders and Ministry of Education in March and are awaiting approval by Cabinet Secretary for Education, Prof Jacob Kaimenyi.

"The proposed guidelines seek to exempt these schools from some of the rigorous requirements that public and private schools are subjected to and are deemed to be less essential when balanced with the provision of education," says Mwangi. She notes: "For example, the requirement to have five acres of land which is practically impossible in slums."

Complementary schools on the other hand now acknowledge the need to subject themselves to Government regulation and supervision.

"We are offering the same curriculum that is offered in public schools in teaching the pupils," says Michael Odhiambo, head teacher Silver Plate Education Centre in Ngomongo, within the sprawling Kariobangi slum.

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Drug barons and terrorists targeting disabled

By NICOLE WAITHERA

People living with disability are now being engaged in illegal trades. In most major towns across the country, they are now being used in drug trafficking.

According to Isaac Manyonge, Mainstreaming Advisor for the National Council for People with Disability, drug traffickers are targeting disabled people because they are the least to be suspected by security officers for getting involved in crime.

Ferry

Speaking during a meeting with departmental heads in Naivasha, Manyonge noted that recent investigations by the National Authority for Campaign against Alcohol and Drug Abuse (NACADA) had indicated that the disabled, especially in Nairobi, were being used to ferry drugs to drug users.

He noted: "There is a need to carry out a security check on all the disabled, especially the ones who were operating in the city centre."

Manyonge also called on the Government to introduce a Bill in Parliament to have people who offer cash to beggars on the streets arrested and charged in court, saying that they were responsible for luring more beggars to the streets seeking for alms.

"In Tanzania, the police actually arrest anyone who is seen giving money to disabled people. This is because they encourage them to go to the streets and there is a by-law that prohibits them from giving out the cash," he reiterated.

Operate

He claimed that 65 percent of beggars in the country were not Kenyans but from neighbouring East African countries where it was illegal for them to operate.

"Disabled people have refused to eke a living since they are used to receiving hand-outs," Manyonge said. He reiterated: "I feel that rehabilitation institutions in the country do not have enough students yet they have huge personnel. The Government



People living with disabilities participate in a cycling competition to show that disability is not inability. Some groups are however misusing them to conduct illegal businesses and terror activities.

Picture: Courtesy

should take disabled people from the streets to the institutions and train them on life skills."

At the same time, Manyonge hit at the political parties for the selection of nominated leaders, saying that disabled persons should be allowed to nominate their own leaders

Speaking at the same meeting, nominated Senator Paul Njoroge, now wants security organs to desist from giving preferential treatment to persons living with disability during security checks.

Njoroge, who is living with disability, claims that the terrorist group, Al-Shaabab and other militia groups were

recruiting persons living with disability to help them carry out terrorist activities.

Allow

According to Njoroge, people living with disability are always allowed past security checks in malls, could be easily used by criminals to cause mayhem.

"We do not deny the fact that the disabled might hide grenades in the wheelchairs or even small arms and

yet they sweep through the security detail" Njoroge noted.

According to the Senator, all the loopholes in security had to be sealed and disabled people were no exceptions.

"They tend to assume persons with disability and let them walk in swiftly without checking them. This is jeopardizing to the security operations within the premises," Njoroge reiterated. He added: "We do not want preferential treatment but we

want them to be checked while being handled with extra care."

According to Njoroge, inmates in prisons who are living with disability should not receive any preferential treatment noting that they needed to pay for their crime.

"If they are wrong, they should not be treated with special attention. We will be visiting prisons to inspect the facilities to see whether they cater for the disabled people as the Senate," he added.

Chronic water shortage leaves city residents vulnerable to infections

By HENRY KAHARA

While they say that water is life, the precious commodity is nowhere to be found in many Nairobi residential estates.

Access to clean water and sanitation is a target that has to be met within Goal 7 of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set by United Nations in 2000 to be achieved by 2015.

Millennium Development Goal number seven seeks to ensure environmental sustainability. One of its targets is to halve by 2015, the proportion of the population without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation

Although tremendous steps have been made to achieve this target, much still needs to be done for it to be realised fully.

Currently accessing clean water in many estates and villages is still a major problem. Huruma Estate in Nairobi is one such area where the

Government needs to improve on access to water. Here, water shortage is common because rarely does a month pass without residents facing water hiccups.

John Mwangi, a resident of the estate says: "We the residents of still have problems when it comes to accessing clean water. Sometimes we do not have water at all." He adds: "There are times when we have just enough to survive for a day or two."

Pressure

"Many of the times water pressure is the problem. You find some areas have while some don't," says Mwangi.

He says that those with children are more affected when the taps run dry.

"Here we have to use water wisely because you don't know when it will run out or when it will come back," he says.

As if this is not enough, the problem also arises when the water comes

back since they have to queue in order to get a share.

"To make matters worse some plots have many houses meaning congestion when it comes to fetching water," Mwangi explains.

Many of the times water in this area does not go beyond first floor due to pressure.

"Women fight while fetching water because each wants to get some and they always want to be the first to fetch since we are not sure how long it will last," says Mwangi.

Huruma is one of the most congested areas in Nairobi. According to the 2009 census, Nairobi County has a population of 3.14 million.

It is estimated that over 60 per cent of the population relies on water vendors, water kiosks or unprotected water sources where quality is compromised and there is a high risk of contamination through faulty and illegal connections.

However, Nairobi County relies on other counties for its water sup-

ply these are Ndakaini and Sasumua dams in Murang'a and Nyandarua counties respectively.

Guarantee

The Constitution of Kenya 2010 in Article 43 1(d) guarantees access to safe and clean water by every citizen and in adequate quantities.

Currently poor sanitation, which is caused by lack of water, is making lives of Nairobi residents harder. According to official records, every year water borne diseases claim many lives of city residents.

According to a survey by United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) conducted in 45 developing countries, an estimated 4,000 children under the age of five die each day from diarrhoea related complications globally.

Dirty water, inadequate sanitation and unhygienic situations are estimated to be the leading causes of the deaths. About 2,350 children under the age of five each day die every day.

Globally, nearly 1.5 million children under the age of five die every year from diarrhoea. Improvement in access to safe water and adequate sanitation, along with the promotion of good hygiene practices — particularly hand washing — can help prevent childhood diarrhoea.

An estimated 88 per cent of diarrhoea deaths worldwide are attributable to unsafe water, inadequate sanitation and poor hygiene.

Water, sanitation and hygiene programmes typically include a number of interventions that work to reduce the number of diarrhoea cases. These include disposing of human excreta in a sanitary manner, washing hands with soap, increasing access to safe water as well as improving water quality at the source and storing it safely.

Experts say that improving access to safe-drinking water and adequate sanitation, as well as promoting good hygiene are the key components in preventing water borne diseases.

Brave enough to tread where men dare

Women in Isiolo cash in on tourism to survive effects of climate change

By MARY MWENDWA

A group of women in the area have formed a group and are wooing local and international tourist to patronize their facilities making tourism no longer a man's business in Isiolo County.

Living in an arid and semi-arid area, the women have survived an array of challenges as mothers, home makers and bread winners due to many factors among them climate change.

Every time drought hits, it leaves in its trail devastating effects and loss of lives.

Maka Intalo, Amina Ali Sime and Khadija Boru in Kinna village, Isiolo County in Upper Eastern Kenya, have come up with the project that has not only earned them respect in the community but helps them eke a living.

Set in the Borana cultural setting to attract tourists, the women have built bandas and cottages using local materials. They have embraced the rich Borana cultural heritage and eco-tourism activities which have promoted social and economic growth around Kinna area.

Services

Visitors are treated to mouth-watering dishes prepared culturally as well as evening bonfire, camel riding, hiking, and beautiful Borana cultural songs and dance. The best cuisine is provided to cement "home-away-from-home" relationship.

Isiolo town has been identified by the Government in its Vision 2030 economic blueprint to be a resort city of Northern Kenya.

The interior of the bandas and cottages are set in true Borana cultural settings, the regalia very evident. The women of Malka Bisanadi Cultural Village decided to come up with the idea, considering the proximity of the game sanctuary, where other communities like the Maasai and Samburu have taken advantage, successfully cashing in on it.

"We came up with this idea, after we observed that we were losing our livestock in recurring droughts and we decided to do things differently this time, the changing weather patterns are just a disaster to this community, we share a fence with Meru National Park where tourists come to watch wildlife," says Maka Intalo, the group's chairlady.

The group started with 18 women and 12 men as members, they managed to raise funds from the membership fee. The members laboured to cut the building poles and all other construction materials to put up the bandas and cottages.

Income

This was after their regular sources of income reduced when livestock perished in the prolonged drought. "Almost all our members lost their wealth in terms of livestock during the drought that followed the El Nino rains, so we laboured very hard to cut each and every construction material to put up the bandas, cottages and other facilities at the village, not forgetting the membership fees which they toiled hard to pay," explained Intalo.

The idea of wealth creation by tapping into conservation related re-



Members of Malka Bisanadi Cultural Village. They have ventured into tourism as a source of income.

Picture: Mary Mwendwa

sources attracted the Kenya Wildlife Service to bring on board a human-wildlife conflict taming measures, by creation of inter-dependence networks that foster relations by active and interactive community involvement as a conservation strategy.

They have undertaken eco-tourism activities aimed at empowering the group members and community at large. They hope to benefit from tourism and eco-museum for income generating as well as a tourism partner. As a result they will conserve the wildlife and eco-museum and hence uplift the standards of living of the community.

The group has also been involved in planting of indigenous medicinal trees; undertaken to create awareness on effects of early marriages among the pastoralists; issues on HIV and

AIDS, drugs abuse among the youth and negative effects of Female Genital Mutilation.

The eco-museum is an overall effect by this group to initiate and organise preservation, display and cultivation of the resources in terms of natural, cultural, historic, and how it will transform people's lives as well as the local areas economically, naturally, culturally and the social environment. This group intend to manage, study, exploit and pass the heritage of the community to the next generation.

Deal

The village boasts of hosting many dignitaries, among them Inter-Governmental Action on Development (IGAD) Members of Parliament, ambassadors and local politicians who

"The village is our ideal place to brainstorm and relax. As men and women we have done ourselves proud. I would like to ask other Kenyans to visit and test what pastoralists can offer in terms of cuisine and our rich cultural heritage."

— Adan Ali, the county representative Kinna

wanted to get away from the heat of the constituents. Other political aspirants in the last General Election formed coalitions and sealed political deals here.

"The village is our ideal place to brainstorm and relax. As men and women we have done ourselves proud. I would like to ask other Kenyans to visit and test what pastoralists can offer in terms of cuisine and our rich cultural heritage," says Adan Ali, the county representative Kinna.

However, a major setback keeps members of Malka Bisanadi Cultural Village from realising their optimum potential is marketing of this tourist destination. A destination so serene, with streams flowing, birds whirling, jumbos rumbling by the fence, scenic natural features to watch and memories to behold are the hallmark of this village

The flow of visitors is not constant, sometimes they experience dry days when there are no one visits. "We are very much out of business because of zero marketing because most members are illiterate," says Maka Intalo. She adds: "However, we do not have funds to hire a marketing firm, we are solely dependent on a particu-

lar NGO, which has not been doing much to market us, we will be glad if someone came to our help to market us."

The group members have used finances received from their business prudently. They have built stores and done other necessary spending to better the village.

So far, the group has received assistance from the local county council which gave them five acres of land where the village stands today. Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) promised to fence the land to keep the wildlife away.

"We have received assistance from local council; they gave us five acres of land, where the village stands and KWS has promised to fence for us, to keep away wildlife. We have spent the money we got from our business well so far by building stores," says Amina, one of the group members. Despite challenges that women of Malka Bisanadi Cultural Village face, they are an inspiration and an example of resilience, towards effects of weather changing weather patterns. Through their hard work, determination and trust they have transformed their community.

Girls in Kampala saved from sexual slavery

By REJECT
CORRESPONDENT

Vulnerable women and girls in Uganda are soon going to enjoy alternative sources of raising income.

