

# Claiming the dividends of Uhuru

## Freedom fighters want government to address historical injustices

By WAIKWA MAINA

As Kenya marks its golden jubilee, celebrating 50 years since the country attained independence, a certain group of people are now in the limelight. They are reminding the country of the role they played towards ensuring that the nation was free from the shackles of colonial rule. These are the freedom fighters, and they include both men and women. Today, they are in court in the United Kingdom, having sued the British government for the pain and suffering they went through.

Even as the case in Britain goes on, many Kenyans who lost land because of colonialism and have remained landless are not happy. They want this anniversary to be marked with a change by having historical injustices addressed.

One of the biggest issues the freedom fighters want tackled is the issue of landlessness. They say this is a time bomb that is waiting to explode.

"The fight for Kenya's independence involved everyone. Indeed, anyone who was alive at that time participated, others suffered more pain than those who were in the forest," says Joseph Maina, secretary general Nyeri Mau Mau Veteran Association.

### Detain

He explains: "These are mothers who watched their husbands murdered and mothers who spent sleepless nights thinking about their sons in the forest."

Maina says even children were not left out in the suffering because they were either abandoned by their parents as they joined other fighters in the forest, arrested and detained or orphaned, and finally the fighters who sacrificed their lives in the forest and detention camps.

His sentiments are shared by former detainee Mama Njoki Kariuki who says "no mother can go to sleep fully aware of the fact that her son or daughter is spending nights in the

cold, in the battle field facing death?"

She notes: "Psychological and spiritual pains are sometimes worse than physical injuries and torture."

Born in 1930, Njoki, then nicknamed Kanyua says though she never went into the forest, she was sympathetic to the Mau Mau fighters.

"We were together with them, mothers do not abandon their children for whatever reason, that is why we supplied them with food, they were our children and their cause was ours," she adds.

In 1951, Njoki was suspected of being a Mau Mau sympathiser. She was arrested and detained in several detention camps including Lang'ata.

The grandmother recalls that it is only the women in the forest who were allowed to carry and own guns.

Maina, who was five years old witnessed all that happened including killings and burning of houses. He watched as his father was beaten to death. His mother was also arrested and together with his siblings, they were left at the mercy of well-wishers.

### Fight

"People were forced to leave their homes and live in concentration camps," recalls Maina. He adds: "The colonialists and their sympathisers stole land and confiscated perceived and real Mau Mau fighters land."

As parents worked in the camp particularly when digging trenches to bar Mau Mau from accessing the village, children spent the whole day without a meal, according to Njoki.

settled in the villages were the landless who are still landless up to date," she says.

Before land consolidation, which gave birth to title deeds, the landless were hosted by others and went about their business just like as the land belonged to them.

But with introduction of title deeds, there was a law requiring land owners to consider those who had stayed on their land for 12 years for inheritance, and that is how the landless ended up in the villages.

Njoki recalls the pains of Operation Unveil whose intention was to



FROM TOP: A group of freedom fighters singing in solidarity. Others during a past function. Freedom fighter Dedan Kimathi.

Pictures: Courtesy AWC and Internet

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# Poverty luring young girls to prostitution

By YUSUF AMIN

Religious leaders from the coastal towns have asked the provincial administration to intervene and curb prostitution among young girls.

Leaders from Mtwapa and Malindi have raised their concern following the increasing number of young girls who have dropped out of school and are looking for jobs after their parents failed to pay their school fees.

Council of Imam and Preachers of Kenya in the North Coast region Coordinator Sheikh Ali Hussein noted that the two towns are more affected and asked the provincial administration to conduct investigations and round up the girls and send them back to school.

"These parents should be arrested and arraigned in court for failing to care for their children," said Hussein.

He lamented that most of the parents are to blame for the large number of girls engaging in sex trade that is popular in the towns.

"Parents who fail to take their responsibilities should be arrested so that the vice can be tackled on time as the County government takes its course," Hussein said.

The leaders said that young girls were being targeted by old men who have money in these towns.

They promised to educate other religious leaders in the region on how

they could preach against the vice.

Bishop Lawrence Chai also condemned the vice and asked Kilifi County government to set aside funds for creating awareness to discourage young girls from engaging in prostitution.

Chai said that in order for the County to grow to its vision, young girls should be given proper education. He blamed all these on parents who have failed to take their family responsibilities.

## Fear

"The County government should create a fund that will help curb young girls engaging in prostitution and further sponsor their education since most of them are bright but come from poor backgrounds," he noted.

Chai expressed fears that the girls might be infected with HIV and other sexual transmitted diseases that may affect their lives and bring to an end their vision.

Kilifi County Islamic leader Bakari Ali Nassib asked parents to be very keen and have their daughters engaged in development activities rather than involving themselves in prostitution.

Bakari challenged religious leaders to have special forums in their churches and mosques to educate girls on the consequences of prostitution in the community.



School girls perform during a public meeting to educate them on the importance of education in the society. Religious leaders are encouraged to have special forums in their churches and mosques to educate girls on the consequences of prostitution in the community. Picture: Yusuf Amin

"We should teach our girls on how they can become responsible people in future despite the hard times faced by families in accessing education.

Kilifi County Commissioner

Erustus Ekidor said that his officers were fighting the problem and asked those who have information on old men who engage in sexual activities with young girls to reveal them to

the police.

"Big towns in the region are most affected by the vice and more police patrols will be conducted to arrest those involve," said Ekidor.

## Drug abuse robbing society of its youth

By BONIFACE MULU

The number of young people who are abusing drugs has gone up tremendously. According to a research done on drug use, about 25 per cent of secondary and college students in Kenya consume drugs.

Kitui District Aids and Sexually Transmitted Infections Coordinator Felistus Vuku said this when she condemned drug abuse.

Vuku noted that the Government is committed to helping its people to avoid drug abuse. She reiterated that a country with drug abusers has no unity and no peace.

"Drugs are many but they have a common problem; that is the side effects," Vuku said. She was speaking during a two-day meeting to sensitise members of the public in Kitui County on the dangers and effects of drug abuse organized at the Kunda Kindu and Kalundu markets in Kitui town by the National Campaign Against Drug Abuse (NACADA) in partnership with the Kitui District Alcoholic and Drug Control Committee.

### Counselling

Vuku urged those living with drug users to assist them seek help in hospital through counselling.

"The Government is fighting the vice because we are having a problem in the country," said counselling, who is also an official of the Kitui District Alcoholic and Drug Control Committee.

She noted that some 1.8 million people are dying of alcohol abuse in

the world alone. She observed that those in the 15-35 year age bracket are the most common drug abusers in Kenya.

Vuku said that some four per cent of Kenyans chew khat, whose consumption is also on the increase in the country. Tobacco consumption in Kenya stands at approximately 8.6 per cent with bhang being the most consumed drug in Kenya.

"Drugs distort your thinking capacity. All drugs go to the brain. The abuser becomes unable to control his or her thoughts," Vuku noted. She asked parents and Kenyans in general to find a solution towards dealing with the consumption of drugs among our children.

According to Moses Kanyi, Kitui Deputy OCPD drug abuse has relation with crime.

Kanyi said that most of the criminal cases in Kitui County are drug related.

"If the habit cannot be controlled, it will be a problem to the society and not for the user alone," said the police chief.

Kanyi, noted that the youth are the most vulnerable group that consume drugs. He called on parents to take care of their children to save them from drugs. On his part, Johnson, Kitui District Public Health Officer, warned that some of the alcoholic drinks are laced with very dangerous chemicals including the methanol.

"We are sensitising you on the dangers of drug abuse. We want to make you lives productive," Muinde said.

## Ambitious plans underway to make Kenya a slum-free nation

By GLADYS MORAA

While Kenya has many informal settlements that host a huge population of urban dwellers, plans are underway to make the country a slum-free nation by 2030.

This will happen if a policy on upgrading slums and preventing their emergence is passed by Parliament and effectively implemented.

However, according to the Ministry of Housing, they will need KSh880 billion to sustainably implement the National Slum Upgrading and Prevention Policy in a bid to eradicate the low income settlements in the urban centres.

Statistics from the housing sector indicate that over 60 per cent of urban dwellers live in the slums and with the increased unemployment, more unplanned informal settlements are rapidly developing.

"Slums are unplanned settlements which have not been identified in any of the existing physical planning or national construction legislations and the rate at which they are coming up is alarming," said Charles Sikuku, director of the Slum Upgrading Programme in the Ministry of Housing.

He called for immediate measures to address this explosion.

### Focus

Sikuku was speaking when he addressed housing and human settlements stakeholders drawn from the Central Rift during a consultative forum held in Nakuru.

He lamented that there has not been much focus and financial good given to the upgrading of the slums

and their prevention.

In the existing Housing Policy 2004, the issue of slums has been integrated as a concern in the housing sector but matters pertaining to solving the riddle of their existence and abolition has not been delved into.

"This is why we need specific guidelines that will be used by both the national and county governments as well other development partners in tackling all issues relating to slums in the country," said Sikuku. He added: "We do not want to have them by 2030, but we need KSh880 billion to do that."

Presently, slum upgrading kitty has been allocated a lean budget of not more than KSh5 billion which is a drop in the ocean.

### Rights

Access to habitable and good housing to all Kenyan citizens is recognised as a basic human right under Chapter Four of the Constitution.

The target, 7(11) of the Millennium Development Goals, also seeks to improve the living conditions of the 100 million people inhabiting or working in slums by 2020.

