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COUNTY GOVERNMENT CHALLENGES



Confusion over devolved system

Functions of county governments not clear to many Kenyans

By HENRY OWINO

Majority of Kenyans are still unfamiliar with the new system of devolved government that has come into existence with the current Constitution.

This includes some of the recently elected leaders who will need more time to study and understand the system.

In spite of the fact that the Constitution is two years old, there is confusion over whether the country has a devolved system or a unitary state.

Devolved government is well explained in

Chapter Eleven, Fourth Schedule of the Kenya Constitution and recently published handbook on devolution by Kinuthia wa Mwangi, chairman Transition Authority and his team.

According to Isaac Ruto, Governor Bomet County, Kenya has two levels of governorship; County Government with 47 counties each led by County Governor and the other National/Central Government headed by the President and his cabinet secretaries.

Ruto, however, clarifies that it does not mean there are two separate centers of power but a del-



An aerial view of Nyeri town. Below: Chairman of the Transition Authority Kinuthia wa Mwangi and his team cut the ribbon during the official launch of the devolution system guide-booklets. The country is still in the process of adjusting to the county governments. Pictures: Joseph Mukubwa and Henry Owino

egation of duties bringing leadership closer home to citizens.

"I must admit that there is a lot of confusion with this new introduced system of governorship. Even leaders themselves do not understand it," says Ruto. He points out: "For instance, the induction programme reads that governors' in-

duction led by His Excellency Mwai Kibaki in Naivasha County. Yet this is Nakuru County not Naivasha as the leaders indicated."

According to Dr Alfred Mutua, Governor Machakos County, expectations of Kenyans on county governments are very high.

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Orphans in Trans Nzoia have their livelihood uplifted

By ABISAI AMUGUNE

An American volunteer's chance encounter with abject poverty among orphans in Trans Nzoia County a decade ago is now paying dividends.

The volunteer, Marjaana Seilonen, has since returned and is now supporting 104 children with food and medical care through her organisation.

Seilonen recalls when she first landed in the country and visited a small village at Kiminini in Trans-Nzoia County and found most of the villagers living in squalid conditions.

Top on the list were children, mostly orphans, roaming the streets instead of going to school for the free primary education.

What also disturbed Seilonen was the fact that despite the villagers owning sizeable parcels of land, they were unable to produce enough food to feed their families.

"I was particularly touched by the plight of women who had lost their husbands either through natural circumstances or the dreaded the HIV and AIDs scourge," she said.

Seilonen heard stories of malnourished children who were unable to get food or medical care.

Education

One of the victims, Alex Wanjala, dropped out of primary school at Lukosi in 2007, following the murder of his father by armed robbers.

Since then, Wanjala, 20 with the help of his mother and Seilonen, have worked hard together and he was a candidate in last year's Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KSCE) at St. Josephs Boys' Secondary School in Kitale.

Wanjala remembers his late father as a police officer and is happy that the American volunteer has promised to sponsor him to college.

After experiencing the hardship of the villagers in Kiminini, Seilonen



Kiminini women in a clean-up exercise during the OWI Environmental Day. Below: L-R: Gertrude Wanjala, OWI US President Marjaana Seilonen and Kenyan counterpart Alice Wanyama.

Pictures: Abisai Amugune

flew back to the United States where she mobilized for sponsorship to be channelled back to Kenya.

Through a non-governmental organisation known as Ordinary Women Incorporation (OWI), Seilonen, as its President, embarked on a mission to empower Kenyan women to attain better lives.

She partnered with a Kenyan community based organisation bearing a similar name to coordinate activities between the two countries.

Seilonen's counterpart in Kenya Alice Wanyama says that since the inception of Ordinary Women Incorporation in Kenya, the local community has benefited socially and economically.

They were speaking in Kiminini on the group's Environmental Day when they led members of the Kenya Ordinary Women Incorporation and area residents in a day long cleaning exercise at the township.

Said Seilonen: "What started as a women's affair has now grown to also include men since they are also regarded as members of a family. We have included men in our Kenyan programme to sensitise their families on childcare."



Today, Ordinary Women Incorporation is catering for 104 children for their food, school fees and medical care.

Cyber services

Apart from conducting seminars on social care, Ordinary Women Incorporation recently introduced cyber services at Kiminini marked "where the residents can communicate with the world using modern technology".

Under the clarion "Joining Hands for Global Change", the two partners invited doctors from both countries who recently converged in Trans Nzoia to offer a free medical treatment camp.

"We were able to treat nearly 1,000 patients and our doctors exchanged information on tropical diseases. Both sides benefitted in their own ways," said Seilonen in an interview.

The US branch of Ordinary

Women Incorporation with its headquarters in California and its Kenyan arm have now acquired a 3.4 acre piece of land on the outskirts of Kiminini town on which they intend to construct a full-fledged health centre in view of the growing number of tropical diseases.

Both Seilonen and Wanyama, a nutritionist, can afford a smile after seeing the behavioural change in the orphans and widows.

From nourished children to the tolerance of widows in homes, the non-profit making groups have improved the social set-up of the community.

According to a guardian to an orphan Gertrude Wanjala, Ordinary Women Incorporation had initiated table-banking for her group's members who currently are involved in small-scale business in Kiminini and the neighbouring towns such as Kitale, Bungoma, Kimilili and Webuye.

Water scarcity fuelling conflict in Kwale

By ADAM JUMA

Vandalism of water pipes by neighbouring communities in Kwale County has left communities from Shangia Village in Mariakani without water for over 20 years.

The villagers have accused herders from Kwale of vandalizing pipes that supplied water to the area from the main Mzima Springs water pipe.

Speaking at a community meeting with the Mariakani Water Officer at Shangia Primary School, women from the area called on the Government to replace the old pipes with metallic ones to curb the vice.

According to Beatrice Tatu, neighbouring communities have vandalized the pipes to ensure that their animals access water leaving the villagers with nothing.

"This area is very dry and we rely on piped water but we now have to buy a 20 litres jerri can at KSh40. We are also Kenyans and would like the Government to address our plight," said Tatu.

Kilifi-Mariakani Water and Sewerage Company (KIMAWASCO) Mariakani region Manager Daniel Muindi noted that women were most affected by the poor water and sanitation system.

Muindi observed that the problem is gender based as mostly the burden of providing water to the family is the sole responsibility of women and girls.

"In this area drawing water and transportation is the responsibility of women who have to walk long distances due to the scarcity of the commodity and insufficient supply," said Muindi.

Vandalism

Women and girls are forced to walk over 20 kilometres every day to fetch water in pans because piped water is only available from the Kenya Army barracks in Mugoya.

"The vandals cost us a lot of money that is why we had to abandon the main pipe supplying water to this area from the Mzima Springs. The only pipe that has a steady supply of water is the one which supplies the Mariakani barracks and belongs to the Department of Defence," Muindi reiterated.

He said the water company has no mandate to tamper with the pipes without the approval of the Department of Defence.

The scarcity is also to blame for the high drop-out rates because most school going girls accompany their mothers to search for water.

Speaking at the same meeting, Alex Mwanza Executive Director Coast Forum for Human Rights called for a private-public partnership to address the problem so that people have access to clean drinking water.

Mwanza said the organisation will soon start a project that would enable reliable water supply to the area.

"The initiative will incorporate a gender approach while offering water and sanitation solutions to reduce water-related problems and ensure more girls are retained in school," said Mwanza.

The project shall include establishing water kiosks to reduce acts of violence and aggression against women who fetch water from long distances.

Women also called for their involvement during the implementation of all water projects in order to transform the current cultural and social discrepancy in the area.

Mwanza called on the provincial administration to work closely with the communities living around so that they can make good use of the project which is scheduled to start early next month.

Reject writer bags another award

By DIANA WANYONYI and MERCY MUMO

The second Annual Journalism Excellence Awards (AJEA) gala which was held at the Kenyatta International Conference Centre (KICC) in Nairobi last week saw a number of print and broadcast journalists recognised for their various contributions in journalism.

Diana Wanyonyi got feted in the Children and Youth Affairs Reporting Award category where she submitted a radio feature on the risks that children under the age of 18 face with many of them being infected with STI's and AIDS.

The story focused on a number of incidences at the Coastal part of Kenya where 50 children are reportedly defiled monthly, 80 per cent being girls and the remaining percentage being boys.

"I give my heartfelt appreciation to the Baraka FM team for the endless support they have given me to do investigative stories out of my comfort zone," said an elated Diana.

"Many thanks also goes to the Kenya Media

Programme for nurturing my career through grants to facilitate my movement while covering features and to Internews- Kenya for the well tailored media training programs which I have effectively participated and got polished professionally."

She also thanked AWC for giving her a platform to tell stories that are least reported especially those involving the poor and vulnerable persons at the grassroots.

Diana emerged top early this year at the National Council of Population and Development - Tupange Awards, for a well-researched feature on family planning. In November last year, the same feature was published in Issue 073 of the Reject newspaper, a bi-monthly online publication of the Media Diversity Centre entitled "Malnutrition linked to high infant mortality in Coast region."

The story focused on the statistics from



Diana Wanyonyi displays her award during the second Annual Journalism Excellence Awards (AJEA) gala which was held at the Kenyatta International Conference Centre (KICC) in Nairobi. She won in the Children and Youth Affairs Reporting Award category. Picture: Diana Wanyonyi

Kinango and Ganze districts which according to the Kenya Demographic and Health survey 2008 / 09 statistics, 71 out of 1000 live births die before the age of one.

Joshua Malingi: First Malindi senator hails establishment of devolved government

By ROBERT NYAGAH

Today when you meet him nothing speaks to the position he once held in society because he is retired and operates as a small-scale farmer in Sabaki area on a one acre parcel of land on which he also rears livestock.