This is being done by Plan Uganda which has launched the three year project 'Partnership for Empowerment of Vulnerable girls and Women in Urban Slums (PEVUS)' which aims to provide an alternative income for girls aged 13-24 who risk being lured into unsafe means of acquiring an income in Kampala as a result of poverty and lack of access to alternative opportunities.

A study conducted by Uganda Youth Development Link (UYDEL) in 2011 revealed that girls as young as 14 years were being recruited into sex trade. The report noted that girls and young women are often transported from rural areas to Kampala City for commercial exploitation.

In this chain they are mere commodities to be traded as long as there is demand from the sex industry. It is estimated, that around 18,000 girls and young women are currently engaged in the sex industry in Kampala's slums.

Trainings

Over the course of the next three years, the project aims to provide training to 900 girls and young women currently working in Kampala's slums. The girls will benefit from training in a range of skills from business management and entrepreneurship, rights awareness

as well as life and mentorship skills to enable them obtain alternative employment. The girls will also be able to access sexual reproductive health services.

As well as helping the women, around 1,000 young children whose mothers are also vulnerable to the sexual exploitation in the urban slums of Kawempe and Rubaga divisions will benefit from quality Early Childhood Care and Development services.

According to Virginia Saiz, Programme Support Manager for Plan International in Uganda there is need to empower girls by building their skills that will help them overcome poverty.

"Engagement of young girls in sex work has resulted in many negative consequences, including high HIV and AIDS rates, back-street abortions as well as mental health disorders," Saiz explained.

Success

This project follows on from the success of the project funded by Plan UK and implemented between January 2010 and December 2011 to economically rehabilitate young vulnerable girls. The project targeted 100 young vulnerable girls in total, 93 girls undertook vocational



Girls training as hairdressers at the projects supported by Plan International in Kawempe, Uganda.

Picture: Courtesy

skills training, ranging from making leather products, hair-dressing, catering, computer and tailoring.

After the death of her grandmother, Harriet, 25, became the sole bread winner to her siblings.

When she was 18 she started living with a group of girls who were involved in the sex trade.

At first, she just looked after their children when they went to work, but after seeing all the money the girls made each night she decided to join the sex trade to earn a living.

"After eight years as a sex worker I started getting disenchanted with the trade. Besides my children were complaining about my lifestyle. I had endured a lot of risks, we would get arrested by police, beaten by clients or gang raped by thugs."

After learning about the

Plan International project, Harriet decided to take part in the project and chose to train in catering.

Graduation

Though some of the girls on the course continued to work on the streets at night, Harriet put all her efforts into completing the training and graduated in 2012 with employable skills.

"Most of my fellow trainees secured jobs immediately but I preferred to start my own small restaurant thanks to the start-up kits we were given during graduation," Harriet says. She adds:

"The most significant change in my life is the ability to live a predictable and socially acceptable life because I have the confidence to plan and pursue my targets."

Harriet says she has obtained the financial ability to finance her plans and to dream big.

"Despite the hard work involved in preparing food and serving customers, I am earning steady money," says Harriet. She explains: "I no longer rely on drugs and alcohol. My ambition is to expand and operate a big restaurant where I can employ other girls."

Government urged to support schools in the slums

Continued from page 1

Odhiambo notes that majority of the 480 pupils in his school are rehabilitated from working in the Dandora dumpsite where they collect garbage items for recycling.

Concern International is advocating for a policy change that would require the Ministry of Education to provide both financial and technical support to complementary schools at same level that is received by public schools.

Obligate

The schools will be obligated to register with the Ministry and will be entitled to financial and technical support from the government which includes quality assurance, teacher allocation and education materials.

Previously government planning for these schools has been a big challenge because of lack of data on the number of children who rely on these schools, thus if the guidelines are adopted, the government will be mandated to consider these vulnerable children in their national plans.

The guidelines also lay down minimum standards on management of the schools and they emphasise on quality education for all children. In regulating these schools, Government will be obligated to provide quality

education as envisaged by the law.

Section 39 (c) of the Act stipulates that children in marginalised, vulnerable or disadvantaged groups should not be discriminated against and prevented from pursuing basic education.

The guidelines will be used to solve a major barrier to attaining education that has in the past led to the exclusion of vulnerable children, youth and adults from fully accessing support from the Government.

"Children from slum schools are not admitted to good high schools after passing class eight exams because they are considered to be from private schools. This is discriminating the poor child since their interest should be the overriding objective," says Odhiambo.

Recognise

When the campaign to have the complementary schools legally recognised began a few years ago, the process drew interest from various actors including the donor community who gave the Government grants to support the complementary schools.

Only 343 schools out of the over 1,500 schools in the slums benefited from the grants due to lack of understanding of the management style in the schools.

Concern International has been



Pupils share limited resources due to under funding. Picture: Courtesy

working with these schools since 2004 and has developed a strong working relationship and a greater understanding of urban poverty and its effects on the provision of education services to the most vulnerable children.

Many of these schools especially those supported by non-governmental organisations have shown good ac-

ademic performance and these guidelines, if adopted, will give them a distinct character of recognition.

Concern research shows that 1,704 schools in the slums have an average of three trained teachers per school which is a dire situation of inequality in teacher distribution that can be improved to meet the teacher

distribution requirements by the Government.

It is, therefore, essential that non-governmental organisations and donor community work together to bridge the gap between these schools and the Ministry of Education for better education provision for the most vulnerable children.

MP to the rescue of Meru's girl child

By MARTIN MURITHI

A girl in high school loses 156 learning days which is equivalent to almost 24 weeks out of 144 weeks of school.

Nationally, a UNICEF report reveals that a girl in primary school between Standard 6 and Standard 8 loses approximately 18 weeks out of 108 school weeks.

Due to ignorance and poverty, most of the affected girls use pieces of dirty rags, cotton wool, leaves and paper, while some wash and recycle them. These practices, experts say, expose the girls to diseases and discomfort.

However, this will soon end for schoolgirls in Meru County who no longer have to worry about sanitary pads, thanks to the area Women's Representative, Florence Kajuju's philanthropic gesture.

Kajuju has pledged to cater for the estimated 30,000 girls from marginalised areas in Meru County by offering the vital products through the Florence Kajuju Foundation.

Speaking during the launch of the programme at Kenya Methodist University where more than 500 girls from primary schools in Imenti North, Tigania West and Buuri were given their packages, recently, Kajuju said the programme aimed at promoting the retention of girls in schools at all costs.

"The Foundation is taking care of the communal problems by providing sanitary towels to girls in the marginalised schools which have less chances of accessing the basic needs," said Kajuju.

The programme has received immense support from other investors including KeMU, Marvel Five who

are the manufacturers of the sanitary pads, several financial institutions, government agencies and private investors.

Kajuju reiterated that by empowering a girl, one empowers the whole nation adding that through the provision of sanitary pads to the girls, she is partly fulfilling her pledge to the people of Meru County.

"The programme will continue until all girls are retained in school since they can achieve the same as the boys and increase the number of the educated girls who can also take on leadership in all sectors of the country," the MP said.

According to Kajuju, since the Government had budgeted for provision of sanitary towels in other parts of the country, through such initiatives leaders were supporting the Government's activities where they could not reach.

At the same time she appealed to the Nigerian terror group, Boko Haram, to release the more than 200 abducted school girls.

Transit

"They need to bring the girls back home to their parents. We need to be together as we fight for these girls so that they are retained in school," said Kajuju. She added: "Boko Haram needs to know that their act does not make sense. They should bring back the girls and make their demands to the Government later."

According to Prof. Alfred Mutema, Vice Chancellor Kenya Methodist University, the free pads programme will help increase the transition rate of girls who normally drop from school due to such challenges to secondary schools and into university.



Excited girls who have just received their washable I-Care sanitary pads. Such initiatives help the girlchild to stay in school even when having her menstrual periods. Picture: Afri-Can

Indeed, since 2011, the Finance Minister has been allocating funds from the national budget to provide for free national pads to schoolgirls. The initial amount was about KSh32 million (\$4 million) which has increased over the years.

That development came after persistent pressure from the women's movement as well as women parliamentarians who took the issue of girls' absenteeism from school due to lack of the pads to the august House.

It was a campaign that left their male counterparts speechless, for such matters are rarely spoken about in pub-

lic, let alone in Parliament.

In their persistent lobbying, the women MPs have brought to the fore a problem that could have continued to hinder girls access to education.

Meanwhile, several Non Governmental Organisations, like Saidia Dada Network Kenya, have also started programmes to address the issue.

Home-made pads

The Network mainly targets the young girls and women who cannot afford to buy the sanitary pads. They are trained in various institutions, such as schools, churches and the

community level on how to make the pads from locally available materials.

Thereafter, the home-made pads manufactured by the Network are donated to institutions like schools in the rural areas and in informal settlements in urban centres like Nairobi, Mombasa and Kisumu among others and also to orphans in their respective homes.

Research has shown that the majority of school-going girls from poor family backgrounds usually skip attending classes when they are menstruating due to lack of sanitary pads.

Count them all in!

Action needed to ensure unregistered children do not fall through the cracks of development.

By REJECT
CORRESPONDENT

Millions of children around the world cannot prove who and how old they are. Hence, Governments and development actors are unable to plan for their present and future needs

According to a report released by Plan International in a new research paper called: "Birth Registration and Children's Rights: A Complex Story" this poses serious implications for reducing poverty in developing nations.

Out of about 230 million children under the age of five that have not had their births registered, 85 million live in Sub-Saharan Africa and 135 million in the Asia-Pacific region. More than 100 developing countries still do not have functioning systems that can support efficient civil registration and vital statistics.

"Unregistered children are at greater risk of exclusion. Registering them creates an official trace of their existence, which means they become visible and are accounted for. They can be protected by laws against

exploitation and abuse, and they are acknowledged when development plans are drawn and implemented," said Roland Angerer, Plan International's Regional Director for Eastern and South Africa.

"At the same time we must be mindful of possible unintended consequences of excessively rigid efforts to achieve universal birth registration," explains Angerer. He adds: "When, for example, a birth certificate is considered a strict requirement for going to school or taking exams, we create barriers to the right of education. We have to count them all in so that they can enjoy all their rights."

"We initiated this research because there is a knowledge gap on birth registration and its relationship to other rights. Yet while the research has produced some solid evidence, it

also raises many questions," said Jacqueline Gallinetti, head of Research at Plan International.

In Kenya, a birth certificate is required to take national exams but this is not the case in other countries like India or Sierra-Leone.

"The key finding of our research is that the relationship between birth registration and children's rights is complex and context specific and so we call on governments and development partners to use the research findings to inform, plan and implement birth registration interventions," explains Nicoleta Panta, Count Every Child Manager at Plan.

In some countries, civil registration data is not used for planning, policy development or resource distribution because birth registration rates

"At the same time we must be mindful of possible unintended consequences of excessively rigid efforts to achieve universal birth registration."

— Roland Angerer.



A happy mother who has just registered her child. Children who are not registered miss out on important life opportunities. Picture: Courtesy

are low and the systems in place are unreliable.

However, government officials aspire to use birth registration data for these purposes in the future and they recognise that civil registration data (including birth registration) is preferable to other forms of data because it is exact, continuous and real time.

Plan's research findings show that, although birth registration can promote children rights, it may also be used for

government purposes that are not rights friendly, such as restricting the rights of migrant children.

Plan, therefore, recommends that birth registration in developing countries be consistent with human rights principles and standards, and be viewed not as a solution to poverty in itself, but as a component of a broad range of issues, such as enforcement of the law and child protection.

Birth registration is a fun-

damental right of children and should be achieved through an effective and rights-based civil registration and vital statistics system. The research suggests that these systems have the potential to benefit individuals, governments and the wider global community.

Plan, therefore, calls for greater investment in effective, comprehensive and rights-based civil registration and vital statistics systems, including every child's right to birth registration.

Kajiado leadership seeks to protect girls from FGM

By CAROLYNE OYUGI

The war on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in Maasailand has gone notch higher, thanks to support of a Governor and 10 Maasai elders from Entosopia sub-location, Kajiado County.

The 10 elders vowed to end the outlawed female circumcision at a ceremony organised by AMREF Health Africa in Kenya.

The denunciation ceremony paved way for more than 250 girls to undergo the alternative rite of passage intervention, graduating to womanhood.