Dwelling in the slums or the informal settlements, according to the finding of the Ministry of Housing, deprives the residents the power to proactively contribute to the social and economic development of the state.

This makes them the group that is vulnerable to manipulation in the process of policy-making and hence continues to marginalise them further.

During the forum, violation of land policies and physical planning structures was identified as the major cause to the sprouting of slums in the fastest growing towns and major cities in the country.

In order to stop this trend, stakeholders called for effective implementation of the Land Policy to seal all the loopholes leading to grabbing of public land to establish the squalid structures to accommodate the under or unemployed urban residents.

### Create

"The unfortunate thing is that these slums are created by the halves who construct those pathetic structures to house the poor," noted Prof Robert Rukwaro, an expert in the housing and shelter matters who is leading in the formulation of the policy. He noted: "There is no land tenure security because sometimes this land does not even belong to whoever built those houses, the tenants act as the owners."

According to Rukwaro, with proper funding and comprehensive framework that will coordinate and collectively address the issues surrounding slums mushrooming, the Government will be able to abolish their existence.

If the policy, which is expected to be tabled in Parliament in September is finally enacted, fundamental factors resulting in emergence of slums, such as lack of or poor physical planning and environmental control, uncontrolled shelter and housing, security and safety, poor infrastructure, legal, governance and institutional laws would be fully addressed.



# Chameleon farming set to start in Kakamega

By TITUS MAERO

Plans are underway to establish a farm in Kakamega County to train people on how to rear chameleons for export.

The decision to start Buyangu Chameleon Farm (BCF) has been prompted by increasing demand for the reptile in Europe and Asia where taste for pets is shifting from cats and dogs to chameleons because of their distinctive nature.

According to Vincent Shimoli, Buyangu Chameleon Farm Marketing Manager the proposed farm will cost KSh4 million.

Speaking in Kakamega, Shimoli told reporters in that while chameleons appear to be valueless creatures in Kenya because of their scaring look, people in the developed world want to keep them as pets.

There are environmentalists who recommend that instead of using chemicals to kill notorious insects, chameleons can be kept in the compound to stealthily prey on them.

According to Shimoli, one chameleon will fetch about KSh2,075. "Once the farm is established and communities around are trained to rear the reptiles, Kenya will be exporting 5,000 chameleons annually to earn KSh8.5 million," Shimoli noted.

He said the initial figure could double as the demand for chameleons is very high in the United States of America (USA), Spain, Portugal, Japan, Netherlands, England, South Korea and Germany.

## Demand

Shimoli started the business of exporting reptiles a few years ago after he and others established a tortoise farm in Mathemba, Makueni County.

"As we have done at Mathemba Tortoise Farm, we shall discourage people from poaching chameleons from the wild for export," he said.

He pointed out that there is a very high demand for reptiles bred in captivity on the world market which Kenya could exploit to make money and earn foreign exchange.

"Due to the rise in demand we will roll out an outreach programme for schools to teach children the importance of keeping chameleons in particular among other reptiles in our eco-system," said Shimoli.

In addition to their own scientists' technical advice, they will also seek cooperation from relevant government ministries and other organizations which have similar objectives to make the project succeed.

## Host

"Buyangu Farm which will host both chameleons and butterflies will be run by Buyangu community, a conservation self-help group," he explained.

The establishment of the farm has come after the Assistant Director for Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) Robert Muasya said his organization was willing to help communities living near government forests benefit from the fauna and flora.

Muasya said Kenya Wildlife Service was willing to allow communities tame snakes and other reptiles under emerging livestock programme to conserve the forests and their rich biodiversity.

The same sentiments were echoed by David Mbugua, Director of Kenya Forest Service when he said his organization will help communities inter-



One of the chameleon's kept at the Buyangu Chameleon Farm in Kakamega County. Below: Dr Owen Sumbu displaying chameleons on his hand. Pictures: Titus Maero

ested in forest conservation venture into carbon trading market.

Sentiments by the two officials is a departure from previous governments which restricted Kenyans from taming wild animals except to a few selected people.

"Following the relaxation of the laws on wildlife there has been great interest from Kenyans to seek licenses to tame snakes and other reptiles for export and research work with one farmer in Baringo venturing into the lucrative venom extraction market," Muasya said.

## Export

In Kakamega County, Kenya Wildlife Service has promised to return snakes confiscated from a farm managed by Kakamega Environmental Education Programme (KEEP) after approving the license for the community running the farm.

Export of captive bred reptiles is likely to be a new brand of business from Kenya to the international market to boost earnings from the country's traditional exports of coffee, tea, pyrethrum and flowers.

Shimoli noted that officials and experts of Buyangu Chameleon Farm are going to embark on an education programme to sensitise local people and Kenyans in general that chameleons are harmless animals and useful for the country.

Traditionally, he said, people also associated chameleons with witchcraft while others claim they are poisonous.

"Our objective, therefore, will be to educate the general public on the role of chameleons in the wider scope of ecology and necessity for conservation and assist educational institutions with accurate information about chameleons so that they do not destroy them," Shimoli explained.

He said they will strive to allay superstitions about chameleon by providing accurate facts on them.

"Chameleons are distinctive and highly specialized clad of lizards," said Dr Owen Sumbu, a herpeto-culturist

at the Kitale Museum.

Sumbu observed that the chameleons are distinguished by their parrot like zygodactylous feet, their separately mobile and stereoscopic tongues, their swaying gait, possession by many of a prehensile tail, crests or horns on their distinctively shape heads and the ability of some to change colour.

He said there are approximately 160 species of chameleons from Africa, Madagascar, Spain and Portugal, across South Asia to Sri Lanka.

"Some species of chameleons have been introduced in Hawaii, California and Florida and they vary from rain forest to desert conditions," noted Sumbu.

In Kenya, he says, there are two types of chameleons that is chameleon and Brookesia whose species number to ten.

## Climate

"A two horned chameleon is generally found in all altitudes from Coast to Mt Kenya," Said Shimoli.

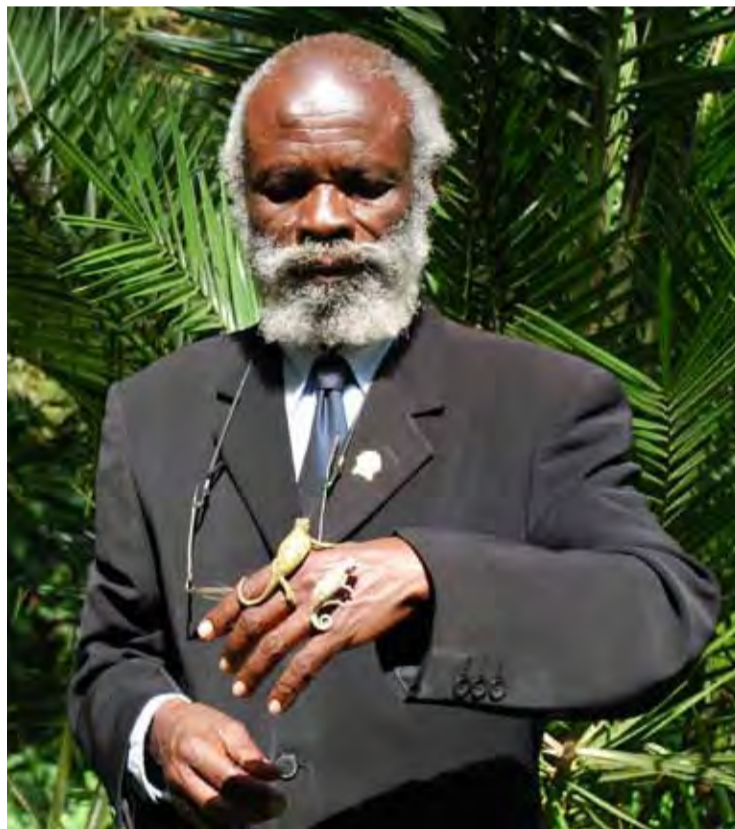
Kakamega Forest has a variety that has evolved into sub-species slightly different from West Africa because of the isolation of tropical rain forest on ecology and behaviour of chameleons. They are among the most solitary of lizards.

"A chameleon's idea of high population density is two animals — male and a female — per territories that can be extensive. Some species are even more anti-social, shunning contact with the opposite sex except for breeding, an act that is quickly accomplished and followed immediately by separation."

When forced into close proximity of each other, Sumbu says, most chameleons quickly become stressed and may be its single greatest enemy.

According to Gary Ferguson, a researcher who has moved widely in Kenya studying Jackson's chameleon, chameleons cannot be bred in boxes they need an area large enough for their freedom.

Jackson's chameleon do not lay



eggs but give birth to young ones and therefore do not require a nest.

"In one year, the species can give birth twice to as many as 8 to 31 juveniles per hatch. They have a gestation period of five to six months. The juveniles are ferocious feeders, they begin feeding a few hours after birth and grow fairly fast," says Ferguson.

Sumbu also says chameleons do not drink water from containers. He said they drink the dew on the vegetation early in the morning. He says in captivity, water is sprinkled on the vegetation for them to drink.

## Sensitivity

Occasionally a chameleon may learn to drink from a water bowl if the water surface is soiled, such as the use of bubbling aerator stone.

"Chameleons are very sensitive animals and are easily stressed when mishandled," he pointed out.

Chameleons are prolific breeders as healthy, well fed females are capable of producing several clutches of 30

to 70 eggs annually.

The incubation period is between 4 to 12 months noting that the temperatures should vary from 760 to 830 Fahrenheit. He says the emergence of an individual from its egg may take as little as few to more than 24 hours.