However, Joshua Henry Malingi, is no ordinary Kenyan. He made history when he became the first Kilifi County Senator in 1963-1964 and also served as the Member of Parliament for Magarini between 1964 to 1969.

His leading an almost non-political life also saw him nearly left out in the list of guests who had been invited to witness the new senators being sworn-in. He was finally invited in what he describes as an afterthought from the authorities.

The clerk to the Senate had sent out invitations to the six; Philip Toikam Lemein from Narok, M. A. Msallam from Lamu, Julius Muthamia from Meru, William Rotich from Baringo, G. N. Kalya from Nandi and Nathan Munoko from Bungoma but had forgotten Malingi.

The ceremony eventually took place at KICC amphitheatre and was dominated by the elections of the speakers and deputy speakers.

At 82, Malingi looks physically fit dressed in his trade mark white short and a black pair of trousers.

Jubilant

The former Senator expressed joy that God had kept him alive to see the new Constitution which had rewarded Kenyans with a devolved system of the government long preferred by KADU, of which he was a staunch member and the party that propelled him to national politics.

Malingi expressed joy that the general elections had ended peacefully noting that the last time he saw bad politics in Kenya was after the 2007 election when the country nearly collapsed under violence.

"I am happy to be around to have witnessed the peaceful elections and the shaping up of the devolved system of governance. As the then staunch KADU leader under the late Ronald Ngala, I strongly believed and still believe that a devolved system of government allows fair distribution of regional and national resources hence creating cohesion," said Malingi.

Although once in a while he is invited to attend celebrations to mark national days, Malingi notes that does not always enjoy the respect fitting the position of a former senator and an elder in Kenyan politics.

During the last Jamhuri day celebration, he was offered a chance to address the gathering by the then Malindi District Commissioner Arthur Mugira and was received quite well by the younger politicians.

"The young Malindi politicians were happy to hear my voice and noted that an independence era politician was still around to offer some wisdom and guidance when needed."

The humble peasant farmer says that he does not mind mixing with the ordinary Kenyans among the audience during important occasions, especially when the community around the Sabaki Village in Magarini Constituency where he lives, congregate to discuss development.

"Sometimes I even sit on the ground to participate in development forums," explains Malingi, adding that he had his chance when he served the people as a senator and MP.

The father of nine, among them six sons and three daughters, Malingi is happy that

one of his sons is a chief in Malindi while others are in various professions including journalism, the career choice of one of his daughters.

Training

The retired politician, a onetime Christian books translator studied at ADA Changamwe Primary School in Mombasa before attending Kamagambo Training School in Nyanza between 1947 and 1952.

He first worked briefly at the SDA church as a clerk in Mombasa and later at Kendu Bay Press where he served for four years as a translator of missionary books.

He later moved to Kilifi African Council where he worked as forest officer retiring in 1959 and returned home in Malindi.

After retirement, he had a chance to work in the tourism sector and served as a supervisor at the Blue Marlin Hotel, then one of the most popular hotels among German and Swiss tourists in the whole country.

In 1963, Malingi joined full time politics and was elected as a senator for Kilifi County under the KADU party ticket.

"Those days KADU was the most popular party in the Coast region and had a huge following mainly because of the popularity of the late Ronald Ngala," explains Malingi with a nostalgic smile and pride.

His elevation to a senator was a great occasion to him. "My opponent was Taura Malindi who managed a mere 4,000 votes against my 69,000 votes," he explains.

The most notable senators then, Malingi confesses, were trade unionist Clement Lubembe, Mwinga Chokwe and William Wamalwa among others.

"There were also charming people in the Senate such as Nathan Munoko and John Kibasoo, who served as the deputy speaker," recalls Malingi adding that those days life was affordable and simple.

Salaries for the senators and legislators in the National Assembly then stood at KSh2,000.

Recall

He recalls that many things like owning a car were affordable. The former senator does not wish to dwell on how the senate was disbanded but he was happy to automatically move into the National Assembly as the MP and served Magarini Constituency between 1964 and 1969.

On losing the seat, he decided to retire honourably and to concentrate on farming and serving God.

"Since retirement, my life has been smooth and peaceful," Malingi notes.

"In 1964 I bought my first car, a new Volkswagen for which I paid KSh9,000," Malingi recalls adding that by 1967 he had changed cars several times before settling for a Volvo which cost him KSh20,000 and would take a mere KSh300 to fill up with fuel.

"I had the chance to acquire by purchase or allocation large chunks of land when I served as a senator and an MP, but as a staunch Christian, I believed that my treasures are in heaven," explains Malingi, using his walking stick to point to the sky while adjusting his reading glasses.



From top: Former Kilifi County senator Henry Joshua Malingi 82, during the interview. Malingi introduces his son who is an assistant chief in Malindi to the public at the Malindi stadium during Mashujaa day. The former senator sitting on the grass with wananchi at Sabaki Dispensary. Pictures: Robert Nyagah

The former senator admits that for some time after he left politics, things were not very smooth financially and like many former MPs and senators, he was also part of those who put up a fight with the government demanding a pension and gratuity payments.

After years of futile battles with the government, Malingi says, the government agreed to pay the former MPs and senators a lumpsum gratuity of KSh1 million three years ago which he agrees was good and like a rescue package for many now ageing former legislators.

He concludes: "The fact that the senate is back is a great idea and a political decision by Kenyans through the Constitution. This expands democracy and offers more politicians a chance to participate in governance. Eventually we shall see a fair sharing of national resources among all Ke-

nyans irrespective of the regions they come from."

Hope for squatters as Land Commission gets down to work

By YUSUF AMIN

Squatters in Coast Province can now heave a sigh of relief after the National Land Commission ordered for the suspension of the controversial eviction orders until further notice.

According to the Land Commission chairman, Dr Mohamed Swazuri, the directive will be applied throughout the country.

Swazuri described the evictions as inhuman and in contravention of the new Constitution.

He noted that the evictions had been stopped until the Eviction and Settlement Bill is passed by Parliament and enable squatters' rights respected and protected.

Eviction

Swazuri noted that most of the affected squatters had been evicted from the lands where they had lived on and known as their home for decades. He expressed hope that the new law would curb the problem.

"Many people, especially in the Coast region, have been evicted without being resettled elsewhere, this must come to an end," Swazuri said.

He lamented that during evictions most of the victims who suffered were women and children who were forced to spend the nights in the cold.

"Why should someone demolish poor Kenyans homes without proper notification?" Swazuri posed. He added: "This should be a thing of the past. We should respect and protect everyone's rights."

Swazuri asked the Police Commission to ensure that no eviction was carried out until the said Bill was debated and passed by Parliament.

He was addressing journalists during the opening of new lands registry offices in Kilifi town that have

been funded by USAID through Kenya Transition Initiative.

Swazuri announced that he had information that Coast region had one of the highest cases of pending eviction orders in the country.

He noted that most of the people in the region had been living as squatters for decades saying that some measures have been proposed to address the problem through the Constitution.

Resolve

In Kilifi County, for example, the land question is a big issue that has never been resolved since independence.

Civil servants in the lands office have been accused of colluding with others to benefit from settlement schemes at the expense of the locals.

The residents have also accused some land officers of being biased in dividing the land in the schemes by favouring influential leaders and certain communities at their expense.

They asked the Land Commission to intervene and investigate the allegations.

Led by Human rights activist, Eric Karisa Mgoja, residents from Kijipwa Settlement Scheme asked the Commission to visit the scheme on a fact finding mission and hear their complaints.

"Wrangles have been brewing in various settlements schemes and the Commission should intervene and have the problem solved before anything bad occurs," Mgoja said.

During the handing over of the offices, Swazuri assured residents of Kilifi County that their complaints would be investigated so that everyone will be able to get a title deed and use it as security in acquiring loans in banks and other financial institutions.



On his part, Kilifi District Officer (DO) 1, Paul Rotich, said the area had experienced land problems for many years. He asked the Commission to intervene and solve them.

Rotich lamented that Kilifi residents had not been sensitised enough on how they could acquire title deeds from the lands office.

Consequences

"People in this region should be educated on how they can acquire title deeds from the lands office in Kilifi so that the squatter problem can be solved once and for all," he said.

Meanwhile Kilifi Governor, Amason Kingi, has warned land grabbers that their days are numbered. He asked them to surrender the land to the Government or face the consequences.

"Most of the Government land in the county has been grabbed leading to lack of land for establishing the county headquarters," Kingi said.

He stated that his government would repossess the land so that investors start developing the county.



The National Land Commission chairman Dr Mohamed Swazuri viewing some of the files in Kilifi lands offices. Below: Dr Swazuri opening the new lands registry offices in Kilifi town funded by USAID through Kenya Transition Initiative.

Pictures: Yusuf Amin

A plate full of demands for Kilifi County government

By ROBERT NYAGAH

Residents of Kilifi County want their Governor, Amason Kingi, and his new team to give the fishing industry and business community top priority in their action plan.

They are optimistic that the County Government will improve services and address most of their concerns.

Kilifi is a large County with a huge potential for fishing, agriculture, tourism, horticulture among areas.

Speaking on behalf of 5,000 fishermen in Kilifi County, Coast region Beach Management Unit (BMU) chairman Omar Msham, blames lack modern fishing equipment for their poor returns.

"The best fisheries are usually further than 20 nautical miles inside the sea while the small dhows used by many fishermen have the capacity to only access fisheries less than 10 nautical miles away from the shoreline," explains Msham.

He wants the County government to work closely with banks to give

fishermen loans to acquire modern equipment such as fishing gear, boats and cold storage facilities.

"We need powerful large boats with good inbuilt engines to be able to sail between 30 and 45 nautical miles inside the Indian Ocean and access the best and high yielding fisheries," notes Msham.

According to the fishermen, Kilifi County government, will need to work with the stakeholders to reclaim and protect some of the beach fish landing depots grabbed by private developers and turned into private use.