The elders are part of a three-year project dubbed, Entito ee maa (the Maasai girl) which is funded by the Dutch Post Code Lottery through AMREF Health Africa in Kenya.

The elders' move was backed by other male leaders from the County led by Governor Dr David Nkadianye, who described the practice as an old culture that had been overtaken by events.

Intervention

According to Dr Lennie Bazira Kyomuhangi, Country Director of AMREF Health in Kenya: "AMREF Health Africa in Kenya has been the leading organisation in developing this ground breaking intervention since 2009."

Entito ee maa aims to contribute to the abandonment of female circumcision in Magadi, Samburu, Loitokitok and Kilindi, in neighbouring Tanzania by 2015.

The function was graced by First Lady Margaret Kenyatta, who was the chief guest. The First Lady address called on

other cultural elders to "let girls be women without undergoing the cut".

She commended the Entosopia elders for their bravery in going public and denouncing the vice.

"This decision will guarantee that many girls will complete primary, secondary and college education to become women who make significant contribution to their community and the country at large," said Mrs Kenyatta.

She said the girls who graduated from the alternative rites of passage were assured of healthier lives, higher esteem and realisation of their potential.

Mrs Kenyatta noted that the graduation was a mark of honour and respect to the personal dignity of the girls. It was also a confirmation to the girls that their community accepts them as women without the cut.

"It is this noble and exemplary community action that we are here to honour," said Mrs Kenyatta.

Echoing the First Lady's sentiments, Kyomuhangi noted that a number of communities had taken steps to denounce female circumcision since 2011 when the project was launched.

So far since then, there are seven communities namely Shompore, Entasopia, Oldonyonyokie and Murantawa (Olkeri) in Kajiado West sub-County as well as Rombo, Noomayianat and Itilal from Loitokitok sub-County who have hosted public denunciation ceremonies to end female circumcision.

Those communities have gone further to adapt the alternative rite of passage model



Soipan Tuyu, (Extreme left) Women Representative, Narok County talking to Kajiado women on the effects of FGM. She is among the women who are working towards zero FGM and alternative rite of passage. Picture: Carolyn Oyugi

developed in collaboration with AMREF since 2009.

Speaking to the Reject, Governor Nkadianye assured his county of full support to ensure that culture is not used to oppress girls.

"We are fighting the cut because we think it is an injury to our female children. It is also a health hazard," Nkadianye said. He added: "We have seen a change in people's attitude and they are helping the NGOs and churches to achieve our goal."

The governor noted that the cut is accompanied by many bad practices like early marriage and girls dropping out of school which should not be happening at this day and time. He reiterated that alternative rite of passage encourages girls to continue with their education even after becoming women.

Death

"A girl passed away two months ago in Lodokilani after bleeding to death as a result of the cut. I don't see why we should lose one more life yet the chances are high as long as the cut takes place," observed Nkadianye.

Moses ole Sakuda, area Member of Parliament has also been working with AMREF and the elders to ensure that the girls are safe. However, he asked the non-governmental organ-

isations to consider the boy child too. "When the girl child is empowered and the boy is left out then there is a big gap," said Ole Sakuda. He added: "The morans will not be comfortable marrying a woman who is his superior yet they are the caretakers of the family." Sakuda noted that culturally the boy child eventually becomes the head of the family so they must also be taken care of in order to have a harmonious society.

Senior Chief Elijah Rereu of Olkramation West Location is also on the frontline supporting the noble cause. The chief who lost his first wife due to complications during delivery as a result of circumcision has been having sleepless nights ensuring that FGM is a thing of the past.

His daughter who is 18 years old was one of the girls gradu-

ating and he swore that no one from his household will ever go through the cut.

The morans were also not left behind as they promised to marry girls who are not circumcised. This is a very important commitment by the morans because one of the reasons why girls are circumcised is because the morans only marry those who have undergone the cut, which is culturally seen as a symbol of womanhood. There is also a myth that women who are not circumcised cannot give birth.

Violence

FGM has been defined by the UN 'Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women' as a form of violence against women and a human rights violation that should in-

cur individual criminal responsibility (Article 2a of UN General Assembly resolution 1993) and February 6 is marked as the international day of zero tolerance against FGM.

The Declaration further states that "women who are subjected to violence should be provided with access to the mechanisms of justice and, as provided for by national legislation, to just and effective remedies for the harm that they have suffered; States should also inform women of their rights in seeking redress through such mechanisms.

In Kenya, The Children's Act (2001) criminalizes the subjection of children to Female Genital Mutilation or Cut; people violating the law are subject to prison sentences. The government also took a positive step forward by creating an Anti-Female Genital Mutilation Board and appointing the Former minister Linah Jebii Kilimo as chairperson in December 2013.

Kilimo was instrumental in passing Kenya's Anti-FGM Bill in 2011 which late became the Prohibition of FGM Act of 2011. The fight against FGM might be slow but at least it is growing and more Maasai are embracing it.

"A girl passed away two months ago in Lodokilani after bleeding to death as a result of the cut. I don't see why we should lose one more life yet the chances are high as long as the cut takes place."

— Nkadianye, governor.

Culture to blame for girls' dropping out of school in Gusii

By BEN OROKO

More than 10 years since the Millennium Development Goals were set, meeting most of the targets has remained a challenge for developing countries.

While Kenya has made great strides towards realising goal number two which is achieving universal primary education, the setbacks are making it a crying shame.

Since the government introduced free primary education, some school aged girls cannot access it due to discrimination.

One of the regions where discrimination is reported to be rampant is Kisii and Nyamira counties in Gusii region.

According to Felix Ogeta, Programmes Officer for Nyanza Region at the Coalition on Violence Against Women (COVAW), research indicates that the culture of gender-based discrimination against girls was at worrying levels.

Ogeta lamented that some members of the Gusii commu-

nity were using culture to promote boy-child education at the expense of their sisters.

Ogeta described the practice as "gender-based violence against girls born among the Gusii community members".

Free Primary Education was introduced by retired President Mwai Kibaki in 2003 when he took over the government. It was promoted under the United Nations Millennium Development Goals and the government's economic blueprint Vision 2030.

Speaking during COVAW's community conversation forum ELCK Monianku Secondary School, in South Mugirango Borabu Location, Gucha South sub-County in Kisii County, Ogeta said that widespread gender-based discrimination and violence against girls was causing concern among state and non-state actors in the country.

"Gender-based discrimination against girls in the provision of education among the Gusii community is worrying, not because of its infringement on

the girls' human rights, but its negative impact on the country's achievement of Millennium Development Goal of equal access to education for both boys and girls," Ogeta explained.

Warn

He warned local communities against subjecting their girls to retrogressive cultural practices, especially early marriages, which deny girls their right to education and other benefits.

Supporting Ogeta's sentiments, Hellen Magara, head of Guidance and Counselling Department at the school, noted that many girls from the Abagusii were still suffering from retrogressive cultural practices which denied them the right to education.

Magara noted that many parents in other parts of the country were still clinging to outdated traditions which prioritise education for boys at the expense of girls, who are in most cases considered as sources of dowry for their parents.

She noted that the discrimination starts at home and continues even to schools where boys and some male teachers discriminate against them based on their gender.

"Girls' access to education has been identified by various studies across the world as one of the most empowering tools for reducing poverty among female-headed households," said Magara.

However, she lamented that traditional division of labour between boys and girls among the Abagusii also entrenches the culture of gender-based discrimination against girls, since boys are assigned light domestic responsibilities, while girls are given heavy responsibilities at household levels to the detriment of their education and careers.

She observed: "Majority of the girls from the Abagusii are tasked with the responsibility of taking care of their siblings and sick family members, while their brothers are either

in school or taking their studies privately at home."

Magara noted with regret that the preference for the boy-child among the local communities in the provision of education negatively impacts on girls from poor family backgrounds who either drop out of school or get married early in situations of acute poverty, as some parents regard them as an economic burden.

According to Magara, cases of teenage pregnancies, were on the increase in the region due to parents' failure to openly talk to their children on matters of sexuality. She lamented that parents instead left teachers in schools and religious leaders in churches and mosques to handle the subject.

Blame

She blamed some parents for the increasing cases of teenage pregnancies and early marriages among school girls in the region since they abdicated their parental role of guiding and coun-

selling their children on sexuality issues.

"Among the Gusii community it is a taboo to talk about matters related to sex. It is a hidden subject treated with a lot of secrecy making it difficult for parents to guide and counsel their children as required," said Magara.

According to the National Bureau of Statistics, Economic Survey 2009, the transition rate from primary to secondary school is very poor with only 43 percent of pupils proceeding to secondary school.

The survey indicates that at secondary school level, the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) remains low although it increased from 29 per cent in 2005 to 43 per cent in 2008.

From the same survey, evidence indicates that many girls drop out of school after primary education. The situation has been attributed to parents' preference for educating boys, poverty, sexual harassment, pregnancy and early marriages.

Dream Lingers Despite Odds

Women with hearing disabilities lament mistreatment by family

By OMONDI GWENGI

For Christabel Auko, the rosy life she had dreamt of while in primary school has turned into a nightmare.

Hitting the table as she speaks, Auko's movement need no interpretation.

When Auko, who is deaf, holds her arms out straight in front of her chest, her palms facing the audience in church in a gesture of surrender, the meaning is understood.

When she sat for Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE), Auko hoped to join a secondary school and later proceed to university where she wanted to take a course in tourism management.

However, the dream was shattered when she was forced by circumstances to drop out of school and start working as a house help in Ndori, Siaya County.

Through a sign language interpreter, Auko says that things have not been rosy. She tells *Reject* that her mother passed away when she was young leaving her with her father and stepmother. "We have never had a smooth sail-

ing with my stepmother mistreated us," says Auko, who accuses her father of always taking away her monthly pay from her employer to pay school fees for her younger sister.

The second born in a family of five, Auko blames her predicament on her father who, discriminated against her just because of her disability and preferred to take her younger sister to school.

"I am was being overworked, getting little food and no time to socialise with friends," she tells *Reject* adding that she lost hope of getting formal employment and now wishes to be self-employed.

Mistreat

Auko's sad story is similar to that of Evelyn Atieno, who was a house-help in Siaya town before she quit under what she terms as mistreatment, heavy workload and under payment.

Speaking to *Reject* through a sign language interpreter, Atieno who is the third born in a family of eight, says that she had plans to save part of her salary to help her return to school.



Christabel Auko, narrates her challenges as a person living with disability during the interview.

Picture: Omondi Gwengi

"After my father told me that he could not afford to pay my school fees, I went out to look for a job just to get some money which I could save in order to go back to school," Atieno explains.

However, her dream was cut short when she realised that her sister had been collecting her salary behind her back.

Discriminate

Atieno says that what hurt her most was the fact that her younger sister has been given an opportunity to go to school because her parents decided

that she (Atieno) does not deserve to continue with her education.

"I had at one time thought of going to the streets rather than face this severe discrimination from my family, who I looked up to for support and understanding," Atieno says amid tears.

However, Atieno says that all hope of changing her situation is not lost. Since she is an athlete, Atieno says that she would like to turn this talent into an income generating activity.

She says: "The Government should put into consideration the needs of those living with disabilities."

According to Atieno and Auko,

persons with hearing impairments have always been ignored during employment phase despite their good academic qualifications.

"Organizations placing job advertisements in the media are always overlooking the interest of persons with disability, we would like to remind them that we also have rights and if given a job can perform some duties even better," says Auko.

For Atieno, who is in Siaya Baptist Church for the Blind's praise and worship team, her dream is to get good education, a well-paying job as well as a loving husband and family.

Kenya goes for vaccine to help reduce deaths among infants

By HENRY OWINO

Rotavirus is a tough virus that can live on objects for several days unless it is killed by a disinfectant. It is very hard to prevent with just hand washing and cleaning with a disinfectant.

Globally, the rotavirus causes more than a half a million deaths each year in children younger than five years.

Rotavirus is the most common cause of severe diarrhoea among infants and young children. Nearly every child in the world has been infected with rotavirus at least once by the age of five. If a child survives he or she develops immunity with each infection, so subsequent infections are less severe. However, adults are rarely affected.

