

Unfiltered, uninhibited... just the gruesome truth

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Celebrating the Girl Child



Red flag raised for the girl child

Girls from Machakos County in a performance that explains they are too important and worth being treated equally with the boys. Picture: Henry Owino

As interventions are put in place to curtail the vices

By HENRY OWINO

As the world marks the International Day of the Girl Child on October 11, female children remain endangered as they face various challenges that hinder them from progressing.

Girls all over the country and the world at large are facing various challenges that are not unique to any one specific area.

However, a red flag has been raised on the state of the girl child in Machakos County where the number of female children being abused has become an issue of major concern to the local authorities.

Concerned parents have tried in vain to eliminate this practice which has made the community lag behind in empowering the girl child and especially in enabling her get education.

Several parents from Machakos County recommend their children to work as house-helpers and herdsmen in other counties. These are normally school age going children exposed to dangerous environment away from and by their parents just for income generating purposes.

However, the nature of these child abuses is in various forms: child-labour, trafficking, early marriages and immorality among other vices. These practices deny the children their right to

education which is key to success in life.

Plan International, a humanitarian child-centred development organization has intervened to curb the practice. The aim is to help all children in Machakos County realise their rights to protection from discrimination, violence, exploitation and other abuses.

Evangeline Naunjiri, Programme Unit Manager in Machakos County says there are many girl-child abuses that go on silently.

"Most of the abuses are due to ignorance by parents and children themselves about rights," says Naunjiri.

Her personal experience and now working

for Plan International on the ground, Naunjiri pointed out discrimination and child preference in education is common.

"Boys are favoured by parents compared to girls evidenced by the number of girls completing school either at primary or secondary levels of education," she explains.

Naunjiri notes with regrets that parents have given boys a lot of recognition and privileges concerning education compared to girls whose education is under-rated.

"Girls are told that their place is in the kitchen and that they will be married to a man

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Ambitious project launched to save street children

By CAROLINE NGETICH

Nakuru County government is set to admit street children to talent academies as a move to weed out the increasing number of street children.

Through a partnership with the Ministry of Children and a non-governmental organisation, Agents of Peace, the street children will be admitted to institutions as per their talent and abilities.

Rehabilitate

Recently, over 30 ex-street children who had undergone voluntary circumcision were admitted to various institutions, talent academies as well as children's homes within the County.

The youth have been undergoing rehabilitation and discipline during the two-week seclusion, a programme sponsored by Agents of Peace.

"The trend in the influx of street children is worrying and if we weed them out early by making them useful to society and ensuring their lives are relevant, we are in a better position of safeguarding security in town," says Daniel Khaemba, the Agents of Peace manager.

The children, aged between 12 to 17 years, are set to be admitted to talent academies in Nakuru while younger ones have been taken to designated children's homes which they will use as a base as they pursue their primary education.

The older children are set to join various institutions and talent schools where they can pursue short-term courses as well as hone their talent to enable them eke a decent and lawful living.

"Some of the younger ones will go back to school while the older ones will be enrolled in talent schools within the county where they will learn tailoring, masonry and driving among other courses," explains Abdi Sheikh Yusuf, County Children's coordinator.

Talent

According to Leonard Koech, 17, the two-week seclusion gave them a chance to fully rehabilitate and relate to others well while giving them a platform to reflect on their lives after the street.

"I am set to join a talent academy and being a rare chance, I will ensure that I work harder so that I can earn a decent living and bring up a family of my own someday," Koech said.

Jigger menace causing nightmares in Isiolo County

By MARY MWENDWA

At the children's ward in Isiolo District Hospital, 10-year-old Jane Karani is writhing in pain.

She is exhausted from constantly fighting the flies at her feet that have been rendered immobile due to jigger infestation.

She has not walked for over six months now because of jigger fleas' infestation. Her sad face tells the story of the pain she is going through. In a low and shaky voice, she says: "Mimi naumwa sana, kiuno ni chungu, hawa wadudu walinivamia hadi siwezi kutembea niende shule, niko hapa kwa matibabu (I am in so much pain. These jiggers infested me, my hip is aching too, I cannot walk and go to school)."

Care

Her mother has just walked out of the ward to go for a casual job so that she can fetch some daily food for Jane's other siblings.

Generally life in Isiolo villages (kambis) is tough. Most of the houses are temporary with mud dusty floors which are a very conducive habitat for fleas which bring about jiggers.

Many cases similar to Jane's are being attributed to the harsh climate around Isiolo region. Irene Kendi, a mother of six says that all her children are almost immobile because of jiggers.

"These jiggers are a menace during the very dry season here in Isiolo. This region is known for drought and famine, now it is so dry, all our children now have jigger fleas, who will come to our rescue?"

During a recent jigger campaign by Consolidated Bank of Kenya and Ahadi Kenya Trust in Isiolo, through a campaign dubbed 'Usafi Bora Maisha Bora' — cleanliness brings good health, over a 1,000 Isiolo families were sensitised and treated of jigger fleas.

Poverty

According to Dr Kamau Stanley, chief executive officer Ahadi Kenya Trust: "Jiggers are friends with poverty, we are here to support the people of Isiolo in eliminating jiggers." He added: "Now that this is



a poverty related problem, we will work together with Consolidated Bank, on a microfinance project to try and eliminate poverty among the people of Isiolo."

Scientists have attributed the increasing temperatures in some regions to be causes of some diseases which never existed before. For example, in the highlands of Kenya which were generally with cool temperatures, now warming up and recording malaria cases is a good indicator.

A family suffering from jigger infestation has their feet dipped in medicine solvent to get rid of the fleas. Picture Omar Mwalago

Laban Njoroge, a research scientist National Museums of Kenya explains that jigger fleas go hand in hand with poverty. He notes that climate change which may deprive people of livelihood may indeed be one cause of this poverty.

"The drying up of areas as a result of climate change may also contribute to infestation of jiggers as they prefer dry and dusty conditions," explains Njoroge. He adds: "A simple solution to the jigger menace is the wetting of the dusty soil conditions but this becomes impossible in areas where water is a problem."

According to Njoroge, development of most insects is dependent on temperature. An increase in temperatures even in a laboratory setup accelerates the growth of insects leading to proliferation of their populations. This is likely to be the case with non-mosquito vectors of diseases such as tsetse flies among others but it is well demonstrated by the house and filth flies. The great nuisance of house flies and their associated health problems at the Coast region and other warmer regions can largely be attributed to temperature increases.

"The drying up of areas as a result of climate change may also contribute to infestation of jiggers as they prefer dry and dusty conditions."

— Laban Njoroge

Slum toddlers benefit from day care services

By HENRY KAHARA

The days of children in Nairobi's Mukuru Kwa Reuben slum going hungry are coming to an end.

A non-governmental organisation has moved in and started a day care centre to assist some of the toddlers and their parents, most of whom are single mothers.

Malnutrition

Indeed, malnutrition has been one of the major problems facing parents living within informal settlement. Some parents are often not in a position to feed their children due to financial constraints.

Many families in informal settlements are headed by single parents who most of the times are jobless or

get casual jobs which pay them peanuts.

However, for now residents of Mukuru kwa Reuben are lucky that Reuben Centre has started giving day care services to the parents living around the slum.

According to Zipporah Mwangi, a nutritionist at Reuben's centre, malnutrition is a major challenge for families living in Kwa Reuben.

Mwangi says they found that many children were suffering from malnutrition and this made them decide to start a centre where the children, below seven years, get a balanced diet.

They later also realised that this was not enough because even after giving them one meal, some parents still were not in a position to give the

children another meal in the evening.

Inadequate

"Most of the times this is as a result of low economic status. We, therefore, looked for how we could take care of the children while the parents are away at work or looking for their daily bread," says Mwangi. She adds: "That is how the idea of day care was born."

At the centre they identify sick children and give them medical treatment.

"Furthermore we de-worm and provide them with toys while they are at the centre. We charge KSh30 per child. The money is used to help the women who come to take care of them," says Mwangi.

Parents who take their children

to Reuben Centre not only get this service but they are also advised on comprehensive family care, family planning, hygiene and importance of immunisation among other benefits.

The Centre has helped to do away with the child labour where in previous days the older children were forced to drop out of school and go home to look after their younger siblings.

Care

"Many parents in this slum work in industries in the neighbouring Industrial Area. The money they get is not enough to cater for their needs and to employ somebody to look after their children," says Mwangi. She notes: "Now we have relieved them of that budget since they are able to go and do their duties without worries."

Reuben Centre is built on a spacious place and there is competent staff in charge of taking care of the toddlers.

It also has a nutrition programme centre where new children go for assessment. Those suffering from malnutrition are put in the programme.

"We record the number of children we receive on a daily basis. The Centre receives between 25 and 30 children every day. So we are in a position to identify the new ones who are picked," says Mwangi.

Most of the children are from single mothers and family values are not that strong in slums.

Edwin Mwangi, a programme manager at the Centre says security and high standards of hygiene has given many parents confidence in Reuben Centre Day Care.