Conditions

In Malindi town about 400 traders at Kwajiwa Wholesale Market have been operating under unhealthy and deplorable conditions inside an old building which lacks ventilation, protests continue to mount.

Members of the Kwajiwa Market Traders Association are asking the County government to improve hygiene at the market as a matter of urgency and importance.

Mohammed Abbas, a stall owner says that being the main wholesale market which is depended on by the tourist hotels for their meat, vegetable, fruits and other fresh supplies, the facility needs to be refurbished.

The same sentiments are expressed by the Matunda Sales Group of about 30 young people, who sell fruits in the open air and are appealing to the Governor and his team to improve their working environment by building modern shelters for them.

Khalifa Saro Mae, chairperson of the group says: "Garbage collection is also compromised by lack of refuse chambers or dustbins, yet the zone has fruits which are expected to be sold in hygienic conditions to avoid contamination."

Female traders who specialise in the sale of live chicken under the Malindi Kuku Traders hope that the County government will provide them with shelter and other facilities including clean water and sanitation facilities.

The traders presently operate in

the open and have makeshift sheds for their chicken which they use to shield their animals from the sun or thieves. The traders say that because they pay for the required fees to undertake trading, they should not be operating without basic amenities.

Even with the general demand for better services across the Kilifi County, the business community under the Kenya Chamber of Commerce and Industry is already at loggerheads with the Malindi Municipal Council over increased charges for single business licence.

Operation

According to Andrew Mattaza, chairman of the Chamber, the County government is operational and should immediately overrule the Malindi Municipal Council and review the licence charges downwards in a bid to assist the more than 3,000 traders who are affected by the raised fees.

"The charges for the single license permits were done without con-

sultation with stakeholders and in some instances the fees were raised from KSh3,000 to KSh8,000 per year which was illegal and unfair," notes Mattaza.

The more than 400 beach traders who sell various curio items to tourists and who operate on access roads are demanding that the County government intervenes to control trading of curios in hotels and also provide them with social amenities such as clean water and toilets.

According to Consolata Ogotu, chairperson of the Baharini Women's Group, the county government should build them a proper market with all the required facilities including clean water, toilets and lighting to ensure that they could also operate at night.

She hopes the County government would provide its own security to the beach traders and tourists instead of the present group of the Tourist Police Unit officers, whom he accused of harassing and arresting the traders on flimsy grounds.

Kitui residents want the rundown 'goldmines' revived



By ANDREW ELIJAH

Residents of Kitui County are looking up to their new Governor, Julius Malombe, and his team to revive two natural resources in the area which they describe as "a goldmine."

The two are Mutomo Hill Plant Sanctuary, which is 75 kilometres from Kitui town, and South Kitui National Game Reserve, that is 32 kilometres away.

Charles Kiethe, a community leader says: "I believe that our new governor will spearhead renovation of this sanctuary and even our game reserve, which have been abandoned since 1979 to create jobs, boost the economy and attract tourists and researchers as well."

According to Peninah Malonza, Kitui County Deputy Governor, they will give priority to revamping and marketing the sanctuary and the game reserve in addition to exploiting minerals in the area to boost the revenue collection in the county.

"It is a shame that our people have gone hungry for years while we are sitting on goldmines, because we have lacked visionary leadership," Malonza noted.

George Glassen, the brains behind the sanctuary would definitely be a very dejected man were he to rise from the dead today.

It is home to over a 100 different indigenous species of plants most of which are believed to have medicinal value.

The sanctuary, standing on a 100 acre land has been abandoned over four decades since Glassen, a Swedish botanist who was then chairman of the Kenya Horticultural Society, discovered it in 1965.

Discover

It has been left to rock hyraxes, monkeys, snakes and rock rodents to stroll comfortably without anyone showing concern about its existence.

Correspondence obtained from offices of the local authority reveal that Glassen had after an extensive expedition of the country discovered the richly unique composition of indigenous trees and vegetation on the Mutomo Hill, which

he termed as: "The best representative of the semi-arid ecology-rich in natural vegetation, trees, shrubs, annuals and succulents."

He instantly fell in love with the native flora growing at the strategically placed rocks at the peaks of the small range of rocks on the hills prompting him to approach the local authority with a proposal to establish a sanctuary in the area.

The area was ideal and still is for scientific study and research purposes following its richness in medicinal plants. It was also an attractive tourist destination to rock climbers and a possible permanent source of revenue for the local authority. With this in mind, Glassen developed a desire to conserve it against destruction.

Development began as a joint initiative between the local authority and Kenya Horticultural Society under the supervision of Glassen who was able to source funds from European organisations and other well-wishers.

He oversaw the construction of a rest house and a water tank for visitors. A larger camping ground was cleared and a fence put up covering the whole 60 acres around the Mutomo Plant Sanctuary. Two caretaker houses were also constructed in addition to a makuti-thatched dining hall and staff quarters.

Productivity

"I remember well how this place was well developed; people came from far including tourists for camping," says 70-year old Nyamai Kasi-kali, a villager elder from Kawelu.

That was in 1976 and the last time anything productive came from the sanctuary.

Thereafter, like its fellow flora and fauna habitat in the region, the South Kitui National Game Reserve that interestingly lies 32 kilometres from the Mutomo Hill Plant Sanctuary has been a victim of negligence and empty promises from the local authority.

Vandals were left to deface the once scenic sanctuary. The fence was pulled down, the steel

gate and water pipes stolen. The rest house and caretakers' houses also had iron sheets, doors and windows stolen.

The County Council turned down an application from a private investor who had applied to lease the property in 2001. An offer from the Faida Organisation (an advancement and development affairs organization) in the same year to jointly develop the sanctuary was also rejected with the council wary of losing revenue to private investors.

As that happened, the sanctuary was run down and lost its image.

Revive

However, in May 2012 the council floated tenders to interested consultancy firms to undertake a new plant re-identification in the sanctuary.

In October the same year, the Kenya Wildlife Services, Mutomo community office hosted a meeting at the sanctuary with all government stakeholders and community leaders who debated and discussed possible ways to revive and restore the glory of the sanctuary.

Mary Njingira, the warden at KWS Mutomo community office, says they still have plans to develop and market the facility before opening it up to tourists and researchers.

"This sanctuary is a resource that deserves real attention and I hope I will be able to re-establish it for the people," says Njingira.

However, residents are still pessimistic saying there have been too many false promises.

"The South Kitui National Game Reserve and Mutomo Plant Sanctuary are facilities that should not be neglected but developed to create jobs as well as attract tourists and researchers," says David Munyau, a local investor.

Before it collapsed, the sanctuary was run by the Kitui County Council, which had taken it over from the Kenya Horticultural Society, which started it 48 years ago. However, they were unable to sustain it leading to its collapse.

Falling education standards worry parents in Kwale

By TERYANI MWADZAYA

Parents at a primary school in Kwale County wonder whether development will ever reach their part of the country.

This is because of the state of the infrastructure and education at Lwara Primary School.

To the pupils, each day is a nightmare as the school lacks basic facilities to enable them attend, learn and sit for their examinations.

The pupils lack desks and benches so they are forced to improvise with logs and stones which they sit and write on during class.

According to Salim Mnemo, the school's headmaster, they have no option but to use logs and stones sitting arrangement in the "forgotten school" outskirts of Kwale town.

"The school has one stream which has a shift class arrangement for class three who study in the afternoon due to the few classrooms available," explains Mnemo.

According to records from the Kwale District Development Plan 2004-2008, ministries of Health and Education indicate that poverty levels are high.

About 50 per cent of the population lives in absolute poverty where women from rural areas suffer the brunt of this. It is from this backdrop that Mnemo is looking for support so as to motivate the pupil to study hard and pass exams.

Intervene

The headmaster says another problem bedevilling the school is lack of classrooms which has discouraged pupils from attending classes regularly.

Cases of rape are also on the increase and he is calling on the authorities and religious leaders to take intervene.

The county also suffers perennial drought, hunger and famine which Mnemo thinks can be resolved through 'dry farming' as practiced by the Republic of Israel and proposed by the Coast Development Authority for adoption.

According to Mnemo, the area is capable of sorting itself out by using modern farming technology to boost agricultural produce and ensure 'residents have water and food through new agricultural means'.

According to Mnemo boys are more than girls in the school and he blames this on parents. "Girls are forced to remain at home to take care of the young ones or due to lack of fees, while their brothers are favoured at their expense," notes Mnemo.

He adds: "Girls in this community are downtrodden and marginalised socially, politically and economically by men due to the patriarchal nature of its traditions."

The major communities in this area, the Durumas, just like their Digo counterparts use traditional systems of governance that is dominated by men when dealing with murder, adultery, fornication, divorce, marriage and theft among others.

Alternative

Despite the cost of living, Kassim Juma, one of the teachers says that the residents are encouraged to seek alternative methods of livelihoods.

Juma lauds various organisations that have been conducting civic education and peace-building programmes in the area as well as those that have been promoting girl-child education.

He commends the new Constitution saying he was optimistic that the devolved government would assist develop schools like Lwara Primary to provide quality education.

A mixed bag of requests from Trans Nzoia

By ABISAI AMUGUNE

The county governments are primarily about giving residents the mandate to decide on their priorities.

Even for those who never supported the election of the County governor, they have a right to determine how the governments will work.

It is now dawning Dr Mike Mbito, a resident of Trans Nzoia County that the polls were not about individuals but the subsequent delivery of public service.

"We want an enabling environment in the county where we can work for development. One does not turn around to sabotage and undermine development just because of losing in an election," notes Mbito. He poses: "What does the common man expect of the elected Trans-Nzoia leadership? Are the winners going to deliver on their promises?"

Mbito and other residents of the county would like to see governor Patrick Khaemba get down to business of making their county a better place for both men and women.