The Ministry of Health in partnership with UNICEF, the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI Alliance) will soon introduce Rotavirus Vaccine into routine immunizations.

This is aimed to help curb diarrhoea cases among children. Diarrhoea is noted as the second killer disease after respiratory infections among children under age five.

Rotavirus is a bug that causes gastroenteritis which is inflammation of the stomach and intestines. As a result, it causes severe diarrhoea, vomiting and fever leading to rapid dehydration followed by death.

The virus is highly infectious and many children succumb to it at an early stage. Rotavirus spreads easily through stool (faeces) of people who are infected with the virus.

It is highly spread to babies by hands

and diapers, or objects like toys, changing tables or doorknobs that have a small amount of the stool on them. The disease is commonly spread in families, hospitals and child care centres.

According to Dr Collins Tabu, Epidemiologist, in charge of policy direction on immunization at the Ministry of Health, the rotavirus vaccine has been administered for eight years in other nations and is considered safe and effective.

However, Tabu cautions that the vaccine does not stop all diarrhoea diseases and vomiting.

"Babies should get the first dose of the rotavirus vaccine at two months. For both vaccine brands, babies get a second dose at four months, while a third dose of is given at six months," explains Tabu.

Caution

He cautions that the rotavirus vaccine should not be started after a baby is 15 weeks old. Babies should get all doses by eight months of age.

According to Tabu, babies can get the rotavirus vaccine at the same time as other vaccines. So, every child depending on the age will need at least two doses of rotavirus vaccines for its effective results.

"We are targeting 1.4 million children less than one year of age and will administer rotavirus vaccine alongside other normal childhood health vaccinations. It is the best way to keep children safe from rotavirus," notes Tabu.

According to Tabu, the government

should offer the vaccine free of charge in all health facilities including public, faith based and private. The rotavirus vaccine will be launched officially on July 1, 2014.

"This new vaccine will go together with other initiatives already on the ground to help prevent child and newborn mortalities. We want to eliminate deaths caused by rotavirus among children in Kenya since the vaccine has been shown to be safe and effective at preventing severe diarrhoea in other countries," explains Tabu.

About 40 per cent of children admitted into Kenyan hospitals are diarrhoea related cases, and almost all are due to rotavirus infection

"To take away the diarrhoea virus among children, this potent vaccine is the only appropriate measure," says Tabu.

The doctor calls on parents to demystify myths with misinformed concept about the vaccinations and trust on the Government, WHO and oneself.

Another disease that would get new vaccine to boost its effectiveness is polio that has always been administered orally. The ministry plans to introduce injectable polio vaccine (IPV) against polio myelitis in 2015. This will help in accelerating eradication of polio that seems to becoming back yet it is vaccine preventable disease.

According to Dr Ian Njeru, the head of Disease Surveillance and Response (DSRU) at the Ministry of Public Health, polio was completely eradicated in Kenya 1984, after efforts to fight it began in earnest in 1980.

However, Njeru notes that 22 years later in 2002, cases of polio were spotted again in Kenya and the campaign to eradicate it began all over again.

The main objective of the planned injectable polio vaccine is to eradicate the disease completely not only out of Kenya, but across Africa as a whole.

"We confirmed a total 36 cases of polio between 2006 and 2013 in various parts of the country and this has been the highest," says Njeru. He adds: "Our target has always been to reach out to at least 80 per cent of the population for all sub-counties."

Data

For polio to be completely eradicated, it is very important for children to get full immunization. Unfortunately, only 80 per cent of children get full immunity after three doses of routine immunization.

Njeru admits these are some of the challenges they face as health workers. He urges families and relatives to take it upon themselves and ensure that their children are fully immunized during the slotted periods.

"Immunization is truly a shared responsibility for all of us, including the media. Let us join hands to help fight vaccine preventable diseases in this country," Dr Njeru urges.

Pregnant mothers are also advised to take tetanus shots against *clostridium tetanii*, bacteria responsible for the disease. It affects all groups but is more common and deadly in new-borns.

It is therefore important that women of reproductive age (14-49) to have

it. Once the mother is immunized, she passes the immunity to the foetus hence her offspring get immune too. Globally, one new-born dies every nine minutes from neonatal tetanus.

The scientists urged the media and journalists to educate the public about the value of immunization services. This, they said, as a matter of concerns that there are many issues such as religious resistance, lack of public education and awareness about hidden agenda related to immunization.

These controversies may be sensational, misinformed and could literally injure or even kill children who are denied immunization services.

The good news is that Kenya has made significant progress as far as Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) deadline are concerned. The proportion of children fully immunized against communicable diseases increased from 64 per cent in 2006/2006 to 82 per cent in 2012.

Analysis of demographic and health survey (DHS) data indicates that Kenya has recorded the fastest rate of reduction of infants mortality in the region in the past decade. This is from 77 per 1,000 live births to 52 per 1,000 live births.

This is attributed to increased utilization of immunization services among other health interventions. Though the national coverage appears high, there is a major variation in county and sub-county level. For instance, Nairobi and Kirinyaga have the highest at 95 and above per cent while Wajir and Mandera at lowest of 50 per cent and less.

Concern raised over slow down in immunizations

By PATRICK MUTISYA

Although national coverage of immunization appears to be high, there is a major variation in county and sub-County levels with Nairobi and Kirinyaga having the highest rate at 95 per cent while Wajir and Mandera recorded 50 per cent.

According to Disease Surveillance and Response Unit Ministry of Health, in general only 80 percent of the children get full immunity after three doses of routine immunization,

This means that many children, below five years, fail to complete the full dosage, leaving them prone to diseases.

Kenya's supplementary immunization campaign target for polio and other antigens is 95 percent and if the target is below 90 percent, the process of immunization is repeated, while target for the sub-counties is 80 percent.

According to Dr William Maina, head Directorate of Preventive and Promotive Health, the proportion of fully immunized children against communicable diseases increased from 64 per cent in 2005-2006 to 82 per cent 2012.

Reduction

This led to the fastest rate of reduction of infant mortality in the region in the past decade, from 77 children from every 1,000 live births to 52 children per 1,000 live births.

"However, there are discrepancies that hinder prosperity in immunisation and that cannot be accepted as the children must be brought for immunisation and everyone needs to be taught that immunisation saves life," explains Maina.

He adds: "We have the services which we offer for free throughout the country. What we want is to ensure that every child born in this country survives." According to Maina "immunisation is the beginning of life and unless children are vaccinated, they might not survive."

Since 2010, proportion of fully immunised children against communicable diseases started showing trends of declining up to early 2014 when some increase started to be recorded.

However, Dr. Ephantus Maree, head of Unit Vaccines and Immunisation attributes this decline to the new Constitution campaigns, the 2013 General Election campaign and devolution structural lay down as well as devolving of health services which led to the structural reorganisation of immunisation services.

The push and pull between national and County government on who is to head health departments saw the number of fully immunized children decline.

According to reports by UNICEF, measles, a major killer of children, still affects many while



A child receives polio vaccine in North Eastern Kenya. The exercise has experienced many challenges leading to law uptake. Picture: Courtesy

neonatal tetanus continues to kill an estimated two children in every hundred new-borns.

Polio has the risk of continuing to spread because of the low routine immunisation coverage. This is why polio immunization campaigns are so important in protecting our children and communities.

However, it is noted that the quality of polio immunisation campaigns has been variable and some children remain missed.

Unless it is ensured that all children under five years of age are vaccinated against polio, the disease may continue to exist and might even reappear later in new areas. It is noted that if a child misses to be vaccinated with the polio vaccine, he or she might infect another 200 children.

According to Dr. Madhavi Ashok, UNICEF Kenya Deputy County Representative, even though compared to a year ago, more children and women are getting vaccinated, many still remain unvaccinated and thus vulnerable to diseases.

It's estimated that over 250,000 children aged below one year have not received all the required routine doses of scheduled vaccine.

Ashok adds that majority of these unvaccinated children live in regions which are less developed and in poor households in the country where access to health services is a major challenge.

This explains why the country still experiences outbreaks of vac-

cine preventable diseases.

However, Kenya performed adequate polio surveillance from January to May 2013 and 179 cases have been reported. At least 38 counties out of 47 have reported at least one case.

Twelve counties which include Bungoma, Garissa, Kilifi, Kwale, Migori, Mombasa, Nairobi, Nakuru, Nyamira, Nyandarua, Siaya and Vihiga have achieved excellent performance in the detection rate of four cases in every 15 years.

However, the most disturbing is that there are 10 counties which are still silent and defined as those that have never reported any suspected case of acute flaccid paralysis (AFP) as required. Such counties are Elgeyo Marakwet, Isiolo, Kirinyaga, Laikipia, Lamu, Mandera, Marsabit, Samburu, Tharaka Nithi and Uasin Gishu.

Outbreak

By December 2013, Kenya had 14 cases of Wild Polio Virus (WPV) confirmed and the outbreak is linked to the ongoing outbreak in Somalia.

Routine immunisation is one of the effective public health interventions for some of the serious childhood illnesses. This entails vaccination of any child at birth and subsequently afterwards until the child grows and develops immunity against the deadly diseases that hinder their health.

However, accessibility to these immunisation activities varies sig-

nificantly across the country, and even within districts in a county. Some of the factors attributed to this include economic, cultural, and to some extent health delivery as been influenced by geographical factors.

One significant factor is lack of community participation in immunization programmes especially when vaccines are readily available. This can be attributed to cultural, religious and geographical factors that have resulted in the lack of immunity among children from these deadly diseases and therefore, resulting in frequent disease outbreaks causing high morbidity and mortality from immunisation against vaccine-preventable diseases.

Consequently to help achieve the universal polio vaccine campaign target the country launched a national immunization policy in February 2014, and also declared polio, an issue of public health emergency.

Presently the country is focused on implementing the Global Vaccination Action Plan (2011/2020) which puts emphasis on demand for immunisation as a shared responsibility, increased accessibility to vaccines, ensuring equity in immunisation, integration of immunisation services to other health programmes, ensuring sustainability through broadening partnership and introduction of new vaccines and immunisation technologies.

Among the new vaccines to be introduced by the Government in the year 2015 is the one dose injectable polio vaccine which will help boost immunity.

Therefore everyone should ensure that every child is reached during routine immunisations and vaccination campaigns and completes all the doses while the national and county government must prioritise immunisation.

Tour of Kilifi County leaves MPs speechless

By YUSUF AMIN

Members of a Parliamentary committee's recent visit to Kilifi County was an alarming eye opener when they came face to face with the poor state of infrastructure and lack of drugs.

Parliamentary Health Committee members were told that lack of drugs in Government hospital in Kilifi were the order of the day forcing patients and or their relatives to buy drugs from private chemists and pharmacies.

Inadequate

Speaking to the media during a Parliamentary Health Committee visit in Kilifi County hospitals, the committee pointed out that patients are forced to buy medicine in chemists and pharmacies since drugs in most hospitals and dispensaries in the county are not sufficient.

Led by the Parliamentary Health Committee chairperson Rachael Nyamai, MP Kitui South Constituency, the committee said the money that was released by the national government had not reached health facilities making it difficult for smooth running of health services.

"Health services have become very difficult at the moment because they cannot get enough drugs compared to previous times when the national government was in charge," Nyamai noted. She added: "Clinical and medical officers have confessed that drug supply is a problem."

The committee said failure to provide such essential health services was a shame to the county governments.

The committee was accompanied by Dr Anisa Omar, director of health, Kilifi County. They visited various health institutions in the County including the Kilifi County Hospital, Gede Health Centre, Watamu Health Centre and Malindi District Hospital.

The committee noted that there was no visible development on infrastructure by the County government and this was disappointing to the residents.

Equip

Most Constituency Development Fund (CDF) projects and non-governmental structures are not equipped, a good example being the Gede Health Centre mortuary and maternity wing.

According to Lawrence Micheni Rewa, nurse in charge at the health centre, poor services to lack of equipment was to blame.

"As we can see this health centre is supposed to admit patients but since we do not have a kitchen and other necessary equipment, we cannot admit anyone," said Omar. She added: "We do not have a cold-room in the mortuary nor a septic tank so we cannot offer any mortuary service."