Explosive social media fires debate on child support

By WANJIKU MWAURA

A Facebook group, Dead Beat Kenya, is stirring a debate on child support and its legal and social requirements.

Inspired by what he termed as the 'pitiful' tales of women left alone to fend for their children, the page administrator, Jackson Njeru, says someone needed to raise the issue of the alarming increase in the number of men who have ignored and or abandoned their children.

Follow

The page, like most morning breakfast shows on FM stations, has attracted thousands of followers and even international attention.

The mainstream media has also been awash with such stories of boys, girls, men and women, going to court to demand a DNA test to be conducted to confirm that they were sired by some of the who-is-who in the political and corporate world.

The most sensational was of the late Cabinet Minister Njenga Karume and the late Prof George Saitoti, which were settled out of court away from the glare of the media and public.

The others have been of Deputy Senate Speaker and Muranga Senator, Kembi Gitura, and the late James Kamangu Ndimu, who had claimed he was Bishop Wanjiru's husband.

And from online and offline discussions on the matter, it is obvious Kenyans are still cynical about the Judiciary and few know about the Children's Act.

Many single mothers say the court process is not only expensive but is also tedious. And legal experts say many women do not understand their rights and those of their

children.

Consequently, Dead Beat Kenya, which provides a forum to name and shame parents, especially fathers who abdicate their role has come in to fill that gap.

Daisy Oluoch from Kilimani in Nairobi says she gave up the legal process after it became too hectic.

"I have managed to fully support my two sons through hard work because I find Kenyan courts the worst nightmare. Sorry to say," she says.

Wanjiru Gikanga Njuguna says following an absentee father is a waste of time. "Why waste your time following them? We should use that time and energy to fend for the children."

Responsibility

From the online discussions, there is also the misconception that responsibility solely rests with the father. Legal experts say this view is heightened by the notion that "a man is the head of the house". There is also the view that children born out of wedlock can be left to their own devices or that the parents must be together for the father to give child support. The Children's Act addresses this issue.

"People should understand that according to the Constitution, biological parents (whether married to each other or not) must equally cater for the child," says Harold Ayodo, a lawyer.

He adds that it is women who do not know their rights. They should go to court not to Dead Beat," he says.

Ayodo says that whatever the relationship both parents have, child welfare is what matters in law.

The lawyer says that Article 53 (2) of the Constitution is clear that

a child's best interests are of paramount importance in every matter concerning a child.

Support

Before the amount of child support can be determined, a court looks at the financial status of the person against whom a suit has been filed and the child's past and present living conditions. The aim is to ensure the child's life is disrupted as little as possible. Usually, the courts look at the basic needs of the child like education, health, shelter and clothing.

Traditionally and among some communities, when separation or abandonment happened, the woman went back with the children to her ancestral home.

However, there are those communities that obligated fathers to support their children and be responsible for them.

Before the enforcement of the Children's Act, child support depended on the benevolence of the father in case of divorce or separation.

In a rare case, a man from Kakamega went to court demanding child support from his wife in June 2014. The woman was ordered to pay KSh3, 000 per month in upkeep for her husband and two children or face a five-year jail term.

More recently, former Speaker of the National Assembly, Kenneth Marende, was ordered to pay Sh457,000 for maintenance of a child by a Magistrate's Court.

Last year, a Children's Court ordered Bungoma Senator Moses Wetangu'la, to pay monthly upkeep of KSh270,000. He was also required to pay an additional Sh120,000 every year to cater for the child's requirements.

However, in a country where thousands of teenagers are getting pregnant each year, the social media and courts may soon be flooded with women seeking child support.

Seek

Other issues emerging are how children born out of wedlock should be handled. For example, if a woman comes into the marriage with children, should the new man take on the responsibility? Legally, is a man obligated to take on the father role? According to Ayodo, he should take responsibility because it is acquired through marriage.

"Legally, if you marry a woman with a child or children you have automatically acquired parental responsibility. Even living with a woman for 12 consecutive months and her child under one roof bestows parental responsibility on a man," says Ayodo.

Some men may put non-disclosure as a defence, but that is hard to prove.

The other issue coming up is whether those engaging in sex should discuss the eventuality of a child.

Emmanu Simiyu says a woman should not get pregnant before informing a man she is involved with. "If that does not happen, then the woman should take responsibility," he says.

The other question arising is how the rising number of teenager mothers should be handled. Statistics show the number is rising at an alarming rate and most the young mothers are left to fend for themselves and their children. For now, there are special preferences and they too must follow the legal procedure in case they want to seek child support.

Children a Key Interest Group

By BONIFACE MULU

The Commissioner of Gender, Dr. Florence Nyokabi Wachira, has said that they in the National Gender and Equality Commission (NGEC) are talking of equality and freedom without discrimination. "Our key interest groups are children, youths, women and persons with disabilities," she said.

Wachira said that the marginalization in Kenya is poverty. "Marginalization means poverty," she said. The NGEC official was speaking during the 38th African Day for the Child marked at the Kitui Central Primary School in Kitui town where she was the chief guest. Kitui County Commissioner Moffat M. Kangi was represented at the function by the Matinyani District Commissioner John P. Kinjo.

Attend

Thousands of local primary and secondary school children attended the function. The function had been jointly organized by the Kitui County government, Kitui Catholic Diocese, the Jhpiego, Child Fund Kenya and the APHIA PLUS. Wachira said that a lot has been achieved in Kenya since the country's government introduced the free primary education programme in the country ten years ago. Wachira said that in some parts of Kenya, some boys are now being lured by vices that include drug abuse. "The female genital mutilation, early marriages and house-help work are forcing many girls to drop out schools in the country," the NGEC official said.

"I urge all the parents and the community in the country to support all the activities that are supporting the education of our children, she said. Addressing the function, the South Eastern Kenya APHIA PLUS Orphans and Vulnerable Children Programmes Officer, Mrs. Rachel Ambalu, disclosed that they (the nongovernmental organization) are currently supporting a total of 13,400 orphans and vulnerable children in Kitui County towards bettering their lives. "We support the education and all the other basic needs of these children," the NGO official said. Project

Ambalu said that the APHIA PLUS is a five-year United States of America-supported project in the South Eastern Kenya region. "In Kitui County we partner with the Kitui Catholic Diocese and the Twana Twitu Community Based Organisation in Mwingi West District within the county in implementing the programme," Ambalu said.

The Child Fund Kenya Kitui Office Programmes Coordinator Janet Munda said that they (the fund) support the general community development. "We are in education, health, agriculture and water. We are everything," she said. "The children remain the agent for development change," the Child Fund Kenya official said. On his part, Kinjo said that the Kenyan government is fully committed to ensure that the country's children get quality education.

The DC said that we have to fight all the vices that involve the children. The DC said that it is a collective effort to fight drugs including miraa (khat), illicit brews and bhang that he regretted that had greatly ruined the young people in Kitui County.

The function was also addressed by the Kitui County Children's Director Philip N.Nzenge, the County Youth, Culture, Sports and Social Services Ministry Chief Officer Titus Kithome and the Deputy Kitui District Education Officer Peter Maundu among others.



The screenshot shows the Facebook profile for 'Dead Beat Kenya'. The profile picture features a large yellow text 'RESPONSIBILITY' on a green background with several penguins. The cover photo shows a group of penguins. The profile name is 'Dead Beat Kenya' with a search icon. Below the name is a red circular logo with the text 'DEAD BEAT' in white. The profile description reads 'Dead Beat Kenya Community'. The page has 73,517 likes. The navigation tabs include 'Timeline', 'About', 'Photos', and 'Likes'. The post creation area shows options for 'Post' and 'Photo / Video', and a text input field that says 'Write something on this Page...'. The 'PEOPLE' section is visible at the bottom left.

How a simple Moon-cap will keep Suba girls in school

By MILLER OMEGA

Happiness Sidai, a 13 year-old class eight student at St Catherine Kioru Primary school kicks the ball towards the goal before being tackled. The whistle goes off as the referee, George Achieng' who is also her head teacher points at the penalty spot.

Sidai takes a shot which sends the ball to the back of the net before her school mates mill around her to celebrate. The win will be key in making the school pick a trophy in a mini league involving girls from eight primary schools in Suba West sub-County, Migori County.

Challenges

The schools; St Catherine Kioru, Kanyasoko, Obembo, Marabiku, Koki, Malera, Machicha and Abwao apart from getting trophies and balls, 80 girls from each participating team will get a Moon-cap, a reusable sanitary pad, each.

"During their monthly periods most girls always just come and ask for a sick leave or just become absent from school which makes you realise they lack sanitary towels," says Achieng'.

Achieng' says attendance at his school with 163 girls out of 322 pupils is affected as the girls reach their matu-

rity from class five. He notes that a local which have been supplying sanitary towels realised they weren't reusable.

Started about a year ago, the Rural Empowerment for Development Initiative Movement (Redim) started the drive to give girls in Suba sanitary towels in primary and secondary schools. They have been able to reach over 1,100 students.

"The towels though useful were limited that's why we came with the simple Moon-cap which has a tough ring and a polythene collecting 'dish' to collect the menstrual blood and can be re-used for up to a decade," explains Elaine Waterfield, a Briton working with the local NGO.