According to Dorothy Cherop from Marambach Village in Saboti Constituency, the woman has always been down-trodden when it comes to the distribution of power and resources.



"As women we only hear of the Women Enterprise Fund giving loans. Majority of us have never benefited because of lack of security."

— Dorothy Cherop

"For example, out of 25 civic wards in the county, only two were scooped by women while no woman was elected as an MP for the local five parliamentary seats," she says.

Calling for respect of the one third majority in the inclusion of women representatives in the County Assembly, Cherop notes that the County government leadership should ensure women are considered for the micro-enterprise loans.

"As women we only hear of the Women Enterprise Fund giving loans. Majority of us have never benefited because of lack of security," observes Cherop.

Revive

Cherop suggests that the women should be assisted in reviving the arts and crafts sub-sector at the Kitale National Museum so as to attract eco-tourism.

However, Eliud Wafula, a teacher in the area discounts the concept of starting new primary schools and offering them computers when they are understaffed and ill-equipped.

Wafula, who is chairperson KUPPET Trans-Nzoia County says: "We should first improve on the learning environment of our primary schools other than advancing them with laboratories without science teachers."

He observes that there is no point of starting new schools when the existing ones were still located in poor-learning environment.

"We expect the governor and his team to think of equipping all the schools adequately before sanctioning for the registration of new ones," says Wafula.

Policy

In the farming sector, local farmers were of the view that since the activity had become agri-business there was need to harmonise and regulate prices between the inputs and outputs for them to realise profits.

Farmers' spokesman Erastus Seroney suggests that loaning institutions such as the Agricultural Finance Corporation (AFC) should be decentralised at the county level and advanced to include insurance cover in case of crop failure.

Noting that farmers were undertaking a risky business, Seroney, wonders how a farmer was expected to plant, treat, harvest and sell his/her produce in a given year and expect him/her to prepare for the proceeding season before disposing off the harvest in time.

"We should revert to the old system where farmers were supplied with inputs without strict conditions. Late planting has caused farmers huge losses," he says adding that farmers should be protected against natural calamities.

Seroney further says farming should be

delinked from party politics since farmers do not conduct their business through politics.

For Michael Manyonge who is physically handicapped, nothing is as sweet as seeing a county that includes the disabled in their programmes.

Manyonge, a former nominated councillor and a member of the Trans-Nzoia Disability Group says the county leadership should include the five per cent stake in the running of the county affairs.

He says the KSh200,000 received from the National Council of Disability to coordinate for the county affairs of the disabled were a drop in the ocean.

On the business community, hotelier Kamau Muchori said the county leadership would be of help if it assisted in the improvement of infrastructure, including the Kitale — Endeless road leading to the Suam border point.

Kamau expects the agricultural sector to be diversified to include fish and irrigation farming.

On behalf of the minority groups of Turkana and Somali communities, Albash Noor called on Khaemba to implement the Constitution by involving them in running of the county activities.



"We expect the governor and his team to think of equipping all the schools adequately before sanctioning for the registration of new ones."

— Eliud Wafula

Leaders push for nomination of more women in Busia County

By LEONARD ACHARRY

Leaders from Busia County want the Governor to appoint more women to the County executive committee to address the glaring gender disparities.

Only two women were elected, one to the County Government and the other to the National Assembly. Mary Emaase was elected the first woman MP to represent the newly created Teso South Constituency while Florence Obinda was elected Bukhayo West Ward Representative in Busia County.

Leaders in the County led by Nambale MP John Bunyasi and Busia County Maendeleo ya Wanawake chairlady Zainabu Muyoti now want more women nominated to the County Assembly to bridge the gender gap.

"There is need to nominate more women in leadership positions because they uphold integrity and are more sensitive to the needs of the people," Bunyasi said.

He promised to push for women's rights in Parliament saying that women representation account for 50 per cent adding that the 30 per cent gender threshold was just minimum.

On the other hand, Muyoti called on the Governor Sospeter Ojaamong to ensure that 30 per cent gender parity is achieved at the County executive level.

"We only have one MP in the National Assembly and one woman ward representative in the County Assembly. We are advocating for gender equity in the appointment of heads of various departments at the County," Muyoti said.

She observed that women are the ones at the centre of economic growth and it was important to have them mainstreamed in the County leadership for the success of projects.

"Money that circulates in this County is mainly generated by women who brave the scorching sun during the day to sell goods in the market," Muyoti noted.

However, she urged the electorate to elect more women in the coming elections so that they can also have an opportunity of nominating men.

During the last elections, Faith Mammoth was the only woman who contested for Senator's seat in the County against former Attorney General Amos Wako and immediate Nambale legislator Chris Okemo.

Alice Were contested for the gubernatorial seat while four other women contested for parliamentary seats in Nambale, Budalangi, Teso South and Matayos constituencies and a number of County representatives in various wards.

Out of these, only Emaase and Obinda got a nod from the voters to join the National and County assemblies.

Functions of county governments not clear to many Kenyans

Continued from page 1

"Governors will be required to ensure effective service delivery, promote economic growth, and high levels of accountability for every single cent spent," says Mutua.

Accountability

"All governors must be ready to work for the people who elected them and be accountable for every penny spent," Mutua says.

Martha Moraa is a Nairobi based businesswoman who travels a lot outside the country. To her devotion is only meant to help in the sharing of national resources rather than creating independent regions as some put it.

Moraa supports the statement by immediate former President Mwai

Kibaki made during induction workshop for new governors at the Great Rift Valley Lodge that elected governors should foster national unity by recognising Kenyans diversity as stipulated in the Constitution.

"I really support Kibaki on his statement that governors should focus on uniting Kenyans despite the devolution of power and resources. After all we are one people and Kenya remains a unitary state," said Moraa.

She further noted that the central government is there to represent the whole country in national and international matters while county government stands with residents on issues at the grassroots level.

Only 15 per cent of the total revenue collected by the Treasury will be ploughed back into the 47 Counties for their development.

"For a business person like me, I would like to see well-built roads not just Thika Super Highway but others like Mombasa, Nairobi-Kisumu-Busia and Narok-Migori roads also built," says Moraa. She notes: "Nairobi County should lead in security enforcement both day and night for our business premises to transact in 24 hours."

For Carolyne Asutza, a secretary in one of the companies in Nairobi, devolved government is meant to give powers to the people for self-governance and enhance participation of the people.

She emphasizes that this is the time that minorities and communities that have been marginalized for long by the centralized government should protect and promote their interests and rights. For instance;

county government would ensure equitable sharing of national and local resources throughout the country.

Asutza notes that if big maize millers are going to be planted in her home county and other stunted companies revived, many youths who now work as boda boda (motor-cycle taxi) operators will venture into their various professional careers.

"This will increase money circulation in Kakamega County and reduce idleness and land cases especially of theft by the youth," she says.

Sector

Concerning education sector, Asutza would like to see proper school management starting with enough teachers, classrooms, books.

"Above all, I would like Nairobi County Governor to ensure that

orphans and children from poor families receive free education especially from slums areas like Kibera, Mathare, Kawangware, Mukuru kwa Njenga among many shanties," Asutza desires.

Pamela Owino, a fish-monger believes that the county government is going to ensure her home county, Siaya is well developed. She says Siaya has lagged behind for years for being in the opposition side but now every county is meant to govern and develop without marginalization as before.

"I am sure there is going to be a fish cooling plant in Kisumu for our fish, other fish factories built right at the lakeside to process fish while still fresh. In fact, I see myself vacating this expensive life in Nairobi County and going back home do engage in business," says Owino.

Press freedom in Africa is obsolete

By HENRY OWINO

Many nations in Africa are far from realising press freedom as most journalists continue to work and live under fear of attacks, arrests or even targeted for death and other threats.

Several African journalists have flown from their home countries to practice their professionalism in foreign nations as refuge journalists.

The worst countries in the region, where journalists would not carry out their duties freely and feel secure are Somalia and Eritrea. These are countries where journalists have been targets of kidnap and death for disseminating information to the public. This was realised even as the World Press Freedom Day was being celebrated globally on 3 May.

More than 500 media professionals and personalities from 30 nations globally, converged in Nairobi, Kenya for a two day conference to mark the big occasion in the media calendar.

The day was officially opened by Kenya's President Uhuru Kenyatta where he urged African leaders to legislate laws that would not just allow freedom of the press but security, safety and protection of journalists.

None of the countries in East Africa is rated good enough in media freedom although Kenya is the second most popular refuge for journalists fleeing persecution.

Report

According to a Paris based report released recently by Reporters without Borders, Tanzania is the only country in East Africa whose media freedom is considered "satisfactory" despite the fact that a journalist was recently beaten while covering demonstrations and another killed by goons.

Despite Tanzania being seen as the best in East Africa, it is ranked 70 globally, yet the best in the region followed by Kenya at 71. Uganda comes in at 104, Burundi at 132, Ethiopia at 137, Rwanda (161) Somalia (175) and Eritrea (179).

The Committee to Protect Journalists ranks Kenya second to the UK in the most preferred destination for journalists feeling trouble in their countries. Currently there are unknown number of journalists who have flown from their motherland

countries for fear of their lives.

Every journalist needs safety, protection and security as he or she operates and this is not possible in Africa as most media houses are owned by influential politicians. The journalists in these media houses report their stories to suit the employer expectations or be sacked. The competitor media houses would be embedded by the politicians and in the contrary becomes target of intimidations through courts with hefty fines of compensation.

It is not easy to publish or broadcast stories negatively touching on these influential politicians. Any of such especially investigative story linking politicians would not see the light of day but if it does then, the author and the media house, face consequences.

Fear

Despite being objective and fair in coverage with enough evidence from various sources, very little could be done once the politician files a case in court.

The journalist may end up paying the hefty court fines individually or the media house pay ups and terminates him or her. This trend has kept many journalists live in fear for their lives so long as the stories published or broadcast reveal the truth and becomes subject of discussion by the public. This is generally the work of media to inform and educate public which others fight to gag.