For now they are using the latrine as our septic tank. According to Omar, the County government has not been able to complete some of the projects since it has other health centres which needed immediate attention compared to Gede Health Centre.

"The county government has its own priority health centres which it's handling now. Since Gede Health Centre is nearer to Malindi District Hospital, we rather start with other interior health centres which are very far away from hospitals," said explained Omar.

Challenge

Lack of enough doctors and nurses as well as late referrals are among the challenges mentioned by the medical practitioners at the county hospital.

However, Nyamai noted that women in Kilifi County turn out in big numbers for delivery services in the county hospitals compared to other counties and this was something that she was so impressed with.

However, there are discrepancies that hinder prosperity in immunisation and that cannot be accepted as the children must be brought for immunisation and everyone needs to be taught that immunisation saves life."

— Dr William Maina

Malnutrition haunts Sub-Saharan Africa

By ROBERT NYAGAH

The need to feed babies properly cannot be over emphasized when looked against a background where the World Health Organisation (WHO) indicates that malnutrition contributes to about 60 per cent of the 11 million deaths that occur each year among children less than four years old.

Closer home a research done in Kilifi County health facilities has confirmed that proper nutrition for babies at early stages plays a major role in ensuring better immunity from childhood ailments.

The study, which was carried out to determine infections associated with severe malnutrition among children admitted at Kilifi District Hospital showed that undernourishment predisposes affected children to various infections.

The study noted that undernourishment either worsens the children's nutritional status or causes malnutrition, hence complicating management ailments attacking them.

Ailments

According to Dr Bruno Sunguya, a specialist on nutrition related ailments at paediatric level: "Severe protein-energy malnutrition predisposed affected children to various infections, which either worsens their nutritional status or causes malnutrition, hence complicating their management and outcome."

Leading the study in Kilifi, Sunguya notes that the proportion of male children with malnutrition was higher than that of female children. The study looked at 1,121 children found to be suffering from severe malnutrition who had been admitted to various health institutions among them Kilifi District Hospital.

According to Sunguya, more than 75 per cent of all patients with severe protein-energy malnutrition were children below two years.

"Thirty-six per cent of all severe



Children playing in Kilifi County. There are concerns that many children in the country suffering from malnutrition exposing them to diseases. Pictures: Robert Nyagah

protein-energy malnutrition cases had malaria while 45 per cent of all admitted patients had diarrhoea," says Sunguya.

The study revealed that 64 or 19 per cent of the children with severe malnutrition died at Kilifi District Hospital. Septicaemia was also found to be the leading cause of death at the hospital which affected 55 per cent among severely malnourished patients. *Septicaemia* is caused when certain bacteria get into the bloodstream. Without prompt medical treatment, it can be fatal.

Deaths

The expert found septicaemia to be the most common cause of death followed by tuberculosis as well as HIV and AIDS.

"Most deaths at the hospital were

noted among patients with septicaemia. Deaths among patients with severe malnutrition were mainly attributed to bacteraemia," says the doctor.

He concludes that co-infections complicate the management of severe malnutrition and are associated with higher death rate.

Therefore, he notes, management of such infections are of paramount importance to reduce fatality rates.

The studies were done against a background where globally, malnutrition contributes to about 60 per cent of the 11 million deaths that occur each year among children less than four years old.

Protein-energy malnutrition was found to be more common in developing countries among children less than five years old, the severe form being between one to ten per cent and underweight between 20-40 per cent.

Malnutrition has been associated with over half of all child deaths in developing countries and presents mainly through kwashiorkor.

Kwashiorkor occurs in infancy but maximally in the second year following abrupt weaning while Marasmus involves inadequate intake of protein and calories, representing the end result of starvation.

Noting that marasmus occurred in the first year of life due to lack of breast-feeding and use of dilute animal

milk, Sunguya explains that poverty, famine, ignorance and poor maternal nutrition were among the major contributing factors.

"Pre-school children in developing countries are often at risk of malnutrition because of their dependency on others for food," explains Sunguya.

He adds: "Increased protein and energy requirements as well as immature immune system are to be blame for greater susceptibility to infections."

According to past findings, severe malnutrition affects one to two per cent of pre-school children mainly in the developing countries.

Sunguya indicated that in East Africa, malnutrition was increasing in prevalence and remained a serious public health problem yet the ability of malnourished child to handle infections is lower.

Data

At the Kilifi District Hospital where much of the data was collected, Sunguya found out that the institution serves a population of over 230,000 with the paediatric unit admitting more than 5,000 children per year.

Mortality rates at Hospital increased with age, with the highest

rate of 42 per cent and then decreased after the second year of life. The situation was worsened by the fact many foods fed on babies once they started feeding lacked required nutrients supply especially protein and calories.

According to Sunguya: "Diarrhoea, which has been the leading comorbidity at Kilifi District Hospital, causes malnutrition due to inadequate absorption and loss of nutrients and water."

However, Sunguya has a positive note for Kilifi District Hospital having been observed to strictly follow WHO guide on management of severe malnutrition, with proper case management.

That was a positive for the health facility because experts have found out that proper case management does reduce mortality to less than five percent.

"The most common complications, which kill patients with severe malnutrition, include hypoglycaemia, hypothermia, infections, dehydration and electrolyte imbalance," says Sunguya.

He notes that co-infections were associated with majority of deaths among the malnourished children.



"Pre-school children in developing countries are often at risk of malnutrition because of their dependency on others for food."

—Dr Bruno Sunguya

Man left desperate after police defuse bid to save daughter from early marriage

By OMONDI GWENGI

A family in Osieko beach, Bondo Constituency, Siaya County is in shock after a man who defiled and disappeared with their school going daughter was acquitted by a Bondo court.

Speaking at their home, the girl's father, Samson Odhiambo expressed disappointment regarding the acquittal of the suspect who unlawfully touched and penetrated his 17-year-old daughter, a Form Three student at Osieko Mixed Secondary School.

Recounting the incident, the disturbed parent said his daughter left home one night when he later learnt that she went to the home of Cornel Juma Masika on August 23rd, 2013.

"When she came the following day, I canned her as a disciplinary measure but she disappeared again when the schools closed," recalls Odhiambo who said he reported the matter at Usenge Police Station.

After three days, Odhiambo said the daughter was reported to have gone to his maternal uncle's home where she once again disappeared.

Police

"I decided to report the matter to a local human rights organisation and the girl was called. She recorded a statement and was taken to Usenge Police Station where she was detained as we searched for the suspect," Odhiambo explains.

Unfortunately, after being taken

to Usigu Health Centre for a test the following day he was told by the police to take back his daughter as they handled the case.

According to Odhiambo, after being arrested after the girl was taken to Usenge Police Station, he was made to understand that there were some police officers who were believed to be collaborating with the suspect to derail the case.

However, according to the ruling which was written by Resident Magistrate B. R. Kipyegon and delivered on May 7th, 2014, the prosecution first insinuated fears of witness interference and infiltration of other interested third parties into the case.

The court, thereafter summoned Usenge Officer Commanding Station

(OCS) through Bondo Officer Commanding Police Division (OCPD) who did not respond to the summonses and neither were there any witness in court.

The Investigating officer also avoided coming to court at the end of the trial and made no effort to trace or avail witnesses for the prosecution.

Defence

The court, therefore, concluded that there was no good case left to warrant any sort of defence from the accused person in these circumstances. The accused person was accordingly discharged under section 210 of the Criminal Procedure Code.

However, Odhiambo in his appeal requested that his daughter be allowed to testify before the court.

"It is my prayer that the Officer Commanding Station will be compelled to appear before the court and give evidence on reasons that prevented his station from cooperating with the court," said Odhiambo who regretted that among the eight witnesses in the case, he was the only person who testified.

He also appealed to have his daughter integrated in school since the incident has denied her the opportunity to fulfill her dream of acquiring quality education.

"I pray that justice will be served and the pain that the pain I have undergone will be reduced," Odhiambo appealed noting that his daughter now stays with Masika as husband and wife.

Tobacco noted as main cause of cardiovascular diseases

By HENRY OWINO

Cardiovascular disease remains a major threat to public health in Africa with significant negative impact on high and middle-income communities in the continent. The most modifiable risk factors identified so far is cigarette smoking and other forms of tobacco products use.

This is the cause of several needless deaths that are due to exposure to tobacco and other risk factors propelled by sedentary lifestyle.

Some these diseases can be avoided by engaging oneself into active and energetic tasks.

Cardiovascular disease mainly affects rich people and is usually associated with hypertension, diabetes mellitus, hyperlipidemia, obesity and sedentary living, while family history, age and gender are the non-modifiable risk factors.

Although most people associate cigarette smoking with breathing problems and lung cancer, smoking is also a major cause of heart disease for men and women.

Risk

According to Dr Shahnaz Sharif, cigarette smoke not only affects smokers, the people around a smoker are also at risk for developing health problems, especially children. Environmental tobacco smoke popularly known as second-hand or passive smoke affects people who are frequently

around smokers.

Sharif notes that second-hand smoke can cause chronic respiratory conditions, cancer and heart disease. He disclosed that an estimated 70,000 non-smokers die from heart disease each year as a result of exposure to environmental tobacco smoke.

"Almost 20 per cent of all deaths from Africa are due to heart disease directly related to cigarette smoking," Sharif explains. He adds: "This means smoking is a major cause of coronary artery diseases in Africa today."

He cautions that a person's risk of heart disease or heart attack increases with the number of cigarettes he or she smokes. For instance, people who smoke have two to four times higher chances of contracting a heart disease.

"Smokers continue to increase their risk of heart attack, so the longer they smoke, the shorter their lifespan on earth," he cautions.

According to Sharif, a wom-



Tobacco smokers gathered in a designated area in Nairobi County. Tobacco is associated with many Cardiovascular diseases and WHO is recommending stringent measures in cubing the habit. Picture: Henry Owino

an who smokes and also takes birth control pills is even worse. She increases her risk of heart attack, stroke and peripheral vascular disease. "This is because smoking damages the lining of arteries, leading to a build up of fatty material known as **atheroma** which narrows the artery," he explains.

Smoking can cause angina, heart attack or stroke and carbon **monoxide** in tobacco smoke reduces the amount of oxygen in the blood. This means the heart has to pump harder to supply the body with the oxygen it needs.

Nicotine in cigarettes stimulates the body to produce adrenaline, which makes the heart beat faster and raises your blood pressure, making the heart work

harder. When blood clots, it increases the risk of having heart attack or stroke.

Policy

The World Health Organization (WHO) notes that an estimated 17.3 million people died from cardiovascular disease in 2008, representing 30 per cent of all global deaths. Of these deaths, an estimated 7.3 million were due to coronary heart disease and 6.2 million were due to stroke according to WHO research 2011.

Tobacco is estimated to kill up to one in every two

users. No other risk factor carries such a high mortality rate and costs more than half a trillion dollars in economic damages annually. As the use of tobacco has declined in high-income countries, the tobacco industry has increasingly turned to low and middle income countries, particularly in Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe, to recruit new users.

Without comprehensive tobacco prevention and control policies, it is estimated that smoking prevalence in the African region will increase by nearly 39 per cent by 2030, from 15.8 per cent in 2010 to 21.9 per cent the largest expected regional increase globally.

Increasing prevalence combined with sustained economic growth and changing population dynamics, could drive tobacco consumption in Africa to double within the next 10 years.

The morbidity and mortality caused by such an increase in tobacco use and exposure

could have devastating effects on health, development efforts, and economic growth in African countries.

In recognition of the threat posed by tobacco use and exposure, member states of WHO adopted a policy known as *Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC)* in 2003, in Geneva, Switzerland.

This international treaty prescribes evidence based, cost-effective interventions for reducing the supply of and demand for tobacco to prevent disease, disability and mortality caused by tobacco use.

Most countries in Africa have signed and ratified the convention but they have not yet fully implemented the interventions described in the treaty's provisions.

Until now, the comparatively low number of current tobacco users in Africa may explain the false sense of security and complacency in this area, especially in the context of other infectious and non-infectious disease priorities that African nations face.

"Almost 20 per cent of all deaths from Africa are due to heart disease directly related to cigarette smoking."