The small Moon-cap, the size of an ear is held in place by panties and can hold the menstrual blood in place safely to facilitate movement of girls without it staining their skirts which made boys to ridicule them in class.

"The Moon-caps were donated by Femmiwear Company based in United Kingdom and USA where they cost about Sh900 and are offered freely to students in the west. In this area, we are beginning with about 150 caps to see their retention," explains Waterfield.

She says the cost of bringing them to Suba was done by Kingsway Church in Southampton while the balls and



Carol Sherman, Plan International Country Director with Machakos County OCPD William Sifuna during a meeting to appreciate the community for the work they are doing in helping the girl child.

Picture: Henry Owino

trophies for the mini league were facilitated by Leicester City Football Club.

Redim which works with widows, orphans and vulnerable girls in the area seeks to empower girls to "have equal opportunities in education by safeguarding their school attendance and give them a voice to be heard".

Alternatives

Sidai whose story echoes that of other girls told *Reject* that before she got the Moon-cap she used exercise books, leaves, old blankets and mattresses to help deal with her menstrual flow.

"Boys used to laugh at us during our periods which caused absenteeism as when we got the periods at school we would go home," Sadai says. She adds: "I got six towels before but this

Moon-cap will clear my headaches."

Her friend Evelyn Achieng says that due to poverty, their parents cannot afford the luxury of buying sanitary towels which makes them vulnerable to boys, something that increases the risk getting pre-mature pregnancy.

According to Malach Achieng', a teacher at Abwao Primary School says that the 267 girls in her school have to contend with other factors like poverty, child labour and money in the nearby gold mines, fishing and tobacco farming which can be used to lure them.

"We often counsel them together with their parents some who don't know the benefit of buying sanitary towels to their daughters and how it affects their education," explains Achieng'.

One such parent is Mary Adisa,

whose four daughters did not finish primary school, realised the problem of sanitary towels in their education after her last born who is class seven came home with a pregnancy.

Effects

"I found out too late that my daughters became pregnant, three have already been married. When my last born started using sanitary towels from school I realised her performance had improved," says Adisa.

However, after this the government immediately factored sanitary pads in its national budget and girls who are in primary and day secondary schools now get free sanitary pads. The Moon-cap will supplement the government supplies of the sanitary pads.

Red flag raised for the girl child: As interventions are put in place to curtail the vices

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who will provide everything to cook," Naunjiri says.

"In this county, most schools enrol equal number of girls and boys in a 50-50 ratio, but majority of girls drop out and never transit to high schools," she explains.

In 2012, there were six girls out of 20 who sat KCPE while pregnant in one of examination centres.

"The girls later got married and they are just house-wives without any stable income to sustain them" Naunjiri explains.

It is unfortunate if the county continues in the same way. Plan International has pitched camp in major sub-counties affected to see how it could intervene and save the girl child.

Child labour

Naunjiri reveals that due high levels of poverty in Ukambani area, parents normally force their children — especially girls — out of school to go and provide labour as house-helpers in Nairobi County among other places. Naunjiri notes that the girls have been socialised to submissive and obedient, and it is these qualities that make them offer the best services to employers who hire them as maids.

"Child-labour abuse has gone to a notch higher and it has become child-trafficking because everybody comes to Machakos to look for house-helpers,"

says Naunjiri. She adds: "There are even brokers whose income is from this menace. However, to them payment depends on the number of girls they traffic."

Cultural practices

Cultural practices and beliefs amongst the community also contributes greatly to factors that hinder girls' progress.

It is noted that grandparents encourage girls to have sex at an early age so that when they get married they will be able to cope up with their husbands in marriage life.

This is cultural belief by the old-women that early sexual debut opens up the girls and prepares them for future sex. This belief has promoted the vice assuming practice makes perfect.

"The grandparents believe that it is their duty to coach young girls concerning sexuality and the only way is to encourage them to play it early," Naunjiri explains. She adds: "Girls in this place always think that to be a virgin is a taboo or curse to her family so, everyone looks for a man to sleep with."

On the other hand, it has contributed to immorality, early pregnancies and marriages among several girls and even other have died while trying to abort. It is retrogressive culture in this era of HIV and Aids and deprives girls their rights.

Traditional night dance are com-

mon in the county and here, girls and boys mingle on their own and in the process girls get pregnant. Majority of girls get pregnant from the night discos where each sex always wants to prove their sexuality maturity.

Due to poverty index level in Ukambani region, some parents marry off their daughters to get wealth and also reduce the burden in family.

These are some the problems and challenges Plan International is addressing in Machakos County. The Machakos Programme Unit (MPU) is now two years old and is mainly in Masinga, Matungulu and Yatta sub-counties.

Awareness

The core work is to raise awareness on rights of children and the need to empower the girl-child to realise their rights and potential in the society. Plan International also builds the capacity and commitments of those responsible for ensuring children's rights are fulfilled.

Plan International collaborates with Government of Kenya and community based organizations for ease in achieving this target. To address the root causes of all these problems in Machakos County, Plan International works with children, communities and partners to enhance active participation of communities in their own development.

Among the schools which have benefited in these programmes are; St Martin Kithuiani primary and secondary schools as well as Kyanzavi, Kyumbuni and Kiliku primary schools among other institutions.

According to Andrew Muli, Principal St Martin Kithuiani Mixed Secondary School, the programme has helped girls realise importance of education and many are going beyond primary level to secondary schools.

Muli admitted that Plan International has played a key role in changing perceptions among parents towards girl-child education in the community.

"I must thank Plan International for bringing this programme to our schools. Indeed it has helped retain girls in schools, improve performance and eliminated ignorance or illiteracy about their rights," Muli noted.

Rights

Daniel Munyau, chief of Kyanzavi Location said cases of early child marriages have reduced. He stated that most parents have been trained and are familiar with children's rights which has really help reduces cases girl-child abuses.

William Sifuna, OCPD, Machakos, said number of gender based violence (GBV) has gone down since 2012 when Plan International opened Machakos Programme Unit for the girl-child empowerment.

"We want police officers to know rights of individuals, how to tackle such cases if a child is denied any of them," said Sifuna. He added: "These rights are education, shelter, clothing, security, food and healthcare that parents must provide otherwise, we will arrest them."

Carol Sherman, Plan International Country Director, was grateful to the local authorities for providing the organisation with maximum support. She pointed out that police officers, government representatives, religious leaders, teachers, parents, artistes and media must come together to end this vice.

Success

Sherman alluded that the campaign to empower girl-child to realise their rights and potentials, dubbed "Because I Am A Girl Campaign" could not have been successful without the support of key stakeholders in the ground.

"Let me say here that Plan International will always act in the best interests of the child. We acknowledge that we cannot solve problems of poverty and other child abuses alone but only through teamwork and mutual partnerships," Sherman said.

She encouraged girls to work-hard in schools and if abused to report at the right place at the right time for action to be taken since it only through this that girl-child abuse will be eliminated.

How brother's intervention saved girl from early marriage

By TITUS MURITHI

As children grow up while going to school, they have their own plans with their lives, who they would like to be and what careers they would like to end up in future. But at times it might go contrary to the plans and wishes of their parents.

This is precisely what happened to Sanaipei Loice from Kajiado. Immediately she was through with her primary school education in 2004, her parents had planned she undergoes Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and then get married. They already had a suitor for her.

However, Sanaipei's wishes and plans were to join a secondary school, then proceed to university and study until she becomes a lecturer.

Quick intervention by one of her step brothers, Pius Amashul, saved her from the circumciser's blade and forced marriage which was already at an advanced stage.

With the help from Beads for Education, Sanaipei today is a celebrity in her community after acquiring a degree from a university and is today a role model. She aspires to change the cultural practices from her Maasai community.

Sponsorship

Beads for Education Foundation, is an NGO based in Kajiado and sponsors education of girls as from class four all through to colleges and universities in Kenya, with an emphasis on girls from the Maasai community.

Beads for Education gets a sponsor for each girl mostly from the United States of America with whom the girl communicates regularly.

Later, most of the sponsors visit the girls, their schools and their families. This is what happened to Sanaipei after the intervention by her step brother.

She got Tony Foltman and Terese Lyons, a couple from Santa Fe New Mexico in the US as sponsors and later they adopted her as their daughter.

We caught up with Sanaipei with her biological parents and siblings as well as her foster parents during the recent Kenya Methodist University 14th graduation ceremony where she was graduating with a Diploma in Clinical Medicine, Surgery and Community Health.

Sanaipei said it was a sad moment for her when that after her primary school education when she learnt that her parents had already found her a suitor who would marry her after she underwent female genital mutilation.

Sanaipei realised things were not right when at first her father assigned her the duty of herding his livestock as preparations for her to undergo the female cut were underway and then he married off.

It is her step brothers who intervened and saved her when they went to seek for help at Beads for Education Foundation where she was lucky to get the couple as sponsors from the USA.