According to Sumbu, Buyangu Chameleon Farm is going to be a pilot project in Kakamega County. Its success will encourage the locals to rear chameleons for export.

"We shall provide the technical knowledge on how to keep and take care of reptiles as we have done at Mathemba Tortoise Farm. We shall further discourage people from poaching chameleons from the wild for export."

The main sponsors of the project will be the Kenya Tourist Trust. Japan International Co-operation Agency (JICA) has also shown interest in the project and Mathemba Tortoise Farm may also chip in. Other well wishers are welcome.



## Current cost of living harsher now than before independence

By GILBERT OCHIENG

As the country marked Madaraka Day on June 1, the day it achieved "self-rule" from the British regime in 1963, majority of Kenyans have opened up saying there is little to celebrate about.

Peter Ong'aria, 65, a former Kenya Air Force officer and a resident of Nambale District in Busia County says though the colonial regime had been ruthless to the blacks, the cost of living was low as everybody could afford the same.

"Though the colonial regime had subjected Kenyans to a lot of harassment especially during the Mau Mau war, the cost of living was not as high as it is today as everybody was able to put something on the table at the end of the day," recalls Ong'aria.

The former Kenya Air Force bomb detonator officer, remembers with nostalgia how three years after Kenya achieved self-rule it would cost him as little as KSh15 to travel from Nambale to Nairobi by bus.

"With the KSh500 I was earning when I joined the Force in 1973, I was able to feed, clothe and enrol my children in quality learning institutions, recalls Ong'aria. He poses: "However, with the current high cost of living, do you think one can manage the above responsibilities with such a meagre salary?"

Ong'aria notes that health services were accessible and affordable adding that there were adequate drugs unlike today when majority of health facilities do not have drugs due to mismanagement and corruption.

Ong'aria says children from poor families are not able to get access to education whereas those from rich backgrounds enjoy education in higher institutions of learning of their choice. He notes that corruption is so high and that bursary for education is being issued on the basis of "who is who" whereas needy children are denied the same hence being forced to drop from school prematurely.

### Education

"Despite the introduction of Free Primary Education, (FPE) programme, majority of children have dropped out of school due to illegal levies as scores of parents are unable to pay tuition for their children," notes Ong'aria.

The gap between the rich and the poor has continued to widen with the poor taxpayers being forced to bear the burden of the rich especially the Members of Parliament who have been awarding themselves hefty salaries and allowances.

"The cost of living went up as from 1973 when the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) raised the prices of crude oil to \$18 an equivalent of KSh120 per litre by then, prompting the cost of transport to shoot up leading to the increase in price of essential commodities," Ong'aria says.

He is calling upon the Government to bring back price control measures so as to save Kenyans from unscrupulous traders who want to exploit the poor.

"Selective improvement of infrastructure along political lines has also become the order of the day hence denying other areas development."

In a nutshell, it is "Not Yet Uhuru" because 50 years down the line Kenya is desperately struggling to manage her affairs independently, and it is survival for the fittest as the gap between the rich and the poor continues to widen.

# Mzee Kadenge Thuva Ngala

## Former police officer recalls serving in the colonial era

By YUSUF AMIN

Mzee Kadenge Thuva Ngala has a lot of experience to share with all Kenyans especially those who normally visit him at his home in Majengo-Kanamai in Kikambala Division, Kilifi County.

He has many stories to tell on how the colonial error treated the Africans.

Many people from various parts of the Coast region visit him regularly to listen to unique stories about how he managed to join the colonial police force and travelled to many parts of the country during the Mau Mau uprising over 50 years ago.

During his early days, Superintendent Ngala, who was born in 1939, worked in a sisal farm at Mavueni in Kilifi where he was paid KSh2 per month, in 1952, and managed to take care of his family.

"I used to be paid the little money by my colonial master although I worked hard under very poor conditions," he recalls.

### Arrest

Ngala remembers how he was arrested with his friends when they were working as casuals on the sisal plantation by police because they did not have identity cards.

They were tied up in a chain and kept in a cell at Kilifi District headquarters. They were later transferred to Takaungu where big cells had been established for those who did not adhere to the law.

He said: "We spent two days in the cells and were subjected to harsh conditions under the cruelty of the colonial guard."

While in the cells, he recalls, his father went and secured for him an identity card. It is only then that he was released from the Takaungu cells. Ngala recalls how they were treated badly by the police.

After that incident, Ngala was lucky as he was recruited to join

Kiganjo Police Training College in Nyeri in 1958 and graduated as a police officer.

When he completed his course, Ngala was posted to Mweiga in Nyeri where he received further training to serve as a General Service Unit officer. Looking back, he laments that the training was very inhuman and harsh.

"Some of my colleagues fled because they could not bear the corporal exercises they were being forced to go through by the trainers," he recalls.

At that time, Ngala was earning KSh37 per month.

Even after training things were not easy and Ngala says African police officers were discriminated against and were forced to wear short trousers and khaki shirts.

In 1963, Ngala was promoted to the position of corporal and his salary was increased to KSh140 per month. Thereafter he was transferred to Lodwar to maintain security at the stations where freedom fighters Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, Achieng Oneko, Paul Ngei and Bildad Kagia among others were detained.

Ngala says he did not enjoy his job. Later that same year they were taken to Embakasi in Nairobi by the colonial government to demolish freedom fighters' prison so that it could be rebuilt.

He notes that prisoners were mistreated since there were no toilets. They would relieve themselves in buckets while undergoing severe punishment.

"My experience and rank of superintendent did not benefit me after retiring from the force since I was only given KSh10,000 as pension," says Mzee Ngala.

But now with his wife Mchejeri with daughters, sons and grandchildren he ponders as to why he got little money from the Government after his retirement.

He is a father of nine sons and five daughters who are now working all



Major retired Kadenge Thuva at his home in Majengo ya Kanamai in Kilifi County. Picture: Yusuf Amin

over the country.

With the little pension he received from the government, Ngala decided to engage himself in farming activities in his small shamba in Kanamai.

He now plants vegetables and sells them in Kanamai market to earn a livelihood. Villagers around Kanamai flock his farm where he grows vegetables to get a little of his advice.

### Old age

"He is old but he can perform many activities in the society," says Katana Nzai, one of the village elders who visits often him at home often.

He has a lot to do in his village since he gives advice to the youth on how they can perform their duties without much supervision.

Through his experience in the colonial government, residents of Majengo village at Kanamai have now elected him as a village elder because of his skills in administration.

"There were plans by the leaders

in Kilifi County to award me with a medal of recognition," he says.

Ngala has been engaging in many political meetings and was shocked that most politicians do not to fulfil their promises after they are elected.

He says politicians in the Coast region have not been united since the colonial government and that is the cause of the land problem in the region.

Ngala, however, has also been advising politicians to come together and address the problems they are facing especially in the region.

Among those to be remembered vividly is the late Mwangeka from Taita/Taveta County who led the community in fighting the Arab slave traders who were capturing slaves for sale in Arabian countries.

Mwangeka and Mama Mkawanyara fought the European colonial masters who wanted to evict people from their ancestral lands and that is why the Taita community still live on the hills to date.

## Freedom fighters want historical injustices addressed

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clean Nairobi of some target communities suspected to be Mau Mau sympathisers.

"They moved from door to door demanding occupants identify themselves, those perceived to be freedom fighters' sympathisers were loaded onto trucks and taken to detention camps or back to their homes," Njoki recalls.

Members of these communities were not allowed to visit Nairobi without a pass, movement was also limited even with the pass.

"When one changed employers, both the former and current

employer had to rubberstamp the pass. Visitors were not allowed to see their relatives without a pass and clearance from the authorities," says Njoki.

The other method used to steal land from those in detention was underestimating the real acreage. Colonial sympathisers took the surplus land, which they still own to date.

Like other freedom fighters, the two survivors say Jomo Kenyatta's government intended to reward the freedom fighters but was frustrated by colonial backers who were employed to serve in his government.

"There were very few educated

freedom fighters to serve in the government. Apart from the late Jaramogi Oginga and Achieng Oneko among a few others, those in Kenyatta's government had served in the colonial government and their children had gone to school, that is why it was easy to frustrate good intentions by Kenyatta's government," says Mzee Maina.

### Injustices

He says unless that historical injustice is addressed, the issue will remain a ticking time bomb waiting to explode.

"We have had tribal clan clashes in the country and all committees and commissions formed to investigate the root cause, pin pointing land as a key factor. We may assume that everything is ok but it is not the case," says Maina. He adds: "No one can be happy when a few people own farms they can only go round using horses and choppers while others have no place of their own where they can even be buried."

According to Maina it does

**"No one can be happy when a few people own farms they can only go round using horses and choppers while others have no place of their own where they can even be buried."**

— Joseph Maina



Josephine Njoki who was one of the detainees during the fight for freedom. She was suspected of being a Mau Mau sympathiser.

Pictures: Waikwa Maina

not make sense when one-person sets aside a hundred acres of land as mausoleum while other Kenyans have nothing. "President Uhuru Kenyatta must address these issues as mandated by the Constitution, the Ndung'u Land Commission report should be implemented, Kenyans are waiting to see how the Land Commission is going to handle the issue," reiterates Maina.



# Freedom fighters hope Uhuru will push for their compensations

By JOSEPH MUKUBWA

Several former freedom fighters from Mathira West in Nyeri County are appealing to President Uhuru Kenyatta to help push for their compensation.