— Dr Shahnaz Sharif

Action called to prevent threat of tobacco growing

By HENRY OWINO

Prompt implementation of interventions could reduce projected smoking prevalence by half and mitigate the health effects, as well as the economic and development costs, of an African tobacco-related disease epidemic.

A new report by the Network of African Science Academies Congress (NASAC) now calls for immediate action to prevent the growing threat of tobacco use in Africa.

The report entitled "Preventing a Tobacco Epidemic in Africa" is calling for effective action to support health, social, and economic development, assesses to tobacco use and production.

The Network of African Science Academies is an independent African forum that brings together Academies of Sciences in Africa to among other things discuss scientific aspects of challenges of common concern, make common statements on major issues relevant to

Africa and provide mutual support to member academies.

The Network of African Science Academies also facilitates provision of science-based advice to governments and regional organisations on topical matters.

Impact

According to the Academies, tobacco is causing negative impact to health, economy, social and environmental effects to several people in Africa. The report reveals that current tobacco control efforts in African countries are being undermined.

For instance, women are disproportionately being targeted by the tobacco industry. When promoting tobacco use among women, the industry presents smoking as a symbol of strong women having modern values.

The report availed that youth are the largest potential market for tobacco use. It means, therefore, that youth smoking rates will continue

to rise as tobacco marketing and advertisement promotes the acceptability of smoking.

As a results of these, the use of tobacco products especially cigarette smoking prevalence in the African region has gone high. It is expected to increase by nearly 39 per cent by 2030, from 15.8 per cent in 2010 to 21.9 per cent.

Tobacco related deaths and diseases are certain to increase in Africa in case of absence of strong action to prevent tobacco use. The increase in deaths and diseases caused by tobacco relations could have devastat-

ing effects on public health, development agenda and economic growth in African countries.

African governments should, therefore, prioritise the implementation and enforcement of the tobacco control measures called for in the WHO's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.

Policies

Among them are: Protection of public health policies from commercial and other vested interests of the tobacco industry; effective use of taxation measures, including reform of tax structures if necessary

African governments should prioritise the implementation and enforcement of the tobacco control measures called for in the WHO's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.

and regular tax increases, that result in increases in the price of tobacco products so as to reduce demand.

Protection from exposure to tobacco second-hand smoke in all in-door public places, workplaces, and public transport which Kenya among other few countries is fully implemented and very successful.

In addition, African governments should initiate a whole-of-government approach to coordinate national tobacco control and prevention efforts that also include civil society and other non-state actors.

A guest speaker at a tobacco summit, Prof Sam Dagogo Jack, a renowned Endocrinologist at the University of Tennessee Health Centre said ravages of hypertension and diabetes on the African continent can be seen daily in people's faces.

It is high time governments took action now especially as the World No Tobacco Day is marked on May 31.

Climate change forces pastoralists into crop farming



By MARY MWENDWA

A farmer in Isiolo displays his water melons. Most residents of the dry region have abandoned pastoralism and embraced crop farming. Picture: Mary Mwendwa

It is a windy, sunny and hot day, the different types of bird species chirping, cows, goats and a few camels roaming in the fields searching for the precious commodities, pasture and water.

The road network here is not very good, people use four-wheel drives to navigate through the rough and tough terrain. Motorbikes also form another alternative mode of transport for short distance travels. From a distance, I can spot a green carpet of vegetation, I ask whether an oasis exists in this region, but I am told they are vegetables being grown on the banks of river Ewaso Nyiro.

Farming

Thirty four year old Diba Gilaba, a father of four is one happy farmer. His five-acre farm, which borders the river, is a safe haven for his family.

Watermelon, maize, vegetables and sunflower are just some of the crops he has planted. Marta location in Merti, Isiolo County has been known for dryness and food insecurity. Many families depend on relief food as their own source of livelihood when drought and famine knocks at their doors.

Diba is busy digging a trench on his farm that will allow easy flow of water to irrigate his crops.

"I use water from the Ewaso Nyiro, this is the only wetland we have in this region, without this we are doomed," Diba explains, revealing that he decided to venture into farming because pastoralism was not sustainable.

Diba recalls with bitterness

how he used to be a proud owner of over 100 livestock that became victims of the last drought in 2011.

Similar sentiments were echoed by Dabaso Halkano in Korbesa location in Merti. Halkano has ventured into farming through Tulla Self-help Group.

Encourage

The group encourages agropastoralism among its members and others within the community.

"We were so used to livestock but now we have diversified, we are farming and the fruits of farming are way better than that of livestock because we can harvest grain and keep our livestock for future use," says Dabaso with pride.

A tour of his granary reveals several sacks of maize and beans. "Look at my stock. I have prepared myself in case of any eventuality during drought, I don't need relief food now, my family is happy," Dabaso says.

At Rupa farm, things are not different, Hassan Halaki owns a large farm where he grows a variety of food and cash crops.

One unique crop that captures my eye is tobacco. Tobacco is normally grown in the highlands of Kenya that enjoy good rainfall. The crops that dot this farm are huge with wide green leaves.

According to Halaki, he is able to plant many food crops on his farm. He has just harvested watermelon. I get a taste of the sweet watermelon from his farm.

Halaki recalls how his life was very difficult when he depended on rearing livestock alone.

"Here we do not get rains often, we can go for two to three years and this poses a big challenge to our livestock who solely depend on water and pasture," he says.

According to Halaki, farming makes them feel comfortable as they harvest and supply their produce to Isiolo town and its environs. The income helps him educate his children and take care of his family's needs.

Venture

On her part, Khadija Jilo Shande, a member of Bismilahi Self Help Women's Group in Komu Location is among the few

women who have decided against all odds to venture into farming. She has an injured limb from an accident in the past, but this does not stop her from tending to her farm.

"I am a farmer here and I get a lot of food which I sell. I also keep some for my family use. We no longer suffer just because of livestock which die when we are facing drought," she says.

Many people in the upper Eastern region where Isiolo County lies have resorted to farming to help them overcome effects of climate change.

Project

According to Rashid Guyo Waso, chairman River Users Empowerment Platform (WREUP), they work with communities and educate them on how to use the Ewaso Nyiro River sustainably. The platform has helped many farmers in the region on the best practices of farming which can help them deal with changing climate conditions that affect them adversely.

Through other partners like Kenya Red Cross Society they have a project dubbed, "Partners for Resilience" which addresses matters of resilience building among pastoralist communities.

Many wetlands in Kenya remain threatened; Ewaso Nyiro River which originates from Mt. Kenya and passes through Northern Kenya. It is one wetland, which people cannot afford to lose. It is just an oasis in the desert for Isiolo People.

Experts warn of looming crop failure

By TITUS MAERO

Kenya remains at risk of food shortage due to an impending food security crisis in the country.

According to Willy Bett, Managing Director at Kenya Seed Company Limited, the crisis is likely to be experienced due to low maize production this season.

According to Bett, the declining maize production is due to the dreadful maize lethal necrosis (MLN) acidic soils, use of fake seeds, sub-division of land and challenges posed by climate change.

Produce

Despite Kenya Seed Company producing high quality seeds for all ecological zones in the country, Bett says: "The issue of poor soils and new diseases were causing low production in the country's grain basket regions of Rift Valley and Western."

Bett explains that land preparation and timely planting of maize seeds contribute to high yields by farmers.

He assured farmers that despite challenges facing maize production in the country, his firm had developed quality seeds for all ecological zones.

"We are urging farmers to buy quality seeds from our outlets and registered agents as well as plant their crops within the 15 next months," Bett explained.

He noted that so far studies have shown that maize planted after on-set of heavy rains beyond April 15th were likely to be attacked by dreadful diseases leading to poor yields.

Register

Bett urged farmers to ensure they buy quality seeds from the company outlets and registered agents and avoid fake seeds from unscrupulous middlemen and businessmen.

He pointed out that his company had hired soil technicians from Soil Caves Limited to demonstrate to farmers how to test soil for application of relevant fertilizers.

Over the years, maize production in Trans-Nzoia and Uasin Gishu counties have been declining because of acidic soils prompted by over usage of organic fertiliser and aggravated by emergence of new diseases.

"It is for this reason that I agree with remarks by Trans-Nzoia Governor, Patrick Khaemba, that the government should help farmers in the area to acquire and apply a chemical known as lime to their soils to make them fertile once again," Bett reiterated.

He said Kenya Seed Company was partnering with soil testing companies, Kenya Agriculture Research Institute (KARI) and Kenya Plant Health Inspectorate Service (KEPHIS) as well as the Ministry of Agriculture to find a solution to new diseases and soil rejuvenation.

Address

Addressing journalists in Kitale town, Bett called on farmers to ensure they seek technical advice from experts and discontinue traditional farming methods.

He observed that currently Kenya Seed Company was selling its products in Rwanda, Uganda and Tanzania where they are equally becoming popular judging from their high demand.

Bett also appealed to farmers in maize producing areas not to abandon the food crop as it would lead to food security in the country.

"I am a farmer here and I get a lot of food which I sell. I also keep some for my family use. We no longer suffer just because of livestock which die when we are facing drought."

— Khadija Jilo Shande

Cultural norms bar women from family planning

By PATRICK MUTISYA

Despite the millions of shillings that the Government and developing partners have been pumping into family planning programmes in the country, there is not much to show for it.

During its fiscal year 2013-2014, the Government committed more than KSh700 million for family planning as a sign of its commitment to get a healthier, better educated and more productive society, the hurdles ahead are enormous.

In Ganze, Kilifi County, the number of children in a family stands at between eight to 14. However, even though many women wish to use family planning, their cultural beliefs and tradition does not allow them.

According to the nursing officer in charge of Ganze Health Centre, Winnie Muriuki, family planning is a stumbling block to many women who bear the burden of carrying the pregnancy, giving birth and even taking care of their family.

"They believe that a woman should give birth until all the children in her womb are over and a woman does not have any powers over her life to decide for herself whether to use family planning or not," says Muriuki. She adds: "It is mandatory for a woman to be granted authority by her husband first before she can start embracing family planning."

Muriuki says: "We have a problem with women because we give them all the required education on family planning but at the end of the day, they tell you, the owner has the final word. Meaning the husband still is the final decision maker to her on what to do."

So far, culture has been identified as the major brick wall placed against family planning by the local community.

Most men in the region do not want their wives to practice family planning.

The climatic condition of Kilifi County and especially around Ganze area is dry and only little rainfall is received each year. Much of the income is derived from selling of few coconuts that some family may have.

As a result, many men in Ganze do not have any source of income and due to the pressing needs of their big families they end up becoming drunkards.



Community Health Worker, Ruphence Rimba in Ganze Kilifi County educating village women on family planning. Picture: Patrick Mutisya

"Most men cannot even afford chicken because they are unemployed and loiter around the area to seek for casual work or even burn charcoal to get some few penny into their pockets for their families," says Muriuki. She adds: "Due to the scarcity of casual work, many of them end up becoming drunkards out of frustrations."

According to Ruphence Rimba, a community health worker in Ganze, Kilifi County, this is an indication that a man doesn't rest until he gets children.

Regret

"Even though many women wish to give birth to few children, their tradition is an irritating culture that cannot easily be wiped out from the community," says Rimba.

Rimba's husband is a casual labourer and although she regrets not knowing about her rights and family planning earlier, the mother of seven now urges women to plan their fami-

lies in order to bring up a healthy family which they can take care of.

"Most of my work involves urging women to open up their eyes and have a change of thought. Today, many women are using family planning to enable them plan their lives and that of their families as well as do businesses that benefit their respective families," says Rimba.

Through the involvement of community health workers, some women have ignored the taboo and decided to risk their marriages by secretly using family planning.

They leave all the documents and clinic cards with the nurses at the clinic to avoid them being seen by their husbands who would know that they are using contraceptives secretly. Women who have been caught using contraceptives by their husbands have ended up being beaten up while others have been threatened with divorce.

The result is that the wife risks being divorced or shown cold love. She is even told that she is

eating food that she isn't paying for. "According to the Giriama community, a woman shows her profit into the family by giving birth to many children. If that doesn't happen, they say, they are feeding someone who is not beneficial," says Rimba.

According to health experts, family planning helps drive away starvation and famine. Additionally family planning helps reduce the number of abortions and maternal and child deaths.