"My ambition since my childhood was to get education up to university level and become a lecturer but it was saddening after finishing primary school when I heard my parents wanted me to be married," Sanaipei says. She adds: "They had already found a suitor for me but quick intervention by my step brothers especially Amashul



US couple who pays continues to support Sanaipei Loice. Picture: Titus Murithi

who went to seek help from Beads for education saved me."

Sanaipei says: "I was lucky to get a couple, Tony Foltman and Terese Lyons from the USA as my sponsors. Apart from sponsoring me, they've adopted me as their daughter and they've paid for my secondary school and University education. With the sponsorship I want to achieve my ambitions of acquiring a Masters and PhD level to become a university lecturer," said Sanaipei.

Her foster parents, Tony and Terese Foltman say their adopted daughter was a wonderful girl who cherishes education and determined to achieve her ambitions. They said they are very much willing to sponsor her to the highest level of education.

"Our daughter is a wonderful girl and she loves education so much and

she is very much determined to achieve her ambitions. We are ready to sponsor her to the highest level of education. We share her with her biological parents lest they see as if we want to take her away from them," said Tony Foltman.

They added that when they met her for the first time at Amboseli National Park, they listened to her carefully and discovered that she was very much determined to achieve her ambitions through her articulate self-explanations. They were then convinced beyond any reasonable doubt that if she was educated to high level she would become dependable person in the society.

Amashul thought it was not wise for Sanaipei to get married at a relatively young age but she should be allowed to proceed with her education. He prevailed upon his parents to drop

the plans they had for his younger sister but they refused. He then called other family members to pressurise their parents to let Sanaipei to continue with her education to no avail.

Other family members agreed but the parents insisted Sanaipei was to be married and it was at this point that her brothers decided to seek intervention from Beads for Education.

Amashul was given the task to visit Beads for Education and explained to them about his sister's predicament and they quickly intervened.

Amashul says: "Our father had insisted Sanaipei was to get married after her primary school but I thought she was very young and ought to continue with her education. I talked to my father and he refused to hear my pleas and I called other family members and still he declined to listen to our pleas."

He adds: "It is then that we decided to look for a quick solution and we decided to seek for assistance from Beads for Education and they readily agreed to take her on board.

"They acted so quickly to save our sister as already plans to have her undergo the female genital mutilation were at an advanced stage when they came calling to say two sponsors were ready to help our sister go back to school and we settled on the couple," says Amashul. He notes: "The couple acted quickly to sponsor our sister to go back to school and we really laud them."



"My ambition since my childhood was to get education up to university level and become a lecturer but it was saddening after finishing primary school when I heard my parents wanted me to be married."

— Sanaipei Loice

The fight to stop the cut

By REJECT CORRESPONDENT

Did you know it costs Sh500 to book with a circumciser for a girl to be cut in Tharaka? Another Sh3,000 payment for the service is done after the cut and a goat worth between Sh2,000 to 3,000 is also given to the circumciser.

According to Tom Okeyo, Manager Plan in Tharaka, the practice that is done on girls as young as 7 years to 12 years of age has led to an increase in the number of primary school drop-outs with the dropout rate standing at 22 percent and 20 percent for boys and girls respectively in the areas that practise female genital mutilation. Stopping the vice that contributes a lot to the cycle of poverty rate in the area has been quite a challenge as most of the people are quite reserved, secretive and still hold onto traditional cultural practices.

Eradicate

However, the eradication process has been positively progressive with some of the traditional circumcisers pledging their support to stop the vice and promise not to do it at all. The circumcisers who have varied years of experience performing the practice engage in it for different reasons with some concurring that they inherited it from their forefathers and mothers.

"Some of the reasons why I adopted this practice is that it is a source of quick money that will help me feed my family as I don't have much wealth", said one of the circumcisers.

The circumcisers hinted that the practice is nowadays being done without the knowledge of the authorities for fear of repercussions by law with some even doing it in collusion with some doctors from the public hospitals.

Plan's intervention through a number of trainings, has had most of the girls and their parents enlightened on the children's rights with emphasis on Female Genital Mutilation as a violation of child rights and the importance of adopting other life skills as alternative rites of passage for the girls.

"Consequently, only about 15 percent of the 'eligible' girls for circumcision have taken a stand never to perform it with some of the girls shunning it", noted Tom.

One of the children we talked to who wants to be a catholic nun insisted that she will never give in to any forceful measures by the parent to undergo the cut even as she receives support from her elderly sisters who underwent the cut at their earlier stages in life.

"I will report my mother to the chief in case she tries to force me to undergo the cut", said Nkatha.

Nkatha is hopeful of a brighter future ahead aware of the risks those undergoing the cut face.

Held certificate stands in the way of girl's future

By MUNENE MAINA

Eighteen year-old Christine Lengushuru has seen how retrogressive culture can wreck a girl's life.

At primary school she recalls most of her friends dropping out of school to be married off or look after cattle. A move that saw their dreams shattered.

A proud Samburu girl, Lengushuru is fortunate that her parents saw the light and educated her.

"Hearing that your friend will not come back to school again pained, but you couldn't do anything. It's the norm. A girl has no say, parent's word especially from the father is final," she says.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and forced early marriages are still great impediments to women and girls empowerment in the remote Samburu County.

Unlike Lengushuru, many girls are forced out of school to get married to older men and it becomes hard to unshackle them from poverty bondage.

Changes

In the remotest of villages, the cultural practices are still a common thing. However, in most parts through advocacy from non-governmental organisations among other stakeholders these practices are dwindling.

Born and brought up in Polos Village, Samburu County Lengushuru is hopeful one day the cultural bondage that has hindered girl-child empowerment in her county will end.

She intends to become a teacher; a profession she believes plays a great role in changing a community. Education, Lengushuru says, can turn round the way of life in the area.

Lengushuru sat for the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education examinations in 2013 at Moi Girls' secondary School Samburu. She managed to get a C- but her certificate is still held by the school owing to outstanding fee balance. Her dream is still alive and once the un-



Eighteen year-old Christine Lengushuru.

Picture: Munene Maina

paid fee is cleared, she hopes to enrol in a college.

When some girls are made to believe female genital mutilation and early marriages are best for them, many are now enlightened and have nothing to do with the practices at whatever cost. Tales abound of girls who have walked long distances when coerced to drop school for the female cut that precedes forced early marriage.

High rate of illiteracy among women in the county is a factor contributing to their disadvantage. Even as some take pride of their educated daughters, others still view educated

women as corrupted in morals.

"The cultural beliefs remain among factors hindering the empowerment of women and girls. Educated women out to change the community are at times branded corrupt in behaviour," says Naomi Lekaikum.

Women status

Lekaikum, who contested the disputed *Maendeleo ya Wanawake* Organization (MYWO) chairperson seat, says some members of society still frown upon educated women.

Lekaikum claims she won the seat but her opponent Anna Lenturkan

also claims she is the elected chair.

However the two agree that a lot has to be done to elevate the women status. Although they are responsible in managing family and property, women have no say on how they are utilized.

To help women in the county, Lekaikum says, the county leadership needs to build the capacity of women and girls. She says equipping them with education and entrepreneurial skills will be a big step towards fighting poverty.

Introducing modern farming in the county will enhance food security as evident in various areas where residents are reaping the benefits.

Being pastoralist, Samburu County residents have always counted losses due to prolonged drought that often hits the area.

"All our women want is education, capacity building and government support. As their leader I will lobby the county government to support women and girls," says Lekaikum.

Girls remain vulnerable to human trafficking

By HENRY OWINO

Several efforts being made by various agencies to fight violence against children in Africa are hampered by inability to execute laws.

According to a study conducted by Plan International between March 2013 and January 2014, gaps in legislation and policies, harmful practices, exploitation and other forms of violence against children are widespread across the globe.

"Millions of children, particularly girls, continue to suffer from the effects of child marriage which is common in the Eastern and Southern African region," says part of the report.

The report notes that child marriage is still prevalent Tanzania, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and Mozambique among other countries. While it affects boys, the impact on girls is far much larger and with more intensity when compared with boys.

"Parallel to the threats the girl-child is associated with like early marriage, the persistence of the

practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) across many African countries is extensive," says the report in part.

Beliefs

In some communities like the Maasai and Kisii as well as those from Northern Kenya, FGM forms an important part of the rites of passage, marking the coming of age for marriage for the girl child. After the rite of passage many under-age girls are made to believe that they are adults and ready for marriage.

"Reasons like saving family honour which is linked to preserving girls' virginity and eliminating the possibility or even suspicion of premarital sex is the main reason many families marrying off their daughters at a young age," the report points out.

The report also notes that poverty drives some families into marrying off their under-age daughters for financial gain. Poor families which place a high value on their sons over the daughters often argue that they

will have one less mouth to feed when they marry off their girls. They also argue that the gifts and money received from the groom's family as bride-price will help improve their standards of livelihood.

According to United Nations Population Fund (UNPFA) on average one out two girls will be married before their 18th birthday in Kenya. In Uganda, 49 per cent of girls are married by the age of 18, and 24 per cent of girls below 18 years old, are either pregnant or have already given birth.