Mathira ex-Mau Mau are optimistic that Uhuru, who is the son of the founding father Jomo Kenyatta will help push for their compensation from the British Government. They note that most of them have been languishing in poverty as they await justice.

The ex-Mau Mau who are peasant farmers lamented that there have been three presidents before and none helped them in getting their compensation. They hope that this time they will be rewarded.

Three of those who spoke from their homes at Hiriga Village in Mathira West of Nyeri County said that many have died while still waiting for that compensation.

Eighty five year old Wachira Gaichira said that he has seen the Government of

retired presidents Jomo Kenyatta, Daniel Moi and Mwai Kibaki and none helped them.

He remembers how he saw his colleagues being killed and maimed in the Mt Kenya forest during the fight for independence while they were fighting the British government armed with pangas.

## Betrayal

"Many people have died while waiting for the land and money which we were promised yet nothing has been forthcoming. We hope President Kenyatta will remember us since he is the son of the founding father," he said.

A father of 11, Gaichira was in the forest for seven years from 1954 before he was arrested and detained in Lodwar and Mageta Island. He was later released in 1958.

Ruth Wanjira, 80 who has bullet wound marks on the back sustained when she was detained at Kamiti Prison in the 1950s says she has nothing to celebrate and is just a peasant farmer.

"We were betrayed by home guards that we were taking food to Mau Maus. I was about 20 years old at that time. Despite denying that we did not know Mau Mau and had never seen them, we were arrested and detained. I was given a life sentence at Kamiti Prison until the Government got independence," remembers Wanjira, a mother of five.

Eighty-four year old James Waboi wonders why those who never fought for independence are the ones enjoying the fruits of independence stashing billions of shillings in local and international banks while they, the freedom fighters, are living in abject poverty.

"We are living miserable lives. We live from hand to mouth while those who never fought for independence are very rich," notes Waboi, who was detained for two years at MacKinnon Road in Nairobi. Today he spends most of the time grazing the few goats in his possession.



From top: Wachira Gaichira with his grand children at Hiriga Village in Mathira West district, Nyeri county. Ruth Wanjira at her Mathira Village shows the bullet marks which she sustained during the colonial era.

Pictures: Joseph Mukubwa



# Community wants former detention camp recognised

By OMONDI GWENGI

When the Government shipped off political detainees to the island, it hoped they would be rehabilitated by making them work hard in a strange land where they were linguistically and culturally isolated.

To the local community, the longhaired, dirty looking prisoners appeared dangerous and the Government outlawed any form of socialisation to avert political contamination.

Mageta Island was chosen in 1953 as the best spot to lock up 2,000 political prisoners who were agitating for freedom.

According to history, the prisoners were always under guard, but the Government on various occasions ferried prisoners from Mageta to Usenge where they were forced into hard labour of constructing roads and schools while some were taken to Sirigombe Island.

Some of the prisoners were forced to dig Usenge-Bondo road while others worked at Usenge and Sanda primary schools.

One of the detainees, Waruru Kanja, used the friendship to explain to the somehow scared locals that the prisoners were not criminals but freedom fighters.

Through this relationship, there emerged barter trade where fishermen brought items such as tobacco and sugar to the detainees in exchange for cash and blankets.

It was at this point that a prison break was hatched. According to Mzee Isaya Onyango a plan was hatched by three fishermen, Asura Ayau, Ogutu Jariyo, Onimbo Haulu and 11 other detainees.

## Deal

"The agreement was that the three fishermen would assist the prisoners to escape from the island after which they would be given cash rewards and some goodies," explains Onyango.

Unfortunately, the deal went sour since Onimbo declined to cooperate with his colleagues. He refused to release his boat for the escape, disappointing his colleagues.

According to Onyango's account of the event, Onimbo's betrayal was communicated to other prisoners who vowed to deal with the situation promptly.

"What followed thereafter was a brutal attack of the defiant Onimbo and his body parts and blood used in a ritual to bind all the conspirators to the crime," explains Onyango.

After hiding in a thicket, the prisoners escaped through a canoe to Usenge under the cover of darkness. However, the authorities launched a hunt that led to the killing of three fugitives.

## Nostalgia

Onyango and other locals remember the chilling fear that hung over Usenge on the fateful day Onimbo was killed.

"Security agents were ransacking everywhere as they pursued the escapees," recalls Onyango.

It was after the prison break that Mageta Island gained prominence in London as Members of Parliament demanded explanation regarding the detainees' living conditions.

On July 24, 1956, Viscount Stangate demanded to know the reason for increased security in the island and whether Mau Mau detainees who had not been convicted of any offence were being subjected to forced labour.

The Secretary of Colonies, Lord Lloyd responded that the special detention camp in Mageta was at the time holding 1995 Mau Mau adherents to maintain public order.

It is more than five decades since the Onimbo tragedy and the bloody confrontations witnessed in Mageta but little has changed. The roles played

by Ayau and Ogutu, who died from unknown causes, have since become distant memories.

The island has a population of about 15,000 during fishing seasons and during fish ban period, the population goes down to 8,000. It has five beaches and has the highest HIV and Aids prevalence as well as child mortality rates in Kenya.

The main economic activities in Mageta Island are fishing and small scale subsistence farming. Fishing, however, accounts for the main source of employment in the island.

However, the community living in the island says that lack of exposure and information is pushing them to practicing the traditional ways of doing things even as the world is changing socially, economically and politically.

"We are not able to practice mod-



A view of Sirigombe Island where some of the detainees were being transferred. Below: Some of the buildings that still stand at the former colonial detention camp in Mageta Island.

Pictures: Omondi Gwengi



ern methods of fishing and farming because the Government has not put in place adequate measures in terms of disseminating information on the same," observes Odembo. He adds: "This has, therefore, isolated us in terms of development."

## Access

Without the rural access roads in the island, the youths say that they were not considered in the *Kazi Kwa Vijana* project. "Youths of Mageta Island have always been neglected when it comes to recruitment and other development activities," notes one youth.

Speaking on behalf of women, Prisca Acholla noted a positive

change in girl-child education unlike in the past when the girls opted for fish for sex instead of going to school.

"I would like to note with confidence that our girls have finally changed and are now thirsty for education. We, therefore, urge the Government to promote girl-child education in this region," Acholla suggests.

Despite being a former colonial detention camp for the Mau Mau fighters, Mageta Island is still struggling for recognition. The community now urges the government to convert it into a tourist attraction zone as it has historical sites that were put up by the colonialists over 50 years ago.

**After hiding in a thicket, the prisoners escaped through a canoe to Usenge under the cover of darkness. However, the authorities launched a hunt that led to the killing of three fugitives.**





# Water project brings change to Nyamasaria

By AJANGA KHAYESI

For the past five years women in Nyamasaria on the outskirts of Kisumu city have enjoyed the services of Nyamasaria Water Works.

This multi-million shillings project has transformed their lives in terms of dignity, status and opportunities.

The women no longer have to fetch water and carry them on pails and or jerri cans as they have the precious and clean liquid supplied by a pipe all the way to their kitchens and bathrooms.

Before then, they were dependent on water-kiosks, trucks and handcart water sellers.

## Benefit

Nyamasaria has a population of 30,000 people and lies in Kisumu East District along Kisumu-Nairobi highway, three kilometres from Kisumu city centre.

According to Marion Adhiambo, one of the beneficiaries, in the past they suffered and were unable to maintain domestic and personal hygiene, resulting in outbreaks of infections like scabies and Typhoid among other water-borne diseases.

"Women can now smile while fetching water from nearby points, unlike in the past when they had to trek in a long distance or harvest rain water," says Adhiambo. She adds: "At times they would just collect the commodity from stagnant pools after the rainy season, or the unclean river Kibos."

According to Jemima Akinyi Nyakano, a businesswoman, tenants renting premises no longer question the availability of water in the area.

The water works project was the brainchild of Anthony Githae, who started tapping water from River Kibos for small-scale irrigation purposes in 2002. Along the way Githae changed his mind from irrigating tomato gardens to venture into water purification business before selling the station to two brothers;

Bernard Odhiambo Odhon'g and Elly Onyando Odhon'g. That was in 2008.

Odhiambo, a clinical health officer, became the director under joint partnership with his younger brother Onyando, a banker in Kisumu town.

## Outcome

As a dependable supplier of clean water the Odhon'g brothers knew that the outcome of the project would improve sanitation and hygiene, and create job opportunities.

Adjacent to the vast fresh water Lake Victoria, residents of Kisumu town get domestic and industrial water supplies from the Kisumu Water Services Company (KIWASCO).

"Residents in areas where piped water is unavailable, use wells, harvest rain water and or collect the precious commodity from swamps or pockets of pools of water," explains Rispah Adongo.

Standing on an acre piece of land which borders river Kibos, the water works management upgraded the storage tanks to meet the high demand of the commodity in the area.

"The tower tanks stores 40,000 litres of water with similar amount being stored underground while retailers, handcarts and trucks are filled direct from the plant," explains Odhiambo.

Household distribution of piped water is done direct through pressure from the tower

**"The tower tanks stores 40,000 litres of water with similar amount being stored underground while retailers, handcarts and trucks are filled direct from the plant."**

— Bernard Odhiambo, Nyamasaria Water Works



**From top: River Kibos that meanders down lake Victoria. The plant manager Joseph Otiemo examines raw water from the river. Pictures: Ajanga Khayesi**

tanks serving four-kilometre radius.