Muriuki says it is a myth that family planning stops women from giving birth at all. She notes that family planning enables women to space as well as bring up healthy and limited number of children whom they can take care of easily.

Myth

Despite the fact that the Government has devoted to increase access to modern contraceptives, a lot of information on family planning and government's intention on this matter needs to come clear to everybody in order to clear the misconceptions associated with it.

So far, records show that Kenya's population is growing rapidly and has more than tripled from 10.9 million people in 1969 to around 40 million people in 2013.

Population growth is the driving force to a reduced amount of arable land per capita available to rural farmers and their children.

Nearly 70 per cent of Kenyan people live in rural areas, and two out of three rural farmers do not believe the land they own is sufficient for their children to stay and live.

The only remedy to this is to ensure quick access to voluntary family planning. It is important to create awareness around it in order to prevent unintended pregnancies and reduce maternal and child mortality. Currently, one in every four women who desires to delay or prevent pregnancy does not have access to modern contraceptives.

Among married women aged 15 to 49, the poorest women and those with the lowest level of education have the highest unmet need for family planning while women in the lowest wealth quintile report the greatest need for spacing and limiting their births. In fact almost half of the poorest women report that their most recent pregnancy was not planned.

Cellphones used to impart health skills in Kitui County

By NZINGA MUASYA

The cell phone has gained more currency in parts of Kitui County where community health workers have undergone health training through mobile phone lessons on how to save lives within their communities.

The M-learning lessons are conducted through text messages, with participants answering questions and tutors marking them through the same channel, in a move aimed at taking health services closer to the people.

The move comes in the wake of shortage of community health workers who play a key role in taking health information closer to the rural populace.

Shortage

To address this shortage, the Kenyan Government through the Community Health Services Unit in conjunction with African Medical Research Foundation (AMREF) and Safaricom among other organisations have developed a new innovative solution dubbed Health Enablement and Learning Platform (HELP), whose goal is to address critical gaps in health training and improve the effectiveness of community health workers.

The platform takes advantage of the mobile phone penetration in rural areas and provides M-learning training to the health workers. Already 100 community health workers

from Kakululo, Enziu and Kavuvwani community health units in Mwingi region have benefited from the 10 month pilot project, which brought together 300 volunteers from Kibera, Samburu and Mwingi.

Speaking at Kakululo Dispensary in Migwani District, Kitui County, Dr Peter Ngatia of AMREF said the idea is to make the workers better providers of health information while the residents will become better users of the same, in regions where residents are deprived of health services

"The objective is to leave a lasting health change in the communities. The programme aims at putting competencies and skills to the health workers in areas where it is nearly impossible for people to access healthcare," explained Ngatia.

He said they picked Kitui, Samburu and Kibera because these are regions where the residents are deprived of health services due to shortage of health personnel.

He put the ratio of doctor to patient in these areas as 1: 30, 000, saying the trained health workers will significantly bridge this gap.

The trained health workers are placed under the supervision of a community health extension worker, mostly a nurse in charge of a health centre or dispensary within the locality.

According to Bernard Ngumbi, a trained health worker who benefited

from the HELP programme, it has helped in eradicating common diseases.

He says their role is to visit households and share health information with family members. Such information includes advising people how to dig and use pit latrines, use of mosquito nets, how to treat drinking water, best family planning methods and advising pregnant mothers on the benefits of delivering in hospitals.

Improvement

"This programme has really improved the healthcare services in our region. The trained workers also have a first aid kit to treat minor injuries," says Ngumbi, who attends to 12 households regularly. He adds: "However the key role is to refer serious cases to health centres."

He revealed that the community



Bernard Ngumbi, a trained worker attends to a client at Kakululo Dispensary in Kitui County. Picture: Nzinga Muasya

health workers hold a Dialogue Day every month with the residents and discuss health matters.

According to Miriam Macharia,

nurse in charge of Kakululo Dispensary, community health workers were helping reduce the outbreak of diseases such as malaria, diarrhoea, dysentery, typhoid and water borne diseases by giving the right health information to the residents.

"The programme has a positive impact on the community. Together we are working towards a health population through disease management," said Macharia.

According to Ngatia, over 200,000 community health workers will be trained across the country.

"The objective is to leave a lasting health change in the communities. The programme aims at putting competencies and skills to the health workers in areas where it is nearly impossible for people to access healthcare."

— Dr Peter Ngatia

Africa to capitalise on Europe's bee shortage

By HENRY KAHARA

Africa countries are being urged to invest more in bee farming as there is a big and ready market for honey. This follows a mysterious disappearance of bees in Europe.

"European bees are dying at high rate and there are fears that the continents may not produce enough honey," says Suresh Raina from the International Centre for Insect Physiology and Ecology ICIPE.

He notes that the bee decline in Europe may be as a result of health related issues.

Decline

"Honeybees and other pollinators are victims of natural hazards like pests and diseases as well as unnatural present circumstances," says Raina, explaining the cause of bee decline in Europe.

He adds: "There is a big market for honey in Kenya and there are more opportunities outside Kenya."

A section of *South African Bee Journal* early this year reported a global increase in honey consumption over the last years which can be attributed to a general rise in living standards and increased interest in natural and healthy products.

"It seems that worldwide honey consumption and consequently its production demand is increasing annually and there are no surplus

global honey stocks. Natural disasters such as drought, flooding and fire have also taken their toll on honey production," states *South African Bee Journal*.

With the bee decline in Europe scientists see this as a huge opportunity for bee farmers in Africa to increase their production and capitalise on this shortfall.

Although the cause of the bee fluctuation in some parts of Europe may not be known, scientist say that this could be attributed to climatic conditions, pests and diseases or simply to economic conditions making bee keeping less profitable.

Survey

The winter colony losses in United States of America were recorded through a survey which was conducted by the bee Informed Partnership. Over the winter 2010-2011 the total losses in US were 29 per cent a decrease compared with a record in previous years 2006-2009 (34 per cent).

This has seen scientists in Africa looking for ways to protect insects in Africa.

For now, the International Centre for Insect Physiology and Ecology (ICIPE) is planning to build an ultra-modern bee laboratory to help accelerate research and development in sub-Saharan Africa, including breeding, identification and con-



servation of genetic traits of certain African species such as disease tolerance.

Contribute

"Bee diseases and pests do not respect borders, therefore requiring regional and continental approaches with policy and guidelines for their control across Africa," says

Raina.

The laboratory will contribute in reducing the incidence of bee diseases and pests to improve honey production and pollination services for income generation and harmonize

A farmer attends to his beehive in preparation for harvesting. Farmers are encouraged to invest in bee keeping to meet the shortage. Picture: Courtesy

procedures and legislation relating to bee health issues in Africa.

Bees are important in the biodiversity pollination and quality of food may be reduced due to lack of pollination.

Insects are now becoming an option to food on the table

By HENRY KAHARA

Insects may soon be considered as a source of food worldwide. This means that in the near future people could start rearing insects for consumption. This is despite insects being named as the greatest cause of loss of fruits and vegetables in Africa.

In Africa fruit flies cause annual loss of fruits and vegetables worth two billion dollars.

According to Dr Nguya Maniani, insects will be considered for food not only because of their nutritional value but also because of the rise of the number of hungry people in the world.

The number of malnourished people in developing countries is said to be above 15 per cent of the population.

The figure of the malnourished is expected to rise with time as the population continues to grow while land space continues to decrease.

"There are nearly one billion people worldwide who are hungry. There is, therefore, need to re-evaluate what we eat and how we produce it," explains Maniani.

Expect

Maniani notes that by 2050 the world is expected to have a population of about 20 billion people. To accommodate this number, the current food production will need to be almost double.

A report by Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), dubbed *Edible Insects: Future Prospects for Food and Feed Security*, indicates that land is scarce and the area set apart for farming is gradually becoming small due to population growth. Today worldwide there are nearly one bil-

lion people who are starving.

The report indicates that eating insects is not a new thing in some communities although there are some who have distaste for them.

Although the majority of edible insects are gathered from forest habitats, innovation in mass rearing has begun.

International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology (ICIPE) is one of the institutes where insect rearing is taking place. Since 1971 ICIPE has reared more than 100 different arthropods species.

"Broad-based scientific efforts need to advance and promote insects for food, feed and other uses," says Maniani.

Consume

Globally more than 2,000 insects are consumed by human beings with the most common being beetles (Coleoptera) at 31 per cent, caterpillars (Lepidoptera) 18 per cent as well as bees, wasps and ants (Hymenoptera) 14 per cent.

Feeding on insects is yet to be embraced in western countries as to them feeding on insects is seen as a primitive behaviour.

Western nations view on insect consumption has greatly affected insect farming.

But this has not hindered other communities worldwide from feeding on insects. Feeding on insects is mostly perpetuated by culture and religion.

The report by FAO indicates that insects are a highly nutritious and a healthy food source with high fat, protein, vitamin, fibre and mineral content.

The nutritional value of edible insects is highly variable because of the wide range of eatable species.

Campaign launched to have men support fight against GBV

By JOSEPH MUKUBWA

The Nairobi Women's Hospital jointly with other organisations have started a campaign aimed at ending gender based violence (GBV) in the country.

The One Million Father's Movement campaign targets men from all walks of life and is fronted by the Gender Violence Recovery Centre.

The campaign, which was recently launched in Nyeri town, is a national social movement through which men sign up to reject all forms of gender-based violence.

Counsel

Nyeri Senator Mutahi Kagwe, who was the chief guest during the occasion, urged men to join Kikuyu Council of Elders where they can be counselled against many things including how to take responsibilities in the family.

For the past 12 years, the Gender Violence Recovery Centre (GVRC) of the Nairobi Women's Hospital has treated over 27,000 survivors and or victims of violence.

Most cases of the GBV go unreported with 55 to 95 per cent of women having never sought help.

Statistics from the centre indicate that over 90 per cent of the reported perpetrators are men.

"Nyeri men must take up family responsibility by providing love, care and protection. Nyeri men are no longer beaten by their wives. They were born by Mau Mau freedom fighters who fought for our independence," said Kagwe.

According to Margaret Gachagua, wife of Nyeri Governor Nderitu Gachagua, Nyeri men are not being battered by their wives and this is only a myth brought about by few people misusing the media.

"No more violence against men, women and children. Women should obey their husbands as the Bible says," noted Mrs Gachagua.

According to Alberta Wambua, Executive Director Gender Violence Recovery Centre, statistics

collected at the centre indicate that over 90 per cent of reported perpetrators are men. She noted the need to target men since most of them have abandoned their responsibility of love, care and protection for their families.

"The father's campaign has embarked on an aggressive recruitment drive from the national level to the counties, to mobilise and recruit one million men to commit to end violence against women," said Wambua.

She said that by signing up to the movement, men commit to stand in solidarity with women to end all forms of gender based violence including rape, defilement, domestic violence, Female Genital Mutilation and child marriages among others.

"The men also engage actively in campaigns as well as involve themselves in local community, business, sport, recreation or home based activities that will build social-cultural rejection of GBV," Wambua explained. She added: "It is expected that at least one quarter of the signees will become changed leaders at a community level by becoming positive male role models for peers and younger generations."

Counties

Peter Gichanga, director of Main Institute noted that such campaigns had been launched in Mombasa and Nakuru counties and more were on the pipeline.

However, Nderitu Njoka, chairman Maendeleo Ya Wanaume Organisation, said the campaign should have involved both men and women "instead of being biased".

The One Million Fathers Movement is a national social movement created by the Gender Violence Recovery Centre and is supported by UNICEF, in partnership with Men for Gender Equality Now, Femnet and The Co-exist Initiative.

The movement's aim is to have three levels of intervention named Gold, Silver and Bronze, depending on the time, commitment and energy they are able to spare.

Viral load test remains a costly affair

In the absence of this vital test to monitor treatment, this may impede progress towards eliminating new HIV infections, writes JOYCE CHIMBI

With more women on anti-retroviral therapy thanks to Option B+ which is now being rolled out in high volume health facilities, concerns are rife that in the absence of mass routine viral load testing, there is little support for lifelong anti-retroviral treatment in this East African nation.