Child marriage profile in Ethiopia indicates that about 41 per cent of the women aged 20-24 were married before age 18. Mozambique has the seventh highest child marriage prevalence rate in the world and the highest in the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC).

When it comes to child trafficking, the report indicates that it is widespread and rampant in the four countries; Kenya, Ethiopia, Tanzania and Uganda. In child trafficking, girls are the majority of the victims.

Among the four countries, Kenya has been singled out to be more attractive as a destination for trafficked children. Trafficked children are engaged in various activities such as commercial sex and domestic work, all of which expose them to risks.

Children aged between 13 and 17 are most preferred by traffickers because of their cheap labour potential. More so, girls are preferred because they can be used as domestic servants and commercial sex workers more so because they are submissive.

Human-trafficking

"Up to 17,500 persons are trafficked in Kenya every year and 50 per cent of them are children. The International Organization of Migrations (IOM) reports that Kenya has the highest rate of human-trafficking in East and Central Africa," the study reveals.

In Ethiopia, a comprehensive study by ILO in 2011 reports that 7.5 per cent of all Ethiopians who left the country for employment and other purposes were between the ages of

13-17 years at time of their migration and that basically they were trafficked.

Studies have shown that Mozambique is one of the estimated 10 African countries that fuel human trafficking business that feeds South Africa. Ugandan children are trafficked to the Middle East and Europe predominantly to undertake domestic work and prostitution.

According to Roland Angerer, Regional Director for Plan International in Eastern and Southern Africa, and lead researcher, of the children trafficked, girls are particularly favoured with the perception that they pose less of risk in terms of HIV infection, and also represent the sexual desirability of youth.

According to Angerer, some parents collude with traffickers due to ignorance of the traffickers' intention or sometimes with full knowledge that the child will be exploited.

"However, poverty and economic inequality are primary factors that make people vulnerable to deception and exploitation," said Angerer.

Girls suffer discrimination in society

By BEN OROKO

The culture of Gender-based discrimination against girls embraced by majority of the parents in many parts of Kenya including Gusii region, continues subjecting many girls to neglect when it comes to provision of education.

The Gusii community members' cultural preference for the boy-child has had negative implications on the girl-child's growth and access to education, with majority of the parents preferring to support boys' education at the expense of girls.

The discrimination of girls in favour of boys in the provision of education can be described as Gender-Based Violence (GBV) against girls born among the Gusii community members.

Discrimination

According to Felix Ogeta, Nyanza Region Programmes associate at the Coalition on Violence Against Women (COVAW), the Gusii community should desist from discriminating against girls in favour of boys in the provision of education.

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

"Gender-based discrimination against girls in the provision of education among the Gusii community members 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," stated Ogeta.

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

Hellen Magara, Head of Department (HoD) guidance and counselling at ELCK Monianku Secondary School, concurred with Ogeta noting that many girls from the Gusii community still suffer from retrogressive cultural practices which deny them right to education.

Magara observed that many parents across the county still cling to outdated traditions which prioritize education for boys at the expense of girls who are in most cases thought to be sources of dowry for their parents.

"Girl-child discrimination starts at home and continues even to schools where both boys and some male teachers also discriminate against them based on their gender," said Magara.

Education

She added: "Girls' access to education has been identified by various studies across the world as an empowerment tool for reducing poverty among female-headed households."

Magara lamented that traditional division of labour between boys and girls among the Gusii community members entrenches the culture of gender-based discrimination against girls since boys are assigned little domestic responsibilities with girls taking heavy responsibilities at household levels to the detriment of their education



A teacher from a local primary school in Kisii County taking girls through an internal examinations timetable. (Inset) Felix Ogeta Nyanza Region Programmes Associate at COVAW addressing the community in Kisii County. Pictures: Ben Orok.

careers.

She observed: "Majority of girls from the Gusii community are tasked with the responsibility of taking care of their siblings and sick family members, while the boys are either in school or taking their studies privately at home."

Magara said preference for the boy-child in the community and particularly in relation to education negatively impacts on girls from poor family backgrounds who either drop out of school or get married early in situations of extreme poverty as some parents and guardians regard them as economic burden.

Magara noted that 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 treating it as a taboo subject to be handled in schools by teachers.

She noted that parents are to blame for the increasing cases of teenage pregnancies and early marriages among school girls in the region since they have abdicated their parental roles of

guiding and counselling their children on sexuality issues.

"Among the Gusii community it is a taboo to talk about matters related to sex. It is a subject treated shrouded in secrecy making it difficult for parents to guide and counsel their children on sexuality issues," noted Magara.

According to the National Bureau of Statistics Economic Survey 2009, the transition rate from primary to secondary school is quite poor with only 43 per cent 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 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.

COVAW is an implementing partner within the Peace Initiative Kenya

"Among the Gusii community it is a taboo to talk about matters related to sex. It is a subject treated shrouded in secrecy making it difficult for parents to guide and counsel their children on sexuality issues."

— Hellen Magara



project under the International Rescue Committee and is supported by the USAID. The PIK projects seeks to support and lobby the county governments for the establishment and maintenance of structures for social service delivery such as GBV service committees and directing specific financial resources towards GBV prevention and service provision.

The project targets women and men as partners in GBV prevention, and stakeholders in leadership positions as change agents in the fight against GBV. The project works with other allies like the spouses of county leaders such as county executives, reli-

gious leaders, members of parliament and others as advocates for the project goals. The project also works closely with the National Gender and Equality Commission (NGEC), Ministry of Devolution and Planning — Directorate of Gender — and other stakeholders to support the government in creating an enabling environment for coordination of GBV prevention and service provision. Some of PIK activities include training county government officials and stakeholders in GBV, engagement in GBV working groups at nationally and county level and provide legal and psychosocial counselling to survivors of GBV.

Against all odds, girls strive to get education



By **OMONDI GWENGI**

Students of Ulowa Girls' Secondary School sitting for their exams. The primary section has donated to them two classrooms which they have been using for the past two years.

Picture: Omondi Gwengi

For every candidate sitting for the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) examination, joining a good secondary school with all the learning facilities is always a dream.

However, a recent visit by *The Reject* to some schools in Siaya County which emerged number two in last year's Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) showed a different picture of schools with a thirst for education despite the inadequate learning facilities.

Circumstances

It is hot afternoon as the dust and sand fly into students' eyes when the wind blows. A strong wind comes and blows down a blackboard that is leaning on a tree trunk. This is Form Two class at Kanyibok Secondary School in West Yimbo, Siaya County.

Started three years ago under community initiative to help the children who could not afford good boarding school in the region access education, their thirst for education has seen them soldier on despite facing myriad problems.

In a recent interview, the principal, Gilbert Oduor Ojonya, said they started with 35 students who joined Form One but the number has dropped to 17.

"Some members of the community saw the need to have children who could not afford to attend some of the good schools in the region to acquire education locally," says Ojonya. He adds: "However, it started off well

but due to some parents' poor attitude towards education, some students were forced to drop out of school."

Populate

Despite being registered as a mixed day secondary school, the school's population is still far below the recommended number of 40 students per classroom.

"Out of the 160 students that a school should have from form one to four, we only have 17 students and five teachers," he says adding that he is the only staff employed by the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) at the institution.

During science practical lessons students from the school are forced to go to a neighbouring private secondary school for lessons at a fee.

According to the principal, they

are planning to hold a funds-drive soon in order to pay salaries for the Board of Management (BOM) employed teachers.

The students in Form Three will be moving to Form Four next year and unless extra classrooms are built, the management will be forced to have two classrooms under a tree.

Transfer

During the interview, Ojonya, who was transferred there from Akoko Mixed Secondary School in Bondo Constituency, says that he was reluctant at first to head such a school but decided to take up the challenge. He is calling on stakeholders to work a lot in order to improve educational standards at the school and the area in general by changing the community's attitude towards education.

"Some members of the community saw the need to have children who could not afford to attend some of the good schools in the region to acquire education locally. However, it started off well but due to some parents' poor attitude towards education, some students were forced to drop out of school."

— Gilbert Oduor Ojonya.

Five kilometres away is Ulowa Girls' Secondary School which was also started by the Got-Agulu community after realising that their girls had to walk long distances to acquire secondary education.

According to Alex Mitt, chairperson board of Management, the only mixed day schools in the area were too far for the girls to reach.

"Girls, unlike boys, cannot walk long distances and we therefore, wanted to have a school that could cater for the academic needs of our girls," says Mitto adding that the number has since increased to 88 up from the 28 students.

Accommodate

The schoolgirls are currently accommodated at Ulowa Primary School with their principal operating from a church.

According to the primary school's head teacher, George Omollo, the secondary school still lacks basic facilities such as latrines and a laboratory.

"The students usually attend their science practical lessons at Got-Agulu Secondary School, which is a kilometre away," says Omollo. He adds: "Printing of our examinations is also done here."

According to Omollo, they had started constructing a storied-building for the girls, but it stalled due to lack of funds. He is now worried about the fate of students who will be moving to Form Three next year.