"We have connected a total of 200 households to piped water but we are targeting over 500 households come next year once we install extension storage tanks at Mowlem grounds to increase pressure capacity to serve homes, schools, churches and Rabour market," explains Odhiambo.

According to the plant manager, Joseph Otiemo, a 20-litre container of water sells at two shillings, while a *mkokoteni* (handcart) sells at KSh35 while 10,000 litre lorry costs KSh750.

The water tanker driver Nicholas Lihalwa, says the delivery charges depends on the distance from the source and whether the consumer has storage tanks or the commodity will be used direct from the lorry.

Lihalwa supplies water to industries and processing factories, schools, hospitals, homes, funerals and wedding ceremonies among others.

To ensure the commodity is available to all residents of Nyamasaria, the water company employed four workers, purchased standby power

generators and solar driven battery to run the chlorine dozers.

The purification process for the raw muddy river water comprises pumping, sieving to remove foreign bodies, chlorination and sedimentation.

Before purified water is supplied to consumers, the final laboratory test to confirm if unwanted materials appear and the use of appropriate chlorine is carried out. The plant has achieved certification of Water Resource Management Authority (WRMA) for the extraction of river water.

The water works product has been tested and approved for consumption by the Kenya Bureau of Standards (KEBS) for the specification for drinking water.

## Vision

Kisumu Municipal Council public health inspection team vetted and licensed the plant to serve the community.

Some of the raw river water is used in the horticulture project, alongside poultry farming, fishing ponds and planting indigenous trees.

Odhiambo says the plant has invested in the running of Wema Health Centre in Nyamasaria. The Government's Vision 2030 acknowledges the fact that Kenya is a water scarce country.

Looking at the Kenya National Water Sector Strategy 2007-2015, the country aims to improve access to safe water and sanitation with the goal of attaining 75 per cent in urban areas and 70 per cent in rural areas.

Since majority of residents of Nyamasaria live below the poverty line, the Nyamasaria water Works has been fully welcomed by the residents who see it as their saviour.





# School of husbands saving women's lives

...as more and more men get involved in reproductive health improving maternal health and reducing maternal mortality

By JOYCE CHIMBI

At the *Association Nigerienne pour le Bien Etre Familial* (ANBEF) — Association of Family Planning — clinics in both Niamey and Tillaberi, Niger, long queues of women and children are seen snaking in and out of the facilities. Save for one man who had accompanied his wife and child, all the other women are by themselves.

This is nonetheless not an isolated incident. In many African countries, pregnant women attend regular clinics, a child birth and post natal clinic, unaccompanied by men.

"We reach out to those living in rural areas and the marginalized. We have two static clinics in Niamey and Tillaberi," says Dr Sani Zagul, executive director ANBEF. He adds: "We also have a community based distribution which enables us to reach as many people as we can with information and services that has significantly improved maternal and child health in Niger."

"We are encouraging men to accompany their wives to the prenatal and antenatal clinics. It is important because often men make decisions regarding how many children the wife should bear without taking into account her health and factors that may compromise it, or take her life away due to various complications," Zagul explains.

Male involvement in reproductive health has not been embraced significantly in most parts of Africa.

In Niamey, ANBEF has extended male involvement to health care provision. "We now have a male doctor attached to the clinic. This is important because it sends a message that facilities that offer health care for pregnant women and children are not simply a women affair," says Hachimou Zara, director of programs at ANBEF.

## Culture

Culture and traditions, particularly the patriarchal nature of most African societies has relegated reproductive health to be a women issue.

"We educate the community on family planning, particularly the issue of deciding the number of children to have and spacing," says Abdoulaye Aminatou, a nurse and Coordinator, Tillaberi ANBEF clinic. "It's also about encouraging the people to have the number of children that they can feed and educate."

For this reason, Niger is embracing the 'school of husbands' where men are educated on reproductive health.

"Improving maternal health will take the concerted effort of all. Men particularly must work with women to ensure that the health of the woman is also taken into account when decisions about how many children they should have are taken," says Ali Yacouba, Regional Head of Reproductive Health Division, Tillaberi.

It is unlikely that many countries in Africa will meet the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 5 that seeks to improve maternal health and reduce maternal mortality by at least three quarters, or 75 percent.

In Kenya, as replicated across Africa, saving women's lives during child birth has remained a humongous challenge.

According to the most recent Kenya Health and Demographic Survey, the most comprehensive survey regarding the health and population status in the country, for every 100,000 live births, an estimated 488 women die.

"This has prompted the Government to embrace certain measures, not only to save women's lives, but also to save them from the health consequences of serious complications that may arise, including disability," says Ann Nderi, a nurse in Kenya.

The Jubilee government has issued directives



that women who give birth in public hospitals should do so free of charge.

Countries such as Ghana and Mozambique have been hailed for their concerted efforts to reduce maternal deaths. Ghana has even gone a step further by establishing 'safe houses' where pregnant women who are due to deliver move in so they can be monitored by a skilled health attendant, be it a nurse or mid-wife. It is from such examples that countries which had been blacklisted for showing little progress towards reducing maternal health are now slowly emerging with impressive results.

Niger has long been understood as the riskiest place for a woman to give birth by various safe motherhood reports.

However, it is emerging that, over the years, Niger has continued to invest in reproductive because every life counts.

Government agencies have created a conducive environment for various stakeholders to get involved, and to partner towards reducing maternal and child mortality.

"In fact, Niger will certainly meet MDG 4: To reduce child mortality by at least two thirds," says Zagul.

"While we may not be able to reduce maternal mortality by three quarters within the MDGs lifespan, we have made significant steps," he adds.

Maternal mortality has moved down from 648 per every 100,000 live births in 2006 to 554 in 2012.

"It is important that we set the record straight, Niger is no longer amongst the countries with the highest maternal deaths in the world, we have not lagged behind other African countries in a manner that is significantly alarming," Zagul emphasizes.

## Inception

Nonetheless, he is quick to acknowledge that every life counts.

"Just like other African countries, we acknowledge that no woman should die while giving birth and we have come up with strategies to ensure that maternal deaths are drastically reduced," Zagul notes.

At the inception of the MDGs in 2001, Mozambique had one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world. An estimated 1,000 women would die for every 100,000 live births.

However, during the lifespan of the MDGs, maternal mortality rate reduced gradually from 1,000 deaths per 100,000 live births in the 1990s



**A family in Niger. The country is now repositioning family planning and child spacing by having men working in clinics that offer contraceptives and also having men accompany their wives to the clinics. Below: Men and mothers in an open air reproductive health meeting.** Pictures: Souleymane Ouattara and Courtesy IPPF

to 500 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2007.

The country has been working on reducing maternal deaths to 250 deaths per every 100,000 live births by 2015.

Although that has not been possible, the National Assessment of the Maternal and Neonatal Health Needs in Mozambique (2007-2008) show a maternal mortality rate of 473 in every 100,000 live births.

Mozambique and Kenya are at par in as far as maternal mortality rates.

Ghana is perhaps Africa's best example and testament to the fact that Africa can improve maternal health.

According to the Ministry of Health in Ghana, maternal mortality has declined by 44 percent since 1990. Currently, for every 100,000 live births, 350 women will die.

Regardless of the significant progress that Ghana has made, since every life counts, a maternal mortality rate of 350 still remains high because this means that nearly 2,600 women die in childbirth annually.

"It is in order to save every life that Niger has embarked on an ambitious plan where the country is working on increasing contraceptive prevalence from the current 12 percent to 25 percent by 2015," Yacouba says.

In 2006, Niger posted a five percent contra-

ceptive prevalence which has now risen to 12 percent according to the country's national statistics.

However, Niger will need to do more than raise the contraceptive prevalence.

"We are working on ensuring that more people have access to health facilities and services. Currently, only about 47 percent of the population can access health facilities and these facilities are within a 15 kilometre radius," Zagul explains.

Further, issues such as early marriages, high rate of school drop out by the girl child may also compromise maternal health.

While the rate of Female Genital Mutilation remains low at two percent, as does HIV and Aids prevalence at about 0.7 percent, "Niger will keep working towards zero tolerance to FGM as well as reducing HIV and Aids prevalence to zero percent," Yacouba explains.

Across Africa, countries are devising strategies to improve maternal health and also, to reduce child mortality.

"When a mother dies, the children who have been left behind are affected in many ways. Their health, education and nutrition are in most cases affected adversely. Africa must save the life of every mother and child. No woman should die giving birth," Nderi emphasizes.



# Vaccine only solution to malaria during pregnancy

By CAROLYNE OYUGI

Five years ago Jechoniah Onyango was a very happy man. He had just married and his wife was expecting their first child. However, things started changing when her wife was diagnosed with malaria. She was in and out of hospital and did not get proper treatment because of financial constraints.

They hoped that things would change until on her sixth month of pregnancy when her water broke at 3am. "I was shocked and even got confused because I did not expect her to go into labour this early," recalls Onyango. He adds: "I knew we had three more months to wait. The bed was wet so I asked her why she had urinated on the bed."

They rushed to the hospital and she gave birth to a baby boy. The baby was underweight and did not cry. "I did not know much about babies but I knew that something was wrong with the baby," says Onyango.

He, therefore, went to work as usual and came back to the hospital at 7pm. By then, the baby still had not cried and his wife told him that the doctor had dipped the baby in cold water to stimulate him to cry.

"At 9pm the boy finally cried, I was happy that at least he had shown signs of normalcy but the sound he produced got me worried."