In Kenya, the big day was organised by the Media Council of Kenya (MCK), a body that ensures that the code of conduct for the practice of journalism in Kenya is adhered to by journalists. This was under the Media Council of Kenya Regional Journalists' Convention 2013 held in Nairobi, Kenya.

In his speech, President Kenyatta promised to defend and promote media freedom in Kenya by implementing policies that promote media freedom. The President said his government will fight any attempts to gag the media or any other action that will cripple media freedom.

"I expect the media to be at the forefront in educating and informing Kenyans so that they hold the government to account. We expect media to remain free, fair and objective because the sense of responsibility in the media must expand to social media and other



President Uhuru Kenyatta and media professionals across Africa during the World Press Freedom Day celebrations at KICC. He promised to defend and promote media freedom in Kenya by implementing policies that promote media freedom. Picture: Henry Owino

emerging forms of media," noted the president.

The two-day celebration mainly focused on; media regulation in Africa, safety and protection of journalists and professionalism in the industry.

Joseph Odindo, the chairman of the MCK condemned attacks on journalists across Africa, saying they will continue with the good work of informing citizens.

Odindo wondered why someone could just plan to do away with a journalist or attack a media house for exposing impunity. He encouraged journalists to work day and night to expose more since it is the only way to curb impunity in Africa.

"Journalism is a profession under threat on this continent. Journalists have been attacked in countries such as Tanzania, Somalia, Gambia just to mention but a few. In some cases the attacks are by the government agents and in other case by goons," Odindo said.

Worldwide last year, 89 journalists were killed, 38 kidnapped, 879 arrested and 1,993 physically attacked. None citizen journalists killed were 47 and 144 bloggers attacked.

This year, at least 25 journalists have reported various forms of threats

to their security and safety in different parts of the country.

Lynn Najjemba from Uganda said in her country there is no security for journalists. She added that most are being threaten with death by very powerful people in Uganda whose names she could not disclose. She explained that the powerful forces have ordered for journalists transfer to other regions, some of who resigned from the profession.

No freedom

"There is no freedom of the media in Uganda, my home country. Many professional journalists working in Uganda have been deported to their respective nations for exposing corruption deals in government. For example, a senior editor at a private television was ordered to quit Uganda just because she reported on a shoddy deal between Uganda government and foreign one," Najjemba explained.

"Recently, the Speaker of the National Assembly in Uganda arrested one journalist for the story he published concerning Uganda Parliament yet the story was valid. The journalist had enough evidence to defend himself and prove his case right but

he was still arrested," Najjemba reiterated.

Valerie Nsoka from Tanzania regretted that her country is being rated the best in press freedom in East Africa, yet assailants are targeting many journalists. She said many have gone missing for several months only to be found dead.

Nsoka stated that in Tanzania more than half of the journalists whether freelance or correspondent or employed work under great fear. Regardless of stories published or broadcast, as long one belongs to the media industry, he/she becomes a target.

"In Tanzania, the goons target any persons who calls themselves a journalist no matter which media house you work for. Assailants see the profession as policing agents for the government. Though media and government relationships are not that excellent, the two work freely, fairly and independently," Nsoka stated.

Rwanda is another nation that was spotted as dangerous ground for journalists to operate in. Journalists are basically being targets of attack though the government is re-aligning the media legislative laws to accord press freedom.

Reconciling communities Marsabit Governor's biggest headache

By HUSSEIN DIDO

One of the major challenges facing the Governor of Marsabit County Ukur Yatani is promotion of unity and peaceful coexistence between all the five major communities residing in the expansive region.

The just concluded General Election left the residents split on ethnic grounds with minority communities ganging up against the dominant ones.

The Gabra, Rendille and Burji took one side against the Borana to sweep all the old and new political seats created under the new Constitution.

Although the larger communities missed out of the sharing of the key positions in the county government, women also lost after men forgot about them during the campaigns.

The three minorities ganged up to elect one of their own at all costs. The battle was so fierce that the men

influenced women to vote for a women's representative of their (men's) choice.

According to Yattani Wario, Turbi Ward representative, male chauvinism and outdated cultural practices are to blame for the failure to have a single woman elected to most of the four elective posts.

Wario confessed that the single women's representative's seat for Marsabit "was influenced and decided on by men, on behalf of the women in the county".

Dominate

However, Lucy Bokayo from Karare Trading Centre differed with the ward representative's views saying not all men were chauvinists.

She said women aspirants were always put in a negative light by their male counterparts in order to benefit and take advantage of the situation to dominate in the politics.

Bokayo noted that women were better placed to play a critical role in development once. She said women would be able to address a myriad of the challenges faced by the communities.

She thanked the Catholic Peace and Justice Commission for initiating an advocacy group to spearhead campaigns to empower women and the community on gender and governance issues.

She noted that as a group they will lobby the governor to increase budget on the girl-child education to address their plight.

Despite being sidelined, the Borana managed to clinch the position of speaker and deputy speaker to make up for the loss in the other bigger seats.

A ward representative Galgalo Golicha appealed to all elected leaders to forget their tribal alignment and work together with other elected

leaders from various communities in order to embrace cohesiveness and ensure equal distribution of resources and positions.

Turbi ward representative Pius Yattani says: "The leaders will now focus on working together in order to serve the people and achieve on some of the election pledges that they made."

Cohesion

They raised concern over the way the members voted in position of speaker and deputy and called for unity and cohesion among the communities in the region.

Fears have been expressed that the larger communities might be marginalised in terms of taking positions in the devolved system of government.

On the eve of the polls, Marsabit Catholic Peace justice Commission moved with speed to conduct inter-

community dialogue in order to embrace peace and cohesion among the communities in the area.

The Diocese Peace Justice and Commission coordinator Godfrey Godana said the church had conducted a series of meetings between the Rendile, Borana, Garba and Burji communities in order to foster reconciliation.

He said there was urgent need to sensitise the communities on need to discard tribal regrouping and embrace unity and love among the various communities in the area.

"I am encouraging the residents of Marsabit County to co-exist in peace and harmony as preached by the church," Godana said.

Godana said his organisation would organise a joint peace race for the morans from the various communities in the counties for them to explore their talents and promote peace.

Hopes and fears as County government takes shape

By **GEORGE OMONSO**

West Pokot farmers are upbeat that the new crop of leaders will revive and promote the dairy, bee-keeping and horticultural industries in the far flung County.

They also want their first Governor, Simon Kitelei, to address the issue of mining and revenue distribution of natural resources like ruby and copper perennial.

But they identified cattle rustling among themselves and their neighbours as the biggest threat to their development. They have asked their Governor and his team to intervene so as to attract prospective investors.

The residents are calling on their Governor to give peace-building between the Pokots, who are pastoralists, and their Turkana, Marakwet, Baringo and Karamajong neighbours priority.

One of them, Nancy Loywa, from Kacheliba Constituency, says she expects the County government to promote and support dialogue and sustainable peace processes to enhance harmonious community co-existence.

Cattle rustling has been a major source of conflict between the Pokot and her neighbours, especially the Karamajong in Uganda.

Rev Sammy Kasam is calling on the new crop of leaders to unite the people of West Pokot with their neighbors by embracing PAKATUSA group that has been operational in the region now for over a decade.

PAKATUSA is an acronym for Pokot, Karamajong, Turkana and Sabiny which was started by Pokot leaders. The group seeks to ensure that there is peace among the communities living in that region. It mainly targets communities that practice livestock farming.

Manage

"Through PAKATUSA they have managed to reduce massive cattle raids. The group has also managed to transform close to 3,000 warriors to peace crusaders," says Kasam.

Some of the warriors have embraced peace and are now doing well economically after converting to farming activities.

The Pokot have diversified with some en-

gaged in trading their cattle at markets such as Dagoretti, in Nairobi, while others have bought tractors and are hiring them to the residents at a fee.

With the support of other leaders from the community, they are encouraging the youth, who are in possession of illegal firearms, to surrender them to the authorities.

Already a renowned athlete, Tecla -Lorupe, through her peace foundation, has been able to encourage over 5,000 youth from the Pokot community to abandon cattle rustling activities and instead go back to school to and to brighten their future.

Zachary Lorema, one of the farmers, says that despite parts of West Pokot being endowed with good rains and rich agricultural soils lying between two catchment zones of Kapenguria and Lelan areas, they were still faced with poverty.

"Lelan area being rich in Agriculture should be among the areas that should be given first priority. Lelan is credited for producing milk and pyrethrum. Currently Lelan area, located 47 Km, on the Northern side of West Pokot County, has Lelan Highland Dairies, farmers' owned company with 2,600 registered shareholders," Lorema adds.

Farmers are also expecting the new County government to promote bee-keeping projects in the area by constructing honey processing factories.

Exploitation

Mineral exploitation will also be a major milestone that they expect the county government to embark on. Currently the stalled Cement factory at Sebit and Ortum area should be among the first assignments and upon completion of the factory to create jobs and boost the economy.

Other major minerals that they want supported include explorations of Copper found in Marich and Ruby found in Kacheliba constituency.

On Horticultural farming, Paul Loduto says he expects the County government to expand and promote mango farming in Sigor, Lomut and Chesogn.

The Community leaders say the issue



Pokot women traditional dancers entertaining guests during a past function. Residents of West pokot expect peace and development to be key on the county government's agenda. Picture: Joy Monday

of Pokots asking for relief food should be a thing of the past as they expect a major plan on how to use the water of Muruny River and Turkwel gorge for irrigation.

Lokuchu says the team learns from the success of Botswana, which is a leading meat exporter after tapping on expertise provided by the Kenya Meat Commission.