Embrace Adopted Child, Society Told

By **BONIFACE MULU**

Members of the society have been asked to take the adopted child as a family child when they see him or her. The request has been made by a social worker with the Child Welfare Society of Kenya, Mr. Tom Muindi. The non governmental organization official said that the adopted child is a child like any other child. "We (the Child Welfare Society of Kenya) do have some disclosure meetings where we give the parents professional counseling," Muindi said. Muindi said that the children are agents of their own development.

Train

The social worker was lecturing Kitui District primary school teachers who teach special education in their schools during a two-day teachers training on supporting children rights through education, arts and media methodology organised by the Association for the Physically Disabled of Kenya (APDK) at the Kitui Agricultural Training Centre. Muindi said that the children should participate in their own growth and development.

"The children are sufficiently mature to know their rights," the CWSK official said. On his part, the ADPK Machakos Branch (Machakos, Kitui and Makueni) Coordinator, Mr. Shedrack M.Nduti, said that the ADPK is a non governmental organization that works in partnership with the persons with disabilities.

He said that they do rehabilitate the disabled by providing them with assistive aides that include wheelchairs, listening devices, calipers, hearing devices and white canes. Nduti said that the disabled need to be given opportunities to do things. "If they are given opportunities, they will prove they deserve these opportunities," the officer said. He asked the community to discard the negative attitudes regarding the disabled.

Nduti said that a person being disabled is not to mean that he or she is not able to do what the normal persons do. "There are disabled persons who are more competent in many things including education, brightness, talents and working than many normal people," the ADPK official said. Nduti said that they work in partnership with all the government ministries, community based organizations, faith based organizations and any other partner for disabilities. Network

"We are never selective when we come to networking," Nduti said. The Kitui District Education Department's Special Education Officer, Veronica Mbaika, said that the children with disabilities are the most vulnerable to child labour in Kitui District. She said that they (her office) are working out modalities to tackle the problem in the area. Mbaika said that they do educational assessment for school placement regarding the special education.

"We also give guidance and counseling to the parents of children with disabilities," the educationist said. In his lecture, the CWSK Programmes Officer, Peter Njuguna, said that the media is a vital community to mobilise in fight against violation of the children's rights.

"The community integration aims to stimulate the interest and involvement of the external communities in the issues you are addressing," Njuguna said. The CWSK official said that the community integration raises awareness on issues among the wider community.

Are men going to be saviours for girls?

More men need to speak out against the female cut

By JOYCE CHIMBI

For the Samburu community in northern Kenya it was bad enough that Julius Lekupe had not sired a son — it was even worse that his eldest daughter refused to be “cut”.

“Women are like property here. We circumcise them and marry them off, some as young as 10 years old,” Lekupe says.

He knew it was only a matter of time before his 16-year-old daughter would have to undergo the ritual against her will.

Protect

“She begged me to support and protect her. It was a tough decision but I agreed. I sent her to Nairobi to live with a friend,” Lekupe recalls.

Lekupe is among an increasing number of men belonging to ethnic groups that practice Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) who have begun to speak out against the now-illegal practice in Kenya.

Legally, the tide turned in Kenya in 2010, when parliament adopted the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act, which stipulates that offenders serve up to seven years in prison and can be fined up to KSh50,000. The combination of national legislation and shifting attitudes at the community level seem to be bearing fruit.

In a recent media convening by African Development and Communications Network (FEMNET), Felogene Anumo, a Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) expert said that “the fulfilment of sexual health is tied to the extent to which human rights are respected, protected and fulfilled”.

Anumo further said that as with

the realisation of all human rights “the realisation of sexual, reproductive health and rights requires duty bearers to respect, protect and fulfill such rights....regardless of culture”.

Coerce

While female genital mutilation has been largely perceived as a ritual that involves coercion, there is a school of thought that has been speaking out regarding ‘voluntary FGM’. This is where a woman supposedly volunteers to undergo the ‘cut’.

However, many of those against FGM say that ‘voluntary FGM’ does not exist because the women do so to break away from cultural stigma towards those who have not undergone the ‘cut’.

Speaking at the same event, Kennedy Otina, Programme Coordinator of Men for Gender Equality Now (MEGEN), a programme within FEMNET said that the United Nations General Assembly, in its resolution on the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women defines “violence against women” as “any act of gender based violence (including FGM) that results in, or is likely to

result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life”.

Against this backdrop, Sexual Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) experts are encouraged by the increasing number of men who are assuming active roles in initiating this cultural shift.

In addition to fathers like Lekupe, young men across Kenya are speaking out publicly to announce their preference to marry uncut girls. According to the report, a significant development in a country where FGM continues to be a prerequisite for marriage in some communities.

Shift

According to Ibrahim Shabo, an FGM activist from Isiolo — a pastoralist community notorious for practicing the female cut — this shift in male attitudes towards FGM is particularly significant when it comes to influencing Kenyan Somalis in northern Kenya, who have a FGM prevalence rate of 98 percent.

“Violence against women” as “any act of gender based violence (including FGM) that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life”.

In Kapenguria, Rift Valley, the local council of elders has joined the growing chorus of voices against FGM by making a public declaration to abandon the practice in 2011.

“This is a community that is known to practice extremely brutal forms of FGM,” explains Philipo Lotimari, a community leader in the town.

Lotimari describes the side effects of the practice that include opening up a girl’s vagina with the horn of a cow to allow her have sex for the first time following her circumcision.

Lotimari notes that his younger sisters have not been circumcised because he wanted them to have an education and not be married off.

However, not all men have altruistic reasons for preventing the practice.

Omar, a father from Garissa, says that male youths in his region are against FGM because they themselves have become “victims” of it.

“If the girl is sewn so tight, you can neither penetrate nor enjoy sex. So marriages are ending because of this,” says Omar

According to Dr Salim Ali, a reproductive health physician in northern Kenya: “Sex with women who have undergone FGM is uncomfortable and they do it as a duty.” He explains: “They rarely reach orgasm and make sex tedious. Women who haven’t been cut enjoy frequent sex, and sex with them is enjoyable.”

In other cases, men whose wives

suffered complications at birth have been forced to pay for emergency operations to save their wives and children.

Grace Gakii, a gender activist who has worked in FGM-practicing communities such as the Maasai’s and the Pokot explains.

“The men are forced to sell their livestock to raise the money for surgery. This is a problem because of the attachment they have to their herds,” says Gakii.

While not all men who speak out against FGM are acting as women’s allies, their support for the issue at large is nevertheless crucial for accelerating the eradication of the practice.

“If councils of elders and young men continue to show support for an FGM-free society, Kenya will be heading to zero tolerance of FGM,” says Gakii.



Giving hope to disabled children

By REJECT CORRESPONDENT

Patricia Kamene, 16, is the eldest in a family of four. One day, Patricia woke up only to realise she could not see a thing. Her parents thought she was pretending to avoid school but this was not the case. She had gone blind.

She was taken to hospital but tests did not yield anything. For two years, Patricia stayed at home after her father refused to enrol her in a special school for the visually impaired. This left her hopeless and discouraged.

Hope

In 2009, Patricia joined Kangundo DEB which has a unit for the visually impaired children. The opportunity gave her hope in life.

Plan in collaboration with the Children’s Department supported the formation of Children Assemblies from sub-county to national level, in 2014. Patricia was among those elected by her peers to represent children with special talents at the sub-county level. Plan also supported children councils in Kangundo/Matungulu sub-county, where 12 children were trained on life and

leadership skills, decision making, confidence building, children rights and child protection. Patricia has benefitted from the training.

In April, Patricia was among four elected delegates to participate in the county children’s forum where 50 representatives from the county met in Machakos where decision making, children rights, structure and role of the children assembly were discussed.

They joined other delegates from the 47 counties in Kenya where they elected the president, deputy-president, speaker, clerk and cabinet secretaries in forming the Kenya Children Assembly/Children government for 2014 and 2015. Patricia was elected (at the national level) as the Cabinet Minister for Health.

Her position has opened up opportunities to lobby and advocate children issues at various levels. In July, she was invited to give a talk during the head teachers’ workshop in Mombasa where she held discussions with Deputy President William Ruto on issues affecting children with visual impairments. Mr Ruto committed to supply braille machines to all institutions with visu-



Patricia Kamene giving a moving speech on her journey as a visually challenged child. The confident teen now champions for the rights of children. She is also the Minister for Health in the Children’s Cabinet.

ally impaired children in Machakos County. Patricia was approached by Citizen TV to be one of the ambassadors of the Inua dada campaign that seeks to promote girl child education by keeping them in school through provision of sanitary towels.

Patricia has also had an opportunity to meet the Cabinet Secretary for Education Jacob Kaimenyi where they discussed various issues affect-

ing children education in Machakos County and in Kenya. She has also met the leader of Majority Aden Duale and challenged him on the role of government in supporting street children.

She has also been very active in advocating children rights and protection in her locality through reporting of child abuse cases.

“When I grow up I would like to become a lawyer,” says Patricia.

Helen Machuka:

A teacher dedicated to seeing girls excel in school

By ANTONY ZOKA

The ever skyrocketing cost of living has left many parents struggling to keep their children in school, as the number of cases of bright students forced to drop out of school increases due to lack of fees.