Nicholas Otieno is now five years and four months old but behaves like an infant. He cannot do things that his age mates are doing. He cannot sit on his own and just lies on his back. His neck cannot hold his head; he cannot speak or even chew although he has fully developed teeth.

## Treatment

Onyango realised that his son was different from other children at two years old. "When I discussed it with my wife she consoled me that since this is our first child we should be patient and hope that things will go well."

He took his son to so many hospitals for treatment but the situation did not change until one day when a nurse at Kenyatta National Hospital told him that the son had a spinal cord problem which was later confirmed by a doctor at the same hospital.

Since his wife gave birth to another baby, Onyango has now taken full responsibility of taking care of Nicholas who is also paralysed on his right side.

"I carry him everywhere and I have to feed him on liquids only while he is lying on his back, I also have to change his diapers like an infant," Onyango says adding that this has resulted to both financial and physical constraints because he is a casual labourer.

Since Onyango's wife cannot take care of their baby and Nicholas at the same time, he is forced to leave him at a day care for disabled children.

Onyango partly blames the doctor who attended to his wife for



**"Malaria in pregnancy can also cause preterm labour, miscarriage or abortion and in this case it caused preterm labour."**

— Dr Lucas Otieno, KEMRI

dipping their son in water. He strongly believes that as much as the baby was born prematurely, the shock that the baby suffered could have contributed to the spinal cord complications.

Unfortunately he is not able to trace the doctor and it is suspected that he is out of the country.

However, Dr Lucas Otieno, principal investigator and an official of Kenya Medical Research Institute (KEMRI) confirms that dipping the baby in water, which is not supported medically, could be a cause of the child's poor state.

According to Otieno, every case is unique and malaria could have contributed largely to Nicholas' condition.

He cites sequestration where malaria hides in the placenta hence interfering with the passage of nutrients from mother to child. It also interferes with the passage of oxygen hence leading to retarded growth.

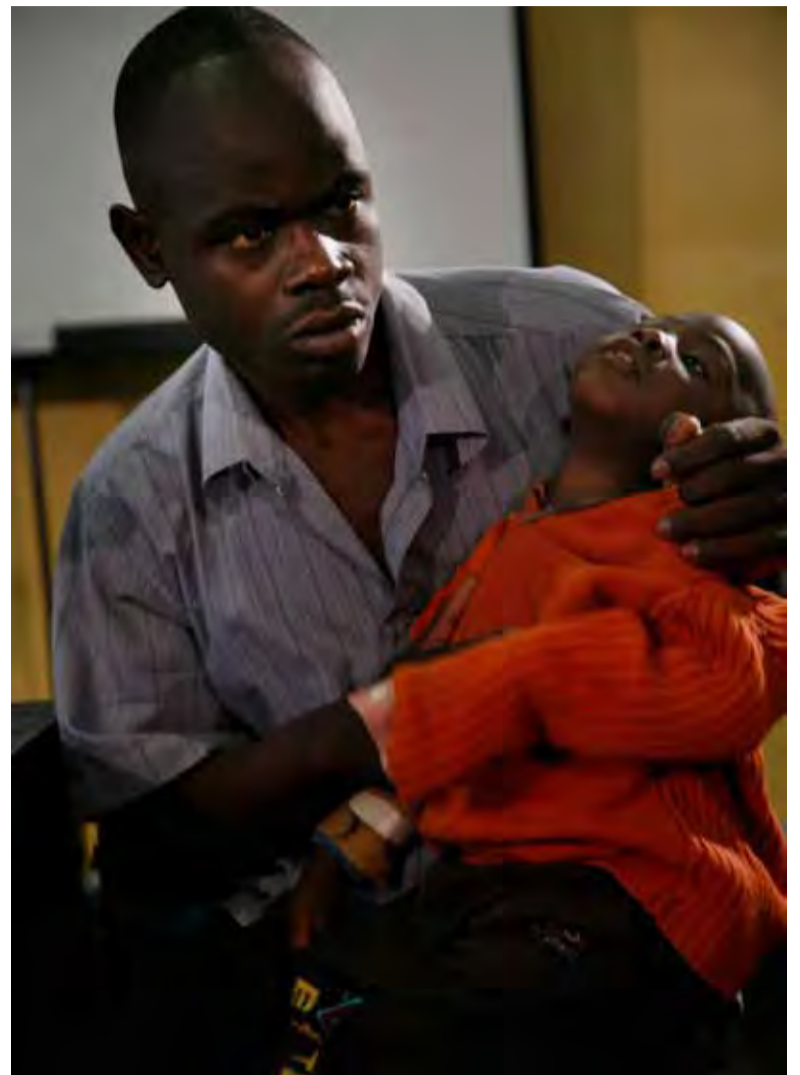
"Malaria in pregnancy can also cause preterm labour, miscarriage or abortion and in this case it caused preterm labour," explains Otieno.

## Complication

The doctor explains that once the baby is born, he is also likely to have delayed milestones in stages like walking, talking or even smiling.

Nicholas is just one of the many children who have had a complicated life due to malaria during pregnancy. According to World Health Organisation, malaria is killing millions of people worldwide. Africa, however, is one of the continents that bear the biggest brunt with approximately one child dying every minute.

Throughout the world, 90 per cent of all malaria deaths occur in pregnant women and children under



**Jechoniah Onyango and his son. Onyango has take full responsibility of taking care of his son who is paralysed on his right side.**

Pictures: Courtesy Internews Kenya

the age of five and in Kenya it contributes to 20 per cent of the deaths.

According to World Health Organisation, Malaria mortality rate in Africa has dropped by a third since 2000. Another positive report is that malaria vaccine is now within sight and if all goes well it will be out by 2025.

This year as the world celebrated the World Malaria Day, hopes were pegged on this vaccine that offers 50 per cent reduction of these figures. This will also save thousands of lives and reduce the cost of patient care, especially in sub-Saharan Africa where over 80 per cent of malaria cases and 90 per cent of malaria deaths occur.

# Malaria online mapping technology started

By DUNCAN MBOYAH

The first online mapping tool to track insecticide resistance in mosquitoes that cause malaria has been launched.

The interactive website, called IR Mapper identifies locations in more than 50 malaria-endemic countries where mosquitoes have developed resistance to the insecticides used in bed nets and indoor residual sprays.

"With the most comprehensive and up-to-date information, the IR Mapper helps direct which vector control tools should be deployed in areas of high resistance," said Dr Nabie Bayoh, an entomologist at the Kenya Medical Research Institute (KEMRI) in an exclusive interview with the Reject in Nairobi.

He revealed that IR Mapper incorporates the just-released World Health Organization (WHO) revised criteria for reporting insecticide resistance which is designed to detect it earlier.

Malaria is a deadly disease transmitted to people through infected mosquitoes and has the capacity to kill a child every 60 seconds yet it is preventable and curable.

In the recent past, governments and partners have made progress against the disease through provision of insecticide-treated bed nets and Indoor Residual Spraying (IRS) in malaria prone regions.

However, the rapid spread of resistance in malaria-carrying mosquitoes to insecticides used

in bed nets and sprays threatens current malaria control efforts.

Resistance among Anopheles malaria vectors has been reported in 64 countries, with parts of Sub-Saharan Africa and India reported to be affected.

"Deployment of the most appropriate insecticide based vector control interventions including nets and IRS needs to be informed by up-to-date data on insecticide resistance in the malaria vector species," Bayoh said.

## Delay

He noted that until now, data has been scattered throughout different databases and has come from a variety of sources hence delaying prompt decision process.

"It is the IR Mapper that has now helped to address this since it helps saves time in decision making," Bayoh added. IR Mapper consolidates published data on insecticide susceptibility and resistance mechanisms from 1959 to 2012.

It includes reports from the President's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief (PEPFAR) that also in-

cludes a malaria initiative, National Malaria Control Programmes and other reputable institutes.

Bayoh explained that resistance is usually measured by putting mosquitoes in a tube lined with insecticide-treated paper. Mosquitoes land on the paper and absorb the insecticide — some may die and others may survive.

Until recently, resistance was confirmed by survival of more than 20 per cent in this test. The new guidelines from WHO reduced this threshold value to 10 per cent, meaning that resistance will be reported earlier.

"This change is an indication of the concern insecticide resistance is causing globally," he noted.

IR Mapper data aligned with the new WHO thresholds is presented in a user-friendly format on interactive maps.

The mapping function allows filtering and projection of data based on a set of user-directed criteria. For instance, users can examine the resistance status of single or multiple Anopheles species to one or more insecticides within their region of interest.

This can be the basis for a "go" or "no go" de-

cision on a particular insecticide for deployment on nets or in sprays.

Data can also be viewed for specified time periods, to identify any existing trends in resistance over time.

Data consolidation for IR Mapper was conducted by Vestergaard Frandsen and KEMRI/CDC. The map interface was developed by ESRI Eastern Africa and is powered by JavaScript.

## Control

Malaria control is not just a health issue, it is an overall development issue as the disease is a driver of poverty.

It is a debilitating disease that affects millions of Kenyans each year and is unfortunately fatal to many thousands.

Malaria is responsible for 30 per cent of outpatient consultations, 19 per cent of hospital admissions and three to five per cent of inpatient deaths. About 70 per cent of Kenya's population live in malaria prone areas. Children and pregnant women bear the brunt of the disease.

Through the National Malaria Strategy covering the period 2009–2017, Kenya has put in place measures that cover all the four malaria epidemiological zones based on transmission: endemic, highland epidemic prone, arid seasonal and low risk.