Option B+ is the latest treatment option recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) for all HIV positive mothers regardless of their CD4 count, which necessitates the need for mass routine viral load testing.

According to Teri Roberts, diagnostics adviser at Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF): "Routine viral load testing helps catch people who are failing on treatment before they generate resistance to ARVs, and helps keep them less infectious."

Statistics by UNAIDS show that in 2013, a total of 55,544 HIV pregnant women received ARVs to prevent transmission to their babies.

However, the challenge is that not only is a HIV viral load test expensive but point of care viral load testing remains largely unavailable.

Though point of care machines are twice as expensive as tests in central laboratories, to provide solutions that work in a big urban context or in a rural poor district, Médecins Sans Frontières recommends a combination of the two.

As a result, Roberts explains: "Mass routine viral load testing is not feasible today. A viral load test component in Kenya is \$25 at the national programme on AIDS compared to a similar test in a clinic in Asia that costs about \$11."

WHO recommends viral load monitoring at six months after treatment initiation, at 12 months and every year thereafter.

Government statistics show that every year, an estimated 1.5 million pregnancies occur, out of which, between 87,000 and 100,000 test HIV positive. From these pregnancies, an estimated 37,000 to 42,000 infants are infected with HIV annually due to mother-to-child transmission.

Martha Akinyi (nor her real name) who has been on ARVs since 2001 has had a CD4 count that ranged between 700 to 800 in 2013, giving her a false sense of security.

"Then I began feeling weak and very sickly, within a very short time, my CD4 count dropped to 380," she says.

Reveal

A viral load test revealed that her body was rejecting the ARVs she was taking.

Many HIV experts are concerned that Akinyi is just one of the many mothers on treatment, who have either not benefitted from a viral load test, or it came too late.

According to Dr Dave Muthama, deputy project director for the Pamoja Project at the Elizabeth Glaser Paediatric AIDS Foundation: "The CD4 count



Youths in Kenya matching in the streets of Nairobi to commemorate World Aids Day 2013. Below: a sample of ARVs Viral load testing is an important yet expensive procedure to some patients. Picture: Courtesy

does not drop immediately drugs fail. The CD4 count may remain high for a while and by the time treatment failure is detected, a lot of harm will have been done."

With more African countries putting HIV positive pregnant women on treatment, HIV experts such as Roberts are concerned that due to poor resources "we may have a situation where we have highly infectious mothers on ARVs because they have acquired resistance to ARVs due to a lack of proper systems to monitor adherence to treatment."

HIV experts are calling on African governments to find ways of overcoming these challenges.

Other experts like Dr John Ong'ech, Assistant Director at Kenyatta National Hospital, say: "While Asia manufactures its own machines and reagents, Africa imports everything. We need to explore the option of having locally manufactured viral load testing reagents and machines."

In the case of Kenya "the cost of these viral load tests could go even higher due to value added tax (VAT) on imports," explains Ong'ech.

Initiative

According to Dorothy Mbori-Ngacha, Senior HIV Specialist at UNICEF East and Southern Africa Regional Office, towards this end, UNITAID, a global health initiative and UNICEF "have been doing market shaping to eliminate monopoly in order to create a competitive market that will ensure that machines and or technology needed for viral load testing are available at prices that are affordable to governments".

On the other hand, Roberts says that other options include "pooled testing at district level as is the case in Malawi".

In pooled testing, blood samples

from as many as five people are mixed together and one test conducted on their blood samples. If results show viral load is high, individual testing is repeated.

According to Médecins Sans Frontières, sample pooling using dried-blood spots reduced the number of tests required in a rural district with over 30,000 patients on anti-retroviral therapy in Malawi by 30 percent, and resulted in district-wide savings of \$207,000 per year.

In Zimbabwe, by the end of the first full year of viral load implementation, 70 per cent of patients on anti-retroviral therapy had received viral load testing.

To facilitate quicker and cheaper relaying of results in rural areas, Médecins Sans Frontières recommends the use of mobile and electronic health technologies.

Push

Roberts says that there is need to push the biggest buyers — President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (Pepfar) and the Global Fund who purchase 90 per cent of the tests — to go for pooled procurement and get even cheaper prices for all.

However, Ong'ech notes that pooled procurement may be difficult because buying laws differ across countries and even within countries and the procedures may need revising.

"Swaziland uses a generic open platform for procurement of viral load tests which leads to competition and achieves cheaper prices. Malawi, on the other hand, uses a closed platform which leads to higher prices," explains Roberts.

She notes that in generic open platform products, viral load commodities are sourced from different manufacturers, whereas in a closed platform, all the commodities are provided by a single



manufacturer.

Pushing for transparency with prices among countries is yet another option "there is no reason why Kenya should pay \$25 and the Clinton Health Access Initiative Prevention Programmes (CHAI) pay \$11 for the same component."

However, experts say that costs are also dependent on how the viral load instruments are used.

According to Médecins Sans Frontières, the price per test is dependent on the volume of tests run on each instrument, the closer to maximal capacity the instrument is used, then the price per test decreases by between 25 and 50 per cent.

Nonetheless, as African countries continue to scale up viral load testing, this is expected to give them some power to negotiate for reduced prices.

Technicalities and costs involved notwithstanding, other experts are concerned with the lack of alternative drugs in cases where drugs are failing.

Mbori-Ngacha says that indeed second line treatment is expensive, and

third line even more expensive.

Government figures show that the cost of the newer Tenofovir Disoproxil Fumarate-TDF/ Dideoxythiacytidine 3TC/ Efavirenz-EFV single-pill fixed-dose regimen is approximately \$180 per patient per year.

Although similar figures show that two key medicines used in second-line treatment, atazanavir/ritonavir and lopinavir/ritonavir fell by 28 per cent in 2013 due to competition among generic producers, with the most affordable second-line combination (zidovudine/lamivudine + atazanavir/ritonavir) now priced at \$303 per year.

However, Mbori-Ngacha notes: "This is the more reason why we need viral load testing. Early detection of drug failure can lead to timely interventions that can prevent the need to move the patient from one treatment regime to the next."

She adds: "The drugs could be failing due to social issues such as stigma and that can be dealt with without changing treatment regime."

Media in Kenya still chasing for press freedom

By HENRY OWINO

As the globe marked the World Press Freedom Day in early month of May, Kenya's media had no much to celebrate about this day. The safety of journalists covering sensitive stories and unearthing it to the public remains a big challenge in Kenya.

Media houses are up to date struggling to be let free to broadcast or publish stories without any state interference. Though the Constitution provides for this freedom of access and disseminates information to the public, in reality it is not reflected.

According to Macharia Gaiho, chairman of Kenya Editors Guild, as much as the President says he supports media freedom, his commitments and actions do not reflect the reality. Gaiho said the President's speech perturbed him particularly criticism of Kenyan media.

President Uhuru Kenyatta was the keynote speaker as he officially opened a two days regional Journalists Convention held at Kenyatta International Conference Centre (KICC), to mark World Press Freedom Day.

Publication

"Media in Kenya do not enjoy absolute freedom of publication and broadcast as they wish because of irresponsible handling of certain information. So it is the mandate of the Government under the Ministry of Information and Communication to defend those who cannot protect themselves against media," Uhuru said.

According to Gaiho, media in Kenya does not enjoy their freedom as it may appear to others. He noted that rhetoric expression must reflect what is on the ground.

Gaiho noted: "If it were so, then media would not have been in Court of Law fighting for their rights, space and freedom today."

He added that despite Articles 33-35 of the Constitution giving media the mandate to charge their duties freely, the government still piles pressure on media houses to force compliance and kills critical reports and commentaries.

"Freedom of press means much more not just word of mouth. This must be seen by action, commitment and felt in the newsrooms or media houses," Gaiho alluded. He added: "Kenya media cannot properly celebrate this occasion when under threat of oppressive media laws."

According to Gaiho, organizations that should fight for media freedom are being washed watered down as government plants its foot-soldiers in them.

He pointed out Media Council Act and Kenya Information and Communications Act that target to take away the established system of self-regulation.

Additionally, he anticipated this would only bring back the dictatorial structures of the State to control the media.

Kenya Correspondents' Association (KCA) and Kenya Union of Journalists



(KU) among other powerful media bodies are targeted as well. The foot-soldiers are now fighting to take control for supremacy. These are some of the setbacks within media industry and so journalists feel unprotected.

Critics

Gaiho regretted that critics are so many that media are under pressure to tow to their selfish motives so as to compromise on its watchdog role on government mistakes, corruption and excesses

"Obsession of media control from certain centres of power is of cause so rife just like in politics, but in media, it must make profit no matter what the story it carries," Gaiho observed. He noted: "Self-regulation is key if media is to monitor government hence the fight for press freedom though limited now."

Echoing Gaiho's sentiments, David Ohito, vice chairman of Kenya Editors Guild said media will not tire on its fight for freedom. He said the world is marking Press Freedom yet in Kenya nothing tangible would be seen and celebrate about.

Ohito stated that media remains the most trusted institution in Kenya and through it, the public gets to know what is happening. He reiterated that the fight for press freedom in Kenya will not end until such a time it is gained.

"In Kenya nothing comes easy and we shall continue fighting for this space regardless of how many times we appear in court. We shall be appearing again soon in court towards the end of

this month (May) just for press to operate freely," Ohito clarified.

Henry Maina, Director of Article 19 East and Horn of Africa mentioned that journalists especially correspondents in Kenya work under fear due to threats from certain politicians and heavy weight businesspeople.

Maina gave examples of journalists from Western Kenya whose lives are in danger for disclosing corrupt business deals and cartels in agriculture industry such as coffee and sugar.

He stated that the journalists received threatening information and had to go underground for months, noting that some had no otherwise but change their residence for fear of their dear lives. To make matters worse, none of the suspected cartels who had issued death threats have been summoned or arrested.

"Journalists in Kenya work under unfavourable environmental conditions poorly paid with all manner of threats let alone limited space of press freedom," said Maina. He reiterated: "It is high time media owners realize these and make life better for their employees."

According to Maina, the government must guarantee them this yearned for press freedom in reality.

On the other hand, media in Kenya has made tremendous steps forward since the country attained its independence in 1963. From a single State owned national broadcaster, Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) to hundreds of privately own stations today.

Journalists conduct peaceful match to protest the laws that undermine media freedom in Kenya. Picture: Henry Owino

This has opened up more space for divergent views of information and eliminated monopoly of one station dominance. The variety of media outlets has come with constant information updates as result urgency.

Freedom of expression, views, opinions and employment opportunities among other factors are some the advantages it brought forth.

However, these local media outlets are owned by non-governmental organisations, religious institutions communities, and politicians so they have several challenges. Competition has led to unverified information, biased news content depending on ownership, advertisers, sales and profits preferences among others.

Ethics

This has, therefore, contributed greatly to irresponsible journalism ethics and code of conduct. Again it leads to limitation of well researched information and promotes nepotism in terms of employment opportunities. Merits is most cases are compromised hence payments as none professional journalists are hired.

Prof Levi Obonyo, Dean of Communication, Language and Performing Art at Daystar University, challenged media houses that freedom is never given but contested.

He disclosed that days of yellow journalism is gone and today it is based on creativity and research with facts.

"Media houses never sell news anymore but depend on stories that would raise revenues from any corner of the world," Obonyo noted.

He urged journalists to stop being enemies of their own and instead work hand in hand to pursue the common goal they are called for which is informing and educating the public.

Mutegi Njau, a Senior Editor and Citizen TV host said journalists must remain relevant to the profession by ensuring that their stories are objective. He stated that any media house that encourages subjectivity or biasness in its coverage, denies the public certain information.

Njau called upon journalists to work professionally so that they can enjoy self-regulation.

"Any media that is irresponsible in its duties cannot be allowed to operate freely on its own unless information being disseminated is not for public consumption. Media is trusted and anything they say, it is taken as 'Gospel truth' hence needs to be careful with what it communicates to the public," Njau advised.

The Media Council of Kenya that is directly mandated with the welfare of media houses and journalists spear-headed the regional world press freedom held in Nairobi, Kenya. At least ten countries from Africa were represented this year's two days regional journalists Convention for World Press Freedom in Kenya.



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