Sammy Rotino says this because West Pokot County faces challenges ranging from poor governance and skewed distribution of resources vis a vis weak strategies in dealing with poverty, declining agricultural production and environmental degradation.

Infrastructure

On infrastructure, Philip Lonyangrem, is calling on the new Governor and his team to give it top priority saying that post independence Governments since 1963 had given them a raw deal.

"On road network, I expect priority to be given to Kapenguria-Alale road, Kapenguria-Sigor road and Kapenguria-Soak road among others," he says.

Mary Loywa says that she expects the County government to lobby the national government to develop a need-based curric-

ulum that will minimise the gap between jobs and skills through relevant training.

Peter Lonyangapoua says that he hopes the County government will support the youth and women to access various devolved funds by simplifying conditions to allow them to access the funds.

Emmanuel Choronger from Sigor says that expects the new County government should ensure that every location has a well-equipped health center with enough drugs.

"The County government should solicit for more funds to ensure that all the schools within the constituencies are well equipped. This will ensure that all children who have attained primary education get a chance to finish form four," he says.

Lopete Lomuk from Kacheliba says it is only through education that they will be sure that their children will compete with others but not through the power of the gun and engaging in cattle rustling activities.

Lomuk further urged the County government to be tough on parents especially those who had the tendency of marrying off young girls, saying that it was time girls were given equal opportunity as boys to continue with their education.

Child labour places orphans at risk of HIV infections

By **GILBERT OCHIENG**

The rate at which HIV and Aids is taking its toll on the residents of Busia County is worrying.

According to Joyce Isiaho, Busia County Commissioner many children were engaging in commercial sex and child labour as a way of fending for themselves. She noted that the children did not have information on safe sex and ended up having unprotected sex leading to more HIV and sexually transmitted illnesses infections.

Isiaho observed that these children, who were orphans and vulnerable, are forced to sell sex to be able to fend for their siblings after their parents succumb to Aids.

"Progress of a child in school is linked to support by their parents, but in case of orphans, their education is left in a limbo," said Isiaho.

She quoted a recent survey from the Kenya Bureau of Statistics, stating that over 60 per cent of Busia residents live on less than a dollar a day and this is also to blame for the high prevalence of the pandemic.

Isiaho urged relevant departments to undertake an aggressive sensitisation campaign through various forums to enlighten the people of the region and the orphans on the dangers of HIV and Aids, which has claimed several lives.

"Many children in Busia County and across the country have dropped out of school pre-

turely due to abject poverty, hence high rate of child labour practices," she noted.

Isiaho was addressing a forum that was convened by the International Labour Organisation and held at the Busia Agricultural Centre.

Statistics

It was aimed at tackling the challenges of child labour, which has posed a major threat in the education sector in the devolved system of governance in the country.

Research has shown that more than 14,000 people in sub-Saharan Africa are being infected with HIV daily and 11,000 die every day from Aids related complications.

In Africa, HIV and Aids is an outcome of poverty with sexual trade, early marriages and child labour being predictors.

Sub-Saharan Africa is home to 70 per cent of the world's poorest people with the lowest Gross Domestic Product (GDP) globally as 60 per cent of the population are said to be living below the poverty index of less than a dollar per day.

However, Isiaho noted that there is need to organise more forums in collaboration with the Busia County government and other stakeholders in the education sector in order to address the plight of children who have fallen prey to child labour and poverty.

Globally, an estimated 33.3 million people are infected with HIV and Aids of which 22.5 are in



Participants during the International Labour Organisation forum at Busia Agricultural Training Centre recently. Picture: Gilbert Ochieng

sub-Saharan Africa. Research has shown that 2.3 million children in sub-Saharan Africa live with HIV.

"HIV, Aids and poverty co-relate and have a negative impact on both the demand for and supply of education in Busia County," Isiaho said.

She thanked efforts of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) through the Support for National Action (SNAP) Project for the elimination of child labour. She noted that they had withdrawn 2,950 pupils from child labour situations in Busia and ensured they continued with education.

Students benefit from books in electronic format

By NICHOLE WAITHERA

As the Government prepares to roll out its ambitious laptops for Standard One pupils next year, non-governmental organisations have already started investing a similar initiative in local schools.

The initiative seeks to make learning easier for pupils to enable them adapt to new methods of learning.

Among the new initiatives are the US-based non-governmental organisation Read-and-Prosper, which are providing e-readers, pre-loaded with e-books to primary and secondary schools in rural villages.

In partnership with a local publishing company based in Nairobi called Word Alive Publishers, the organisation seeks to provide Kenyan books to students in electronic format.

Since some Kenyan publishers have concerns about the possibility of e-books being illegally copied, Read-and-Prosper has also formed partnership with E-Kitabu, a local e-book company.

The initiative E-Kitabu distributes e-books across the world Africa included.

This is meant to empower children in developing countries where students do not have access to the internet, books and other learning materials.



Pupils of the Sir Ali Primary School in Malindi town, Kilifi County during morning assembly. Primary schools will soon benefit from e-learning in the rural villages..

Picture: Robert Nyagah

Partner

According to Evans Colton, chief executive officer Read-and-Prosper, the organisation is partnering with publishing companies in order to help students access reading materials produced locally.

"We intend to introduce books that will not only help in distribution of local sales channel, but will also nurture indigenous writers," explains Colton.

This, he adds, is through adaptation of the syllabus and converting it to electronic messages which will then be fed into mails.

He argues that it is easier to provide students with a lot of free foreign books that are in the public domain but these will not be of help to Kenyan students.

"We want to conceptualise the African story and improve the experience of Kenyan students," he notes.

E-book readers are easy to operate, have the memory capacity to store hundreds of books, are relatively cheap, and require very little electric power.

An e-book reader can be charged using a USB from a wall plug or a small solar panel, and

uses very low electric power that it can potentially run for weeks on a single charge.

This is why Read-and-Prosper maintains that it can use e-readers to deliver large numbers of books at a low cost to needy schools.

According to the head of Tennessee Institute of Information Technology (TIIT), Andrew Thuku, e-readers have really encouraged his students to read more. The school is among the beneficiaries of the NGOs projects.

Technology

According to Thuku, students are more encouraged to read using that technology.

"The portability and accessibility of e-Learning helps students adopt better and learn more. They also have an in-built dictionary and one can add their own content and other materials to the e-readers, and I have no doubt that the results will be tremendous," explains Thuku.

Currently, Read-and-Prosper is providing e-readers pre-loaded with a combination of free public domain e-books and some Kenyan content.

However, Colton says that the e-book production and distribution is still new in Kenya.

The business models are not yet fully understood, and this is a challenge to local publishing companies.

"Most of the companies are still very cautious about changing a business model that is currently profitable, and is understandable," says Colton.

He notes: "The key is to simultaneously build demand for e-books by spreading the availability of devices that can read these books."

Colton also observes that it will be important to build production and distribution capacity within the Kenyan publishing industry.

"It is important to develop business models which ensure that book publishers can continue to profit in the digital world," he advises.

The cost of an e-reader in the United States is approximately KSh8,500 (\$100), which is inexpensive once you factor in its capacity to hold an entire library. If Kenyan publishers seize this opportunity, the official says, they will be able to lower the price for books, while also increasing

their profit margins, because they will not have to pay the costs of printing, importing, and distributing paper-based books.

Increment

This means they can also dramatically increase the number of books they sell and their profits.

Furthermore, the more children read, the more they will be book buyers for life, creating a virtuous cycle for the publishing industry.

"Some publishing companies see digital distribution of books as a threat to business, but I see an enormous opportunity for the publishers, but also for Kenyan students and the general public," Colton explained.

"As we have already seen with music and films, digital distribution is the future. I hope to see Kenya leading all of Africa and the developing world in putting these new technologies to work, to improve education and to build a stronger reading society," he said.

Funding goes digital as Kenyans embrace online initiative

By NICHOLE WAITHERA

A new online initiative seeks to raise funds for entrepreneurs in the country.

Crowd-funding, as it is popularly known, has been attracting the business community and non-governmental organisations around the country.

The method has become a great platform for raising funds as it cuts costs of *harambees* (fund raising) and printing of cards.

Crowd-funding is an online specialised grant application, a method commonly used in the United States to raise funds for various projects.

According to Jay Larson, founder of *Tu-napanda*, a Kenyan based non-governmental organisation which aims at giving free networking to students and free hardware instal-

lation in Kenya, an applicant can start crowd-funding for free and will only be charged when the project has raised the targeted funds.

"This will help people solve their problems easily without spending money in organising towards the fundraising event," says Larson.

Investors

One only has to post a project to a large group of site users and potential investors who will then raise funds towards making the project a success.

Larson started the project two years ago and sold all his products through the internet.

For one to source for funding online, one has to start building networks and meeting a wide range of investors online. Pictures of the

project or a video accompanying the description of the project would formalise it.

One also has to set a deadline for which the fund-raising will run online. Some of the online platforms which have so far registered dramatic success are Kickstarter, Indiegogo, GoFundMe, Razoo, Crowdrise, Pledgemic, Sellaband, Appbackr and Crowdfunder.

When donating towards the project, one has to use a bank credit card so as to donate online. Larson said that donation towards projects online by the locals is still a major challenge since majority of Kenyans are unable to access internet, while others lack information about it.

"Mobile money is the most popular way of money transaction in Kenya and that is why most people are either unaware of online transactions or do not have access to internet,

or are not acquainted to the internet," he noted.

However, Larson says that for their latest online fundraising, they included M-pesa on their website so that it can enable the public to donate towards online projects.

While urging young entrepreneurs and students to source for funds including fees online, he noted that most Kenyans are however not aware of online fundraising.

"Kenyans should be sensitised about the benefits of using crowd funding as a way to empower their projects and realise their dreams," said Larson.

He added: "We can only bring equality to the world and solve our problems by pulling up together and financing projects and talents which could have otherwise been wasted. It is only through the internet that we can mobilise the world."