The strategy aims at scaling up and consolidating malaria control interventions by strengthening of surveillance, monitoring and evaluation.

**"With the most comprehensive and up-to-date information, the IR Mapper helps direct which vector control tools should be deployed in areas of high resistance."**

— Dr Nabie Bayoh, KEMRI



# Blind 82 year old man says life is not a bed of roses

By **OMONDI GWENGI**

For 82 years, Barkias Ojwang has literally seen the best and worst of life.

During that period, Ojwang married four times and was left with one child as three of his wives died while the other eloped with another man.

Indeed, the octogenarian's story is a mixture of joy and frustrations but he has not given up eking a living as a locksmith, herbalist and musician.

At a tender age while in primary school in 1949, Ojwang fell sick and lost his sight. His parents went all over the country to seek treatment for him, but it was all in vain.

They later took him to Thika School for the Blind where he was admitted for a year and taught life skills as well as basic education before he returned home in Uisgu, Bondo County.

Fast forward to last month, the Reject found him begging in the dusty streets of Bondo town.

Even, though he begs to get sustenance, Ojwang also has another life. He also ekes a living as a key-repairer.

## Discover

This talent was discovered when the then Nyamonye Catholic priest lost the key to his doors. The priest went looking for somebody who could remove the lock and repair it.

The regular repairer was nowhere to be found so someone suggested that they call Ojwang. When he was finally brought, the unbelievable happened.

Using a wire, which he inserted inside the lock, Ojwang removed a spring inside the lock and returned it back-

something that surprised the priest and many other people who doubted whether he could succeed.

It was after that encounter with the priest that they became great friends and he thereafter did several jobs for him.

"At first, the priest doubted whether I could perform a task that had defeated somebody with eye sight, but after that incident, he paid me KSh500 and we become good friends thereafter," says Ojwang with pride written all over his wrinkled face.

## Transform

Born in Mageta Island, Bondo District in Siaya County, Ojwang went to Akoko Primary School before proceeding to Usenge Primary School where a single incident dramatically transformed his life forever.

While he was supposed to proceed to class six at Usenge Primary, he developed a headache that was followed by prolonged nose bleeding.

It was after the nose bleeding that he lost his sight and was taken to Mase-no and Kisumu hospitals for treatment.

"Having seen my parents walking from hospital to hospital to have me treated, I pitied them and also lost hope of ever seeing again. I, therefore, told them to take me back home and that marked the beginning of a new chapter in my life," he recalls with bitterness.

Ojwang says he has managed to survive by repairing padlocks and cutting keys. He says that he started with their own padlocks, something that attracted villagers and it was from this that his

business starting to boom.

"I had some of the tools and therefore started repairing padlocks and cutting keys," he explains adding "I charged KSh25 for every key duplicated".

Asked how he is able to do this kind of work despite being blind, Ojwang says that for what he saw when he had not lost his sight, he is able to repair the locks.

"I use my hands to feel the shape of the key and also the padlocks," he explains.

However, Ojwang's trade was cut short when some people took advantage of his disability to make keys that they later on used for criminal activities.

"Some people took advantage of my state and therefore brought keys that they duplicated and later on used in opening other people's doors. This annoyed me and other people advised me to leave the trade as it would land me into problems," he says.

## Resort

As the trade tumbled, Ojwang resorted to farming and using herbs to cure snake-bite victims.

"Even though I do not have my eyesight, God has given me hands which I can still use to do some work and earn a living," he says.

As he was growing up, he would be occasionally sent by his grandfather to gather some herbal plants in the bush



**Mzee Barkias Ojwang at his home in Pala Village, Siaya County. Below: Ojwang being guided by his grandson.**

Pictures: Omondi Gwengi

which they then used to treat various ailments. One herb that he remembers being frequently sent to gather was that of treating snake bites.

"Since I started treating snake bites and since then I have never experienced any complication," he says.

As a young boy, Ojwang trained on how to play a guitar and says that he is also able to compose a song. As the interview comes to an end, he stands and sings a song... "I will never never let you down my dear..."

He however says that his dream of becoming a musician was interrupted by his parents who believed that music was not a profession.

"My parents believed that by involving myself in music, my studies would be interrupted and therefore told me to forget about the idea," he says.



When *Reject* visited his home in Pala Village, the place seemed deserted with only sounds of birds chirping on the trees. He was the only one on the compound.

# Displaced group in Nakuru scales up their standard of living

By **JOHN MAINA**

A group of 60 disabled people are making money in the best way they can in Nakuru town.

The members of the Wachache Disabled Group, who have different physical challenges, meet weekly at the Free Area trading centre every Friday to come up with business ideas.

One such project which has proved to be successful is the making and selling of detergents from cheap chemicals. They members started making soap 13 years ago and have never looked back.

They hold regular meetings where they contribute towards a kitty aimed at buying ingredients for making the detergents.

"We made it a habit to contribute KSh50 every time we meet and later use the money to buy ingredients for making the detergents," explains George Otieno, the group's coordinator.

When *Reject* attended one of the group's meetings recently, they were celebrating a new venture. They had boosted their savings and decided to buy 50 plastic chairs, a carwash machine and a tent capable of sheltering 100 seats.

According to Otieno, they have already applied for a site for the car wash service in Free-area trading centre from the Nakuru County Council and are optimistic that they will soon be issued with a permit.

Otieno noted that they plan to use the tent and plastic chairs for their meetings but will also hire them out to the public for social activities like weddings and funerals that are common in the area.

"We look forward to more booming business plus increased activities as we will be forced to make more detergents to cater for the customers and also for car washing services because we intend to be using everything that we make,

rather than increasing expenses by buying materials from outside," said Samwel Mwangi, the group's chairman.

The spirit of table-banking still burns strongly among them and they have maintained the KSh50 contribution. Although they have spent some of this as capital for purchasing raw materials and the equipment they have acquired, some amount is set aside for emergency.

Mwangi explained that emergency to them includes giving their members an interest-free loan to start personal small businesses when need arises.

"A number of our members have grocery businesses among others small trades," noted Mwangi. He added: "We are so proud that none of our member spreads a mat along town lanes and streets to beg for alms."

Mary Wanjiku is the trustee of the group's cash and says that the biggest challenge the group faces is market for the detergents.

"Though we are happy that unlike other disabled persons we earn a living through the group's commitment, perseverance and hard work, we are faced with a big challenge of a market for our products," Wanjiku said.

## Market

In a month, the group makes about 140 litres of the detergent which can be used in both washing and cleaning for domestic and commercial premises.

Wanjiku noted that poor marketing has forced them to sell the detergents to members and this has reduced the profits because they cannot sell at the same price that they so to outsiders.

The group is now calling on all the disabled persons to read from the Wachache Group's script and emulate them instead of resorting to begging



**Members of the Wachache group in the process of making the detergent. The group makes 140 litres of the detergent every month.** Picture: John Maina

for alms to survive.

"All disabled persons should learn to live without depending on freebies, it is only a matter of making a decision of dropping the habit of begging and starting to earn a living through doing what they are gifted with," said Otieno.

## Decision

The group is among the few teams of disabled persons who have joined hands to enable them earn a living without begging from people perceived to be physically enabled.

The members have decided to make their

common problems a common wealth and they say that, making and selling detergents, purchasing and hiring a tent and plastic seats and offering the car-washing services is not the end of their plans.

Though they refused to disclose their future plans, they look forward to a very bright future where by even the physically able persons will be forced to copy their way of doing things.

"Our creativity, courage to step out of the cocoon of disability and confidence to try new things will turn to be the talk of the country in a very near future," vowed Mwangi.



# Age is just but a number...

## .....as the youngest Nyeri county assembly ward representative takes office

By JOSEPH MUKUBWA

Age is just a number for the 23-year old Nyeri County assembly representative Duncan Gituanja Kiara.

He had just finished his university education and immediately went to his home village of Kabaru to woo voters in his favour. His mission was to improve Kabaru ward in Kieni Constituency.

Gituanja mostly wanted to be elected in order to ensure the roads infrastructure is improved as most of the food crops like cabbages, carrots and potatoes among others rot in the farms due to poor roads which hinder their being transported to the market.

He also wanted to fight for the rights of the youth and women in the area since the Youth Enterprise Fund and Women Enterprise Fund had not benefited the locals.

He notes that unemployment had led to many young people idling in the area due to lack of funds to start income generating projects.

Gituanja thought that the position would enable him to revive the two abandoned polytechnics in the area so that the youth could benefit with knowledge and skills. Together with this he also promises to push for power supply in the area.

### Competition

Not many would believe the second born in a family of four would make it since he had no resources and was the youngest amongst the six contenders and also unmarried.

Dan as he is mostly known by his friends is the youngest elected ward representative in the 30 wards that make up the Nyeri County assembly.

He sits together in the assembly with the others who are as old as 65 years. However, for Gituanja age is just but a number.

Despite bad campaigns from his rivals that he is young and single, Gituanja still went ahead won the seat amid tight competition. For him, leadership knocked at his door from as far back as to when he was still in primary school.

"I developed the urge for leadership from the time I was in Warazo Jet Primary School where I was the prefect for several classes. I later joined Nyeri High School where I was also a prefect," recalls Gituanja. He adds: "Later, I joined Kenya Polytechnic which is today known as the Technical University of Kenya where I was the chairman of the students' association."

### Resources

Immediately, he finished university in May 2012 and graduated in August after attaining the Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration, Gituanja went home. He shared with his parents of his intention to vie for the seat but they were very reluctant.