Perhaps this was the reason 46-year-old Helen Machuka, Principal of Kombeni Girls' Secondary School in Rabai sub-County had in store when she came up with an innovative way to initiate a bursary kitty in the school.

"I forfeited my one month salary in 2009 to start the bursary fund, and to date, the programme has picked well, with other stakeholders, including parents supporting the initiative," she reveals.

When we visited her for an interview in her office, her broad and welcoming smile was an evident indicator of a public servant who is ready to work with anybody for the benefit of the next generation.

According to Machuka, what motivated her desire was how bright students were excelling at Starehe Boys' Centre, courtesy of the bursary initiated in the school.

Earlier this year, she was among the few individuals in the country who were awarded for being the best public servants.

"I take my teacher profession as a calling from God and at all time I am accountable to Him, that is why I dedicate all my energy, knowledge and mind to achieving the best," says Machuka. She adds: "What inspired me was our school motto back in high school at Butere Girls, which simply said, 'For only the best' and I have been striving knowing that I am the best."

An alumnus of Lugusi Primary School, in the rural parts of Malava in Kakamega County, Machuka proudly says she's now a mother of 662 children, saying she has been coping well in dividing her time to all the 647 students at Kombeni Girls, her 4 daughters and one house help, to have all of them feel comfortable regardless of their family backgrounds.

Since she joined the school, Machuka has been keen in her leadership role to ensure the school prospers in its mandate of instilling education

and discipline among girls to help them be self-reliant in their future.

"When I took over as the principal about seven years ago, the school's mean score was at four points, but with good team work together with other teachers and the non-teaching staff and the management board we have stabilized at six now aiming for eight for this year's KSCE," Machuka asserts.

The school has been supporting its students acquire bursary despite similar help from various County government's programme and the Constituency Development Fund (CDF).

At the beginning of the year, about KSh300,000 from the school bursary was distributed to 61 students. Machuka reveals that the bursary kit has received support from the selling of their bakery products to other schools around the area.

According to Machuka, the school received KSh2.4 million funding from the government of Finland through the Ministry of Devolution and Planning, after tabling their proposals for the project which was officially launched last year.

Machuka was recognised with an award during the Huduma Ombudsman Awards for being among the best servants in individual category at an event that was presided over by President Uhuru Kenyatta.

"I was awarded with a distinction in efficiency, innovation and servant hood. I have been hearing people talking about our efforts but rarely did I know that it was going to go nationally. I believe it's the hand of God that is working," she said during an interview with *The Reject*.

Machuka was honoured for her efforts in initiating income-generating projects in the school geared towards in improving the learning in the school.

The key projects were the bakery, dairy and fish farming within the school that supply the students with milk and fish while the surplus makes its way to the community around at a fee that ends up in the bursary kitty.

Since the start of the bursary, the school has rarely been sending students home for school fees, a move that has witnessed the school raise the number of students joining university to over 50 percent.



"Last year, 62 out of 142 students who sat for KCSE qualified to joined public universities, which to me, is a good sign," says Machuka. She adds: "The bursary kitty is open to donations from everyone and that's why we have been advising parents and other stakeholders to market the strategy so that more people can make donations."

On efficiency, Machuka was awarded for being a role model who has been enjoying working with all the players in education sector and love to students that has posted good results.

"I take most of my inspirations from the Bible that says... 'if you want to be the greatest you need to be a servant of all,' she says.

Machuka's call is to all school principals and public servants to deliver the best at their work stations, saying that God rewards hard work

"The bosses might not see you using your time trying to improve things but let's remember we have been given the chance to work and we earn from the same, so it is time we directed all our energy in producing our best," she says.

Machuka insists that school heads should consider going to class to teach and be in a position to compare their results with other staff in learning institutions for better results.

Machuka holds a Master's in Education, Planning and Administration from Mount Kenya University; a Bachelor's degree in Science, Agriculture and Home Economics from Egerton University and a Post-graduate Diploma in Education from Kenyatta University.



Hellen Machuka, Principal Kombeni Girls' School during the interview in her office. Inset: Machuka, poses with the trophy she won as Principal Of The Year 2013 and other that she received during the Huduma awards.

Pictures: Antony Zoka

Study calls for Early Childhood Development

By OMONDI GWENGI

There is need to establish systems for wealth creation and Early Childhood Development interventions in Siaya County, according to a study.

The Rapid Baseline Assessment on Integrated Early Childhood study that was conducted in Siaya, Kisumu and Homa Bay counties found Siaya County to be worst performing in early childhood development despite appreciating the benefits of savings among the caregivers.

Perform

The study's findings, which were released

recently at a hotel in Kisumu, found Siaya to be performing well in HIV/Aids testing during pregnancy, performing below average coverage on water treatment, among other early childhood development concerns.

"The County governments have not established support systems other than bursaries for needy and bright children who are graduating from primary to secondary education," says the study.

The study was sponsored by Child Fund in collaboration with UNICEF and shows that children who have missed ECD/school in the last two weeks stood at 38.9 percent while those with toys or existing materials for play-

ing at home were 32.6 percent.

The Study indicates, "Homa Bay County had the highest indicator of households with an average monthly income above Shs5, 000 at 44.2 percent, followed by Kisumu (43.2 percent) and Siaya at 1.1percent."

Indicate

Other concerns in the study were low indicators on exclusive breastfeeding of children under five with Homa Bay at 16.8 percent, Kisumu at 47.4 percent and Siaya at 38.9 percent.

The study attributed the low exclusive breastfeeding on poverty and lack of knowledge on health benefits of breast-feeding.

"Most of the parents are young with low income and could therefore not find time to practice exclusive breastfeeding. Most of them spend long hours doing casual work, leaving them with little time to be with their children," adds the study.

The study through its findings, therefore recommends that business management skills training targeting Siaya, Kisumu and Homa-bay counties be conducted.

"We also recommend that support structures for the governments and communities to be established to support community resilience and education activities," the study recommends.

Government now using traditional doctors to ensure quality health care

By HENRY KAHARA

For the health of Kenyans to improve, the Government must come up with alternative ways of convincing people to visit hospitals when taken ill.

Africans have a tendency of procrastination instead of visiting hospitals despite the fact that some of the services offered are free.

Alternative

Instead many look for alternative medicine through traditional doctors while others go to an extent of visiting witchdoctors.

Julia Kimutai, a former Embakasi District Community Health focal point official says that incorporating untrained 'professionals' and training them on health basics was an effective way to save lives.

Different communities have their own beliefs, some believe in witchcraft some oppose it. This makes their health to deteriorate since there is no remedy in witchcraft.

In 2009 Embakasi District community Health service providers managed to train 11 witchdoctors operating from different parts of the district.

"We decided to incorporate them since they are very influential and you find that some of them even get many attendants in a day compared to some dispensaries in the area," says Kimutai.

Although after training many of them did not respond positively to the training, one Hellen Koki decided to be an exception and stuck on to the noble profession.

Koki, who lives in Mukuru kwa

Reuben in Nairobi, which is located in the former Embakasi district, reveals that she has been practicing witchcraft for the last 20 years.

"I came to Nairobi in 1992. Before that, I used to live at my home in Kitui County where my father practiced witchcraft. So I acquired the skills from him," she says.

Koki, who is a widower, says that she has managed to bring up her three children through the practice of witchcraft.

There is no one who has shown interest to join her in that profession.

"Witchcraft is real but it doesn't heal any sickness," Koki says laughing. She explains: "What I do is that I know a person who is sick and the one who has been cursed by people. So if somebody comes to me and she is sick I refer her/him to hospital as we were trained while those who have been cursed I cleanse them."

Refer

For now Koki has been referring some of her clients to private and public hospital and has developed a cordial relationship with some dispensaries in Embakasi.

"My value for people is what makes me to refer them to hospital. My father taught us to acquire genuine wealth. So I can't take money from a client if I know I will not be able to treat a certain disease," the self-confessed witchdoctor says.

Many people who visit her are chronic disease victims. Some communities relate chronic diseases with witchcraft.



Patients waiting to be attended to at a government health facility.

Picture: Joseph Mukubwa

Koki says she is also a 'Christian' and fellowships at Jumuiya Mtakatifu Peter. "Witchcraft cannot heal any diseases. If you are sick you must visit a doctor for treatment. Witches who claim to heal sickness are liars."

Anne Kaleche, one of Koki's clients, admits that she once visited Koki who then referred her to hospital where she was treated.

"I had Tuberculosis (TB) and I thought I had been bewitched, but she diagnosed me she advised me to

go to hospital. Where I was treated and given medication," Kaleche recalls.

Kaleche then took the full dose religiously, has since recover and is back to normal.

Koki says that the fact that there is no one who has died after seeking her services has built her name and even some of her clients refer people to her

regularly.

Dorothy Gitari, a community health extension worker in Mukuru kwa Reuben says that she has been regularly visiting Koki to find out how she has been going on with her job.