African women scientists hold key to food security

By HENRY OWINO

Women who are smallholder farmers in Africa have been rated as key to addressing the food security situation in the continent.

According to the African Women in Agricultural Research and Development (AWARD), an organisation that empowers African women scientists through agricultural development initiatives across the continent, if women smallholder farmers are empowered, Africa could soon feed itself.

AWARD is a professional development programme that focuses on research and leadership skills of African women in agricultural science, empowering them to contribute more effectively to poverty alleviation and food security in sub-Saharan Africa.

Encouraging small-scale farmers especially women is one way of closing the gender gap in the agricultural sector. In other professions, women have tried to minimize the gender parity and today, in almost all careers, women have been actively involved.

In a recent research carried out by AWARD, about 12-17 per cent of Africans are malnourished. It, therefore, recommends that when women are highly represented in Agriculture, there could be plenty of food for families and surplus for sale, hence assurance of food security in the continent.

According to Vicki Wilde, AWARD's Founder and Director, women are the backbone of African agriculture. She said majority of those who produce, process and market Africa's food are women, but only one in four agricultural researchers is female.

Wilde said the AWARD programme was launched in 2008 and has been providing two-year career-development fellowships that focus on fostering, mentoring partnerships, building scientific skills and developing leadership capacity.

Intervention

She reiterated that AWARD is addressing gender parity gap in agricultural activities by building the capacity of African women scientists who are conducting pro-poor agricultural research.

"Award is today specifically known for its career-development program that equips top women scientists across sub-Saharan Africa. This is done by accelerating agricultural gains, by strengthening women's research and leadership skills, through tailored fellowships," explained Wilde.

She noted that the organization helps women scientists engage in innovations with high potential to contribute to the prosperity and well-being of African smallholder farmers. It has met with women of different walks of lives and supports each one of them regardless of their background. In addition, she stated, it has helped women in Africa realise their talent and cultivated them to their full potential.

Wilde asserts that the organisation is stepping up towards improving outcomes for Africa's smallholder farmers by strengthening women voices on the farm, laboratories, in markets and in policy forums.

"In various ways, AWARD contributes to poverty alleviation and food security at the highest possible levels," Wilde noted.

Winners

The outstanding women scientists who received the awards were selected from among an impressive cadre of 1,094 applicants from 11 African countries.

The fellowships are granted on the basis of each scientist's intellectual merit, leadership capacity, and the potential to improve the livelihoods of African smallholder farmers most of whom are women.

Dr Bolanle Otegbayo from Nigeria is one of the Award fellowship beneficiaries. She holds PhD in Food Technology from the University of Ibadan and currently lectures at Bowen University in Nigeria. Her research focuses on determining food quality and industrial po-



Some of the 2013 AWARD winners in Nairobi, Kenya. Below: The AWARD Director, Vicki Wilde (center) with some of the 2013 AWARD laureates.

Pictures: Henry Owino

tential of Nigerian yams to contribute to the expansion and diversification of their use.

She says Nigeria contributes to about 68 per cent of the world's annual total yam production at about 50 million tonnes. With her research team, Otegbayo has been able to characterise in detail 45 varieties of yam from five common species.

She says this is the first characterization of a large variety of yams, which would serve as baseline data for future research and for selecting yam genotypes for specific uses.

Since the research has not been able to determine the molecular composition of starch in the yam, Otegbayo, however, carried out further analyses of the yam samples. The results led to better understanding of the functional properties important for determining the industrial potential of starch in the yams.

"In Nigeria, a man would not get a wife if they are not masculine. Yams helps in building

"In Nigeria, a man would not get a wife if they are not masculine. Yams helps in building a strong body structure and Nigerian women admire men with big arms which is a sign of protection in times of danger."

— Dr Bolanle Otegbayo



a strong body structure and Nigerian women admire men with big arms which is a sign of protection in times of danger," Otegbayo said smiling.

Dr Lusike Wasilwa from Kenya is also beneficiary of the AWARD Fellowship programs. She is an Assistant Director, Horticulture and Industrial Crops Division at Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI). This position came to her while she was an Award Fellow during the pilot programme.

Empowerment

Wasilwa's work has focused on empowering women and reducing child malnutrition in sub-Saharan Africa. Her goal is to include research and promotion of underuse fruits with medical properties.

Today, her research at KARI involves collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture,

International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology (ICIPE) and the Kenya Gatsby Trust as well as Farm Africa, a United Kingdom based non-profit organisation working with resource poor African farmers to help them produce more food for their families.

AWARD Fellowship has also benefited Dr Segenet Kelemu who has received a number of awards, including outstanding Senior Scientist Award, for her numerous contributions to the centre and its mission.

These research efforts generated a series of discoveries that have contributed to the ability of the global scientific community to address some key agricultural constraints. Today, Kelemu who is the current Vice President of Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) programmes, has helped to foster the next generation's scientific community in Eastern and Central Africa, and beyond.

Women scientists empowered to boost farmers' income

By DUNCAN MBOYAH

Africa's current leadership in agricultural research is in small number, mostly male, and on the verge of retirement and with a few experienced professionals.

Majority of the farmers are women who require a catalyst for innovations with high potential to contribute to their prosperity.

To most women farmers, acquiring new ideas from men are a tall order as opposed to their interaction with female scientists.

With the increased demand for food in the world, though under many challenges, the best minds of both genders are needed to help bridge the gap to food security.

"Scientists must include all genders since proven statistics reveal that women form majority of farmers and therefore require competent advice from womenfolk," said Dr Vicki Wilde, the Director of African Women in Agricultural Research and Development (AWARD).

She was speaking at a ceremony where 70 African women scientists were awarded fellowships to accelerate agricultural gains by strengthening their research and leadership skills. Wilde challenged female scientists to help women farmers improve their production.

She observed that agricultural sector must greatly increase its responsiveness to the needs and contributions of women if it is to be effective and sustainable in the continent.

"Advances and innovations in agricultural research and development will take place easily when led and enriched by skilled and influential African women," Wilde observed.

Intervention

She noted that in addressing gender inequality, root causes of poverty, malnutrition and environmental degradation are also being managed.

Wilde called for the free use of science and technology in producing and processing of food that is produced by small scale farmers.

"Africa requires a new generation of scientists in food and agriculture to replace the retiring male experts," she noted.

Africa is the world's only region where the number of hungry is growing, from 175 million to 239 million, with nearly 20 million added in the past four years. Clearly, the status quo in the agriculture sector is not working.

Dr Segenet Kelemu, Vice President for programmes, Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) challenged the recipients to help transform the society through their research work.

"The programme is making a difference already and you must make sure that you excel in your work to justify the award," she noted.

Kelemu said that outstanding women are needed in all fields since the world has changed and accepts the contributions of all genders.

"It is very important to have a programme that is especially focused on African women scientists," she reiterated.

Diversity

She observed that AWARD should explore ways to expand into other areas, such as women in IT, engineering, medical and environmental sciences and other areas where women are severely under-represented.

"I believe in empowering people by increasing each individual's belief in their potential, integrating and inspiring people to work together with mutual respect," noted Kelemu.

Cultivating such a culture of empowerment and respect within an institution is critical to



A farmer harvest avocados at her farm. Africa requires a new generation of scientists in food and agriculture. Picture: Courtesy AWC

achieving impact for the disadvantaged people beyond its gates.

Dr. Lucy Murungi, one of 16 Kenyans to win the fellowship this year plans to help change the game for resource-poor smallholders by developing simple, affordable tools to combat poverty.

"I am researching the chemical components of extracts of the hairy African nightshade, *Solanum sarrachoides*, for management of red spider mites," said Murungi, a lecturer at Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology.

Opportunities

The plant is not ordinarily cultivated for consumption in East Africa and her results could impact on smallholder farmers who would grow the vegetable and sell it to manufacturers for botanical crop protection products.

The outstanding women scientists were selected from among an impressive cadre of 1,094 applicants from 11 African countries.

AWARD directly invests in women scientists, empowering them to help close the gender gaps



"I believe in empowering people by increasing each individual's belief in their potential, integrating and inspiring people to work together with mutual respect."

— Dr Segenet Kelemu, Vice President AGRA

across the agricultural value chain.

Preliminary data collected from the first 180 AWARD alumnae revealed that 84 per cent experienced a significant increase in their confidence and motivation to excel, lead and contribute toward a great vision for the future.

Of these, 87 per cent improved their scientific skills and access to resources. This contributed to a significant increase in their scientific outputs and more than doubling of their annual publication rates in peer-reviewed journals

Impact

At least 80 per cent are involved in the development of new methodologies and technologies with the help of smallholder farmers.

So far 52 per cent of scientists, who had received the awards, were promoted in their workplaces.

"This is credible evidence that AWARD fellows are becoming more confident, skilled, and influential," observed Wilde.

The fellowship is two-year career-development programme that is focused on building their science and leadership skills.

It is granted on the basis of each scientist's intellectual merit, leadership capacity and the potential of her work to improve the livelihoods of African smallholder farmers, most of whom are women.

The AWARD laureates represent almost 20 agricultural disciplines and a wide range of innovative, transferable research from plant breeding to improved fodder production, climate change and post-harvest processing among others.

Opportunities

The programme is to help open up novel opportunities for sustainable livelihoods and poverty reduction among smallholder farmers, especially the women.

AWARD was launched in 2008 and has provided fellowship to 320 African women scientists from 11 countries Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Nigeria, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.

It is generously supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) and Agropolis Foundation.

AWARD will be expanding its scope and sustainability by partnering with institutions where the fellows work and study.

"We will be offering gender responsive training in mentoring, science skills and leadership to other women and men in fellows in the institutions," Wilde noted.