Seek

"She has been very cooperative since she has been sending patients to hospitals. She has also been referring me to those who are reluctant to seek health solutions," says Gitari. She adds: "Stigma is still there among people with HIV and AIDs. So you find that some people still fear to visit hospitals. So some of them end up visiting people like Koki but when referred to hospital they shy off and decide to stay at home."

Gitari explains: "When I meet such people I talk to them and they change their minds where we go to hospital and they are treated."

"What I do is that I know a person who is sick and the one who has been cursed by people. So if somebody comes to me and she is sick I refer her/him to hospital as we were trained while those who have been cursed I cleanse them."

— Hellen Koki

Kenya imports maize from Tanzania due to deficit

By HENRY OWINO

Kenyan government has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Government of United Republic of Tanzania to sell her an initial 50,000 metric tonnes of maize to curb shortage of the grain in the country.

The national food insecurity in Kenya with respect to food availability, accessibility, utilisation and stability has declined. This has highly been contributed to poor harvests experienced in Rift Valley region by farmers, the bread basket of the country.

Shortage

The little available maize cannot sustain the population majority who depend on maize as their staple food. As a result, the prices of essential staple crops have shot up especially maize, wheat and rice.

On the other hand, supplies of beans, vegetables and other horticultural commodities now thrive in some parts of the country. The poor

harvests of maize in Trans Nzoia County made its prices oscillate in the market without any control.

Due to this, the Government has intervened by importing maize from Tanzania to ensure food prices do not escalate beyond the reach of many consumers. The two governments agreed to procure 201,800 metric tonnes of maize from Tanzania as an initiative to moderate prices of maize and maize flour, the staple food for many Kenyans.

The MoU between the two governments was signed by Minister for

Agriculture, Food Security and Cooperatives of Tanzania, Christopher Chiza and Minister for Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries of Kenya, Felix Koskei in Malabo, Tanzania.

"The Government of Tanzania has agreed to sell to Kenya an initial amount of 50,000 metric tonnes from her National Food Reserve Agency. This quantity will be availed at a price of KSh2,650 per 90 kilogramme bag and delivered in Nairobi and Mombasa at an extra cost of KSh300 per bag," Koskei said.

"As a Government, our focus is to bring the cost of production down through provision of subsidized fertilizer, use of mechanization and management of post-harvest losses of maize and other foods."

— Felix Koskei

Koskei said the remaining amount would be negotiated for with time as prices will vary depending on the availability of maize in Tanzania. He explained that the whole procurement procedure will be through private traders from both countries.

Produce

However, Koskei said the National Cereals and Produce Board (NCPB) will offer storage facilities to the traders who may not have adequate storage.

"As a Government, our focus is to bring the cost of production down through provision of subsidized fertilizer, use of mechanization and management of post-harvest losses of maize and other foods," Koskei explained.

To manage post-harvest waste, Koskei revealed that the Ministry of Agriculture acquired 36 mobile driers with a capacity of five tonnes per hour each at a total cost KSh248.4 million. The driers have been distributed in 36

major maize growing regions and will be based at the community storage facilities in 36 sub-counties.

The Ministry also promised to build more storage facilities in different parts of the country especially where there are no National Cereal and Produce Board stores. So far 36 sites for such stores have been identified in major grain producing regions in the country. Already 13 are under construction each at the cost of approximately KSh42 million.

Farmers are, therefore, urged to improve efficiency in their production so that they are competitive and are able to enter the international and regional markets.

The initiative is seen as enhancing trade and reviving the spirit of East Africa Community that would ensure affordable food to the member states, cut costs of importing food from other regions when food is available within community members and improve the economies of the nations involved.

Insecurity leaves populations in Somalia facing severe malnutrition

By ROBERT NYAGAH

Thousands of hungry women and children in Somalia where malnutrition has been worsening amid food shortages are set to get some intervention following the provision of KSh425 million (\$5 million) in humanitarian assistance.

The Australian Embassy in Nairobi, in a press release indicated that "the funding would be delivered through the United Nation's Somalia Common Humanitarian Fund to provide Somalis in need with emergency food, water, sanitation, shelter and medical assistance.

The embassy indicated that this contribution brings Australia's total humanitarian and state-building assistance for Somalia to \$15 million in 2014.

While explaining the background under which the assistance comes, the embassy said that a combination of delayed rains and ongoing conflict has had a devastating impact on food security in Somalia.

It further indicated that almost three million people were in dire need of humanitarian assistance and "over 200,000 children under five are acutely malnourished". There are 1.1 million internally displaced people in Somalia and one million Somali refugees in neighbouring states noted the release.

Support

As well as responding to urgent humanitarian needs, supporting stability and state building in Somalia is consistent with Australia's strategy to combat global terrorism, piracy and people trafficking. Enhancing security in the Indian Ocean rim also helps to protect major Australian trading routes.

For quite some time now the Australia government has been supporting the African Union and United Nations missions working with the Federal Government of Somalia to help build security and consolidate state institutions.

The Australia government welcomed the recent territorial gains made by the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) against the Al Shabaab terrorist group. The embassy has been working with the UN Security Council to ensure that military gains are accompanied by humanitarian and livelihood benefits for Somali citizens.

The government urged African Union Mission in Somalia and the

United Nations missions in Somalia to cooperate closely with humanitarian actors to facilitate humanitarian access to those affected by food shortages against non-peaceful environments.

Assistance from the Australian government comes after various UN agencies announced that 200,000 children under the age of five in Somalia are acutely malnourished in the wake of food shortages as the country's food security situation worsened.

Survey

The joint assessment report by the Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit for Somalia (FSNAU) and other UN agencies caused panic among human rights and donor organisations leading to this intervention.

These children fall under the more than one million people in the country who today face acute food insecurity amid a worsening crisis brought by a combination of problems including political instability and violence.

The survey has also revealed that the "malnutrition data and the rates of crude mortality presently being recorded in Somalia are the worst anywhere in the world in the past 20 years.....except for maybe North Korea in 1990".

The UN report indicates that as a result of delayed and erratic rainfall, the 2014 cereal harvest once the records for the July-August are released was expected to be 37 per cent below the long-term average and 28 per cent below the five-year average. According to the Famine and Early Warning System Network (FEWS NET), the drought situation remains the most severe humanitarian crisis in the world today and Africa's worst food security crisis since Somalia's 1991-1992 famine.

Although the international media has reported widely on the Somalia food crisis, women and children continue to be the real culprits reduced to being internally displaced persons and also living in camps where any available relief food arrivals are at times disrupted by a struggle for food at the camp level hence leaving the children and women empty handed.

Current situation

While describing the sad situation in Somalia, one international organisation indicated that "the gradual recovery and gains made since the end of the famine in 2012 are being lost as poor rains, conflict, trade disruptions and reduced humanitarian assistance



led to a worsening of the food security situation across Somalia".

The Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit for Somalia reported that "acute malnutrition increased in many parts of the country, particularly among children and the situation was likely to continue deteriorating further until the start of the rains in October".

A group led by the Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit for Somalia, a project managed by Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations, and the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET), a project funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and other partners indicate that an estimated 1,025,000 people will be in crisis and emergency.

The group said the figure represents a 20 per cent increase since January 2014 with internally displaced persons continuing to constitute a majority (62%) of the people in crisis and emergency, followed by rural (27%) and urban (11%) populations.

Malnutrition

The report indicates that there has been a seven per cent increase in malnutrition cases since January 2014.

It indicated that the figure includes 43,800 severely malnourished children who face an even higher risk of morbidity and death.

Serious statistics of acute malnutrition (Global Acute Malnutrition rates exceeding 15%) were noted in 21 out of 50 population groups surveyed. Morbidity, poor infant and young child feeding practices and inadequate humanitarian assistance are the cause of overwhelming malnutrition in Somalia.



Children in conflict areas greatly affected. (Below) Women and children in conflict regions most affected. Pictures: Courtesy

Even in urban areas which are under government control, trade which would have meant access to food among the people has been suffering disruption causing reduced access to seasonal agricultural employment.

The reports noted that in many urban area access roads remained under insurgent control and trade flow is largely blocked, resulting in sharp increases in staple food prices.

"Cereal prices have quadrupled in Wajid (Bakool) and doubled in Hudur town (Bakool), Middle Shabelle and Hiraan (Buloburte district) regions between January and July/August 2014," indicates the joint assessment

The populations in Emergency and Crisis, note the reports, require urgent lifesaving humanitarian assistance and livelihood support between now and December 2014 to help meet immediate food needs, including urgent nutrition and health support for the acutely malnourished, particu-

larly children

Further, additional interventions are being sought to protect livelihoods and build the resilience of communities against future shocks.

The intervention is paramount because the food security situation of over 2.1 million additional people remains fragile and is classified as stressed by experts.

"This group of households may struggle to meet their minimal food requirements through the end of the year, and they remain highly vulnerable to shocks that could push them back to food security crisis if no appropriate support is provided."

Populations experiencing acute food security crisis are found in large numbers (10% of the total population or more) in rural and urban areas and among displaced populations of Bari, Nugaal, South Mudug, Galgaduud, Hiraan, Middle Shabelle, Lower Shabelle, Bakool, Gedo, Middle Juba and Banadir regions.