Murang'a residents join MDG campaigns and demand action

By RYAN MATHENGE

Residents of Murang'a County want to see their views embraced in the United Nations development blueprint, better known as the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

A cross section of the residents were at a forum where they shared their views saying they would like to see them included in the post 2015 MDG agenda.

Several meetings have been planned in most of the 47 counties in the country to ensure public participation ahead of the international conference to be convened in New York, in September.

This has been a departure from the past when such issues were discussed without any input from the public.

They identified education, health, environment, water and security as core issues that they want to see on the agenda which they believe that will go along way to reduce poverty levels and improve their standards of living.

They said they expected their region to benefit from development of the energy and tourism sectors as well.

But at the same time, the residents said they would like a study done on the feasibility of setting up a hydro electric power station in the area tapping water from the over 26 rivers and flowing from the hilly region.

Failure

During a meeting facilitated by the Government of Finland and Ministry of Planning and National Development, the locals said many of the development programmes failed due to poor implementation and delay in disbursement of financial allocations.

They also pointed that many of the projects that had stalled were because the implementers had failed to consult the public during implementation.

They cited health facilities that had been grounded due to lack of equipment, drugs and posting of medical officials.

County Planning and Development Officer, Elijah Kinaro, said the Government had embarked on the process of collecting public information ahead of post -2015 MDG UN conference slated for September.

On maternal deaths, the medics blamed the community for delaying to transport expectant women to the hospital to deliver.

On the environment, the residents took issue with the Government for delaying to re-introduce laws to ban use of plastic papers bags in the market despite the ban in the year 2007.

Plastic papers were described as highly abused and need for regulation like in other East African countries.

They called on President Uhuru Kenyatta to ensure implementation of the law as a gesture to honour the late Environment Minister John Michuki, who had been in the forefront in conserving and protecting the environment.

Scientists in a milestone development for livestock farmers

By HENRY OWINO

Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI) has developed a user-friendly diagnostic tool to detect Pneumonia in goats and cattle.

Kenyan farmers can now use the quick testing instrument on their livestock wherever they are, in the field or at the farms.

The tool has been invented to diagnose two major contagious bacterial diseases that afflict the lungs of goats and cattle hence causing respiratory infection characterised by inflammation of the lung. That is the most recent milestone by KARI scientists for livestock farmers.

Due to the new development, livestock farmers can now heave a sigh of relief as they look forward to improved production and quality animals through an early detection to quarantine the infected from healthy livestock.

Dr Anderson Wabungu, a specialised scientist in livestock health and diseases at KARI, developed the testing kit with finance from Kenya National Convention for Science and Technology (KNKST) through USAID. "The technology has advantages of reduced cost because it is portable and simplified in disease testing compared to previously available test," he says.

According to Wabungu the kit can detect two major contagious diseases; Contagious Bovine Pleuropneumonia (CBPP) that is Pneumonia in cattle and Contagious Caprine Pleuropneumonia (CCPP) Pneumonia in goats.

He notes that the kit tests for positive and negative reactant that would show an infected or healthy animal which must be obtained from a sample of blood and sera. Others from live animals include nasal swabs and/or broncho-alveolar washings, or pleural fluid obtained by puncture should also be collected.

Wabungu says the kit is currently available at KSh4,000 in all KARI offices in the eight regions and will be rolled out to major veterinary shops soon.

The contagious caprine pleuropneumonia (CCPP) is an acute highly contagious disease of

goats caused by a mycoplasma and characterised by fever, coughing, severe respiratory distress, and high mortality.

It is one of the most severe contagious diseases in goats and causes major economic losses to goat producers in Kenya and Africa as a whole.

Research

According to Abu Oriko, also research scientist at KARI, the disease affects the respiratory tract and is extremely contagious and frequently fatal. He notes that in naive flocks, the morbidity rate may reach 100 per cent and the mortality rate could be as high as 80 per cent.

Oriko admits that Contagious Caprine Pleuropneumonia causes major economic losses in Kenya and East Africa community where it is endemic. "The disease is usually transmitted during close contact by the inhalation of respiratory droplets. Chronic carriers may exist, but this remains unproven," he explains.

"Some outbreaks have occurred in endemic areas when apparently healthy goats were introduced into flocks. It is readily contagious and fatal to susceptible goats of all ages and both sexes, rarely affects sheep, and does not affect cattle," Oriko says.

He cautions that outbreaks of the disease often occur after or during heavy rains, after cold spells or after transportation over night over long distances.

The incubation period under natural conditions is commonly six to ten days, but may be prolonged for between three to four weeks. Some experimentally infected goats develop fever as soon as three days after inoculation and respiratory signs as early as five days, but others become ill up to 41 days after exposure. Affected goats may die within one to three days with minimal clinical signs.

Acute initial signs are high fever between 41–43°C, lethargy and anorexia, followed within two to three days by coughing and laboured respiration. The cough is frequent, violent and productive. In the final stages of disease, the goat may



From top: Dr Anderson Wabungu and Abu Oriko (white coat) explaining how pen-side kit works. Inset: The easy to use kit invented at KARI. The initial laboratory used for all diagnosis of livestock diseases.

Pictures: Henry Owino

not be able to move and stands with its front legs wide apart and its neck stiff and extended.

Symptoms

"Saliva can drip continuously from the mouth, and the animal may grunt or bleat in pain. Frothy nasal discharge and stringy saliva may be seen terminally. Pregnant goats can abort. Acutely affected goats generally die within seven to ten days due to chronic cough, nasal discharge and debilitation.

Contagious Bovine Pleuropneumonia (CBPP) jeopardises cattle health in Kenya and developing countries, making it one of the most important infectious diseases in cattle. In the acute stage, cattle have noticeable respiratory symptoms, including coughing, nasal discharge, dyspnoea, and polypnoea caused by pneumonia and pleurisy lesions.

Affected animals normally have generalised signs such as depression, dullness, weakness and lethargy, pyrexia and weight loss and decreased

production. They will also have respiratory signs including bilateral nasal discharge, dyspnoea, tachypnoea and coughing. Occasionally the only sign seen is sudden death.

The Contagious Bovine Pleuropneumonia is spread mainly by inhalation of droplets from infected coughing animals, especially if they are in the acute phase of the disease. Although close and repeated contact is generally thought to be necessary for transmission, transmission may occur up to 200 metres under favourable climatic condition.

Therefore, serological screening allows for this detection and should be an integral part of a disease control program. Both Contagious Caprine Pleuropneumonia and Contagious Bovine Pleuropneumonia disease incidence are reduced by good hygiene and animal husbandry practices by the farmer and regular testing.

Children suffer from malnutrition in Kitui County

By ANDREW ELIJAH

Parents in Kitui County are being put on the spot over the rise in cases of malnutrition among their children.

According to a medical report, for the last quarter of 2012, only 13 per cent of malnourished children below five years in Kitui South received health enhancement provisions.

Despite a thorough awareness programme, only 818 out of 5,147 cases of emaciated children targeted in the last four months of 2012 were registered for the free food supplement.

According Martha Kimatia, matron at Mutomo District Health Centre: "We are doing the best we can to have all malnourished children from the constituency appear at our health centres for assistance."

However, she hopes that with the on-going awareness programmes the number of children who are victims of malnutrition will reduce.

Her sentiments are echoed by Amos Kilunda, District Medical Officer of Health for Mutomo and Ikutha districts who says: "Increase of food supplement is a must if all affected children are to benefit and recover from malnutrition."

Mutito District had recorded most cases of acute malnutrition. Out of the 1,525 children registered at the district dispensary for food supplements in the last quarter of 2012, 244 were severely malnourished, while 377 were moderately malnourished.

In a similar report obtained from Tseikuru District, only 19 per cent of all targeted children were registered for food supplement.

According Dr Violet Oramisi, Tseikuru District Medical Officer of Health: "Food aid can never be enough to avert a crisis attributed to natural causes."

Another medical issue posing adverse effects on residents from the area is failure by pregnant women to seek maternal care.

Refrain

These women have desisted from both ante-natal and post-natal care with only a small percentage delivering babies in medical facilities.

In the last quarter of 2012, only 587 out of 1,467 pregnant women in Tseikuru District delivered their babies in medical facilities with the rest delivering in the absence of skilled birth attendants.

In Kitui South, only 242 out of 1,062 turned up in medical facilities during delivery while in Mutito it is only 30 per cent that delivered in presence of skilled birth attendants.

"Another challenge for women in the County is the long distances to medical centers, which has led to the poor utilisation of maternal health care services," says Dr Joseph Kinyumu, the District Medical Officer of Health, Mutito District.

Inadequate medical facilities, high costs at private facilities and a poor terrain in some parts of the county were also identified as major challenges inhibiting pregnant women from acquiring necessary maternal care.

Medical officers also identified ignorance and apathy by residents, and women in particular, as another contributing factor to poor utilisation of maternal care.

In Kitui South, stigma and rejection against tuberculosis survivors emerged as a factor driving patients to early death as the disease remained a major cause of mortality in the area.

However, default of medication also led to many deaths, and it was blamed for increasing cases of multi-drug resistance TB in the constituency.

Pauline Maingi, who is the TB and Leprosy coordinator, from the constituency regretted that failure by some relatives to buy drugs for the patients had led some to feel rejected leading to suicides.

Indeed, prolonged famine and ignorance have been highlighted as the major reasons for lasting and high prevalence of malnutrition in children in some parts of Kitui County.

Persist

The recurring drought in most parts of the County had forced many residents to be aid-dependant leaving children aged 10 years and below to suffer from lack of a balanced diet.

Information obtained from medical reports prepared quarterly at district health centers shows the most affected areas were Kitui South, Mwingi North, Kitui East and some parts of Kitui West where residents have gone for over two straight seasons without any harvest from their farms.

That notwithstanding, ignorant parents also bear blame for failure to register their underweight children for food supplements provided by the government through the ministry of health to curtail the calamity.



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