"I convinced myself that if I was elected chairman of university students' association where there was discrimination due to tribes, then I could make it here. Age and marital status was not an issue," he remembers.

However, due to lack of resources as he was looking for his first job, Gituanja took three months mobilizing resources. It was until August last year



**Duncan Gituanja who is the Kabaru county assembly representative feeding chicken at home. Below: Gituanja tilling his mother's farm in Kieni constituency, Nyeri County.**

Pictures: Joseph Mukubwa

which was just six months to the elections that he kicked off his campaigns.

"While we were campaigning, the voters were asking for bribes but I told them I had no money as I was just fresh from the university. I urged them to give me a chance and I will be their servant. My opponents maligned my name but I respected them since they are older than me," he says.

He was still staying at his father's home at the rural Ngukura Village, Kieni West District which was his campaign base.

His mother offered him the support he needed most, prayers.

"I and my husband Joseph Kiara thought it was a joke at first since he is not known by many people. We also wondered where he would get the resources for the campaigns. Finally, we agreed but we started to pray for him," says Kiara's mother Ann Wambui.

Wambui says that her son would walk from door to door despite the area being very large as it covers areas like Warazo jet, Munyu, Mbiriri and Milimani.



Later, the family started hearing positive issues about him that he was a very good orator.

"We would not believe that we were the winners when the results were announced since our family has no political background. It was hard to accept that he had won. It was a battle similar to the biblical fight of David and Goliath," says Wambui.

Unlike his political rivals who had vehicles, Gituanja sometimes used bicycles and motorbikes and would only stop the campaigns when it rained.

"However, God was on my side that I was later nominated on a TNA party ticket when the nominations were conducted on January 18," he says.

"From that time, I got more cash and resources from well wishers which

made my work simpler."

On March 4 he was elected him on a TNA party ticket this year, beating his six opponents who were all experienced in politics.

A neighbour Njoroge Irungu who mostly supported him during the campaigns says that the ward representative will work harder than the old councillors since he has promised to focus more on improving the welfare of all the 22,000 people in the region.

"I believe he can, he is a devoted and determined leader who is ready to work for his people especially now that he has been sworn in. He will deliver all the pledges he made before elections," says Irungu, who is a local farmer.

Kiara has also promised to marry before his five year term is over so that he can be able to fit in family matters.

In his parting shot, Gituanja urges colleagues and the youth to refrain from alcohol and drugs abuse.



***"While we were campaigning, the voters were asking for bribes but I told them I had no money as I was just fresh from the university. I urged them to give me a chance and I will be their servant. My opponents maligned my name but I respected them since they are older than me."***

— Duncan Gituanja Kiara



# Counties may soon benefit from disease free cattle

By **DUNCAN MBOYAH**

It wastes and kills cattle, commonly the most important asset of poor households in Africa.

It also affects and kills human beings through sleeping sickness, which afflicts tens of thousands of people every year, killing and putting tens of millions more people at risk.

Trypanosomiasis is arguably Africa's most lethal livestock disease and has remained a constant threat to poor livestock farmers.

Fortunately, following a comprehensive fight by the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), the farmers' problems may soon come to an end. This will especially be beneficial to counties in Kenya that are dependent on livestock keeping.

A team of researchers at the institute are in the very early stages of a project to develop disease-resistant cattle, which could save the lives of both livestock and people.

"This work has potential to dramatically reduce poverty across Africa, as healthy cattle fundamentally transform lives for poor families," said Dr Jimmy Smith, ILRI's Director General.

He noted that the scientists and their partners have taken a preliminary step in the process, which has so far led to successful cloning of a male calf from one of East Africa's most important cattle breeds, the Boran.

"The calf is healthy and is being raised at ILRI's research facilities in Nairobi," explained Smith.

## Breeding

He said scientists are currently working on a next step to develop a new Boran clone modified with a gene that naturally confers resistance to the disease.

The process involves using a synthetic copy of a gene sequence originally identified in baboons that should protect cattle against this devastating disease.

"We are finally planning to use these disease-resistant cattle in breeding schemes that will provide African countries with another option in their fight against trypanosomiasis," Smith noted.

He observed that the research potentially offers a reliable, self-sustaining and cost-effective



Some of the dairy animals that farmers in Makima, Mbeere South District are rearing. Scientists are currently working to develop a new Boran clone modified with a gene that naturally confers resistance to the disease. Picture: Kariuki Mwangi

way of protecting tens of millions of African cattle against disease and untimely death, as well as dramatically reducing poverty across the continent.

Smith noted that by reducing the reservoir of pathogens, the research is also capable of saving thousands of human lives that are lost each year.

## Resistance

It could take up to two decades to develop disease resistant cattle herds for Africa. ILRI and its partners are also continuing to pursue

other options for fighting trypanosomiasis such as rationale drug treatment and integrated disease control methods.

Given that public safety and animal welfare are paramount, ILRI is working with all the relevant Kenyan and international regulatory authorities to ensure that the highest bio-safety standards are followed strictly.

ILRI is working with a team that includes scientists from New York University, along with experts from the Roslin Institute in Scotland, and Michigan State University in the United

States.

The fundamental research aspects of this project are being funded by the US National Science Foundation.

ILRI's mission is to use the best and safest livestock science available to confront poverty, hunger and disease in the developing world, where livestock provide livelihoods for hundreds of millions of people.

The priority today is to help poor livestock keepers in Africa deal with the constant threat of trypanosomiasis.

## Government urged to put more focus on issues affecting mentally ill persons

By **DAVID NJAAGA**

Following media reports on the recent patient's escape incidence from Mathari Hospital on the basis of medical ineffectiveness, the International Institute for Legislative Affairs (ILA) is defending the patients' rights, blaming the Government for being averse in addressing problems bedeviling the overall management of the institution in as far as ministering patients is concerned.

"We are urging the Government to move with speed and institute mechanisms that will facilitate community mental health initiatives and programmes to address the issue of person's security," said Vincent Kimosop, Executive Director International Institute for Legislative Affairs.

He says mechanisms are important as these will ensure that mental health is mainstreamed and also accorded the indispensable interest and focus.

In view of the fact that the hospital is the largest psychiatric facility in the country, Kimosop urges the Government through the Ministry of Health, spearheaded by Cabinet secretary James Wanaina Macharia

to intensely look into the issue of achieving free health care for all.

This should be done regardless of race or background, as well as the number of facilities at the community level, and guarantee every family access to fully equipped healthcare within five miles from their home.

"Funding for health and more particularly mental health has been negligible over the years. It is, therefore, critical that adequate funds be set aside for mental health to enhance human resource, medication, intervention programmes and research," reiterated Kimosop.

## Endorsement

Basing his arguments from the Mental Health Bill, and the Draft Policy published on the Kenya Gazette as a Supplement Number 115 on 21 September 2012, Kimosop calls for the endorsement and inclusion of mental health and well-being of all, protection and safe guarding of persons with mental illness, as well as plummeting the brunt of stigma that is believed to be one of the causes of the mental illness.

Once agreed upon by the National Assembly, the Bill will guarantee the highest within reach

standards of health amid persons with psychological disability. It will provide parity before the law and non-discrimination particularly when the Government raises the budgetary allotment from the present 0.01 per cent to a higher figure.

County governments have also been urged establish mechanisms to uphold health and also apportion needed financing and human resource to further competence and smooth running of the county mental hospitals.

Kimosop says mental illness causes, including genetics; infections, brain injury and substance abuse are dominated by stigma that is said to be the main cause.

Other psychological factors include severe psychological trauma that is as a result of physical or sexual abuse, neglect, poor ability to relate with other people, or loss in life.

Mental illness in the country has been out-of-the-way with the majority poor being locked out for lack of funds, with a network of health volunteers giving out important linkage to different health centres and households by providing, sustaining and spearheading the work of awareness creation in the society.

## Kitui residents asked to promote dialogue and not conflict

By **BONIFACE MULU**

Kitui County's success will depend on how the leaders work closely with the residents on development issues.

According to Brian Mutie, Capacity Building and Advocacy Officer at Olive Leaf Foundation Kenya, the County has a lot of mineral resources that are yet to be exploited and the residents need to get together and discuss this.

"Dialogue is key to maximising natural resources to benefit the Kitui County community," Mutie noted adding that there is need for stakeholder consultative forums in the Kitui County's Mui Coal Basin and Mutomo region that contain plenty of minerals. This will enable the residents find a lasting solution to the protracted antagonisms between the various warring factions in the county.

Mutie was speaking during a forum on natural resource management on issues pertaining to limestone and coal mining in the area organised by the Olive Leaf Foundation Kenya at the Kitui Multi-purpose Development Training Institute.

Mutie said that a series of consultative forums and arbitration will be held to address the differences between the residents, claimants and the authorities.

In his speech, the Association of Professional Societies of East Africa (APSEA),

Dr Daniel Ichang'i, said that natural resources in the country belong to the people of Kenya.

"The minerals are for our people. They are not for individuals. The mining linkages are the ones that will help us as the people in Kitui County," Ichang'i said.

He observed that if the minerals in Kitui County are managed well they will benefit the local community. He cited Australia, which has been developed through mining.

Addressing the same forum, Dr Charles Gichaba, Secretary Geological Society of Kenya, they will arrange to promote discussions at seminars to create awareness and empower the locals.

"The society shall endeavour to promote the welfare of its members," Gichaba said. He added: "We have now intensified the technology to discover more minerals in Kenya. The minerals are there. We have discovered minerals for the benefit of the Kenyan citizens."

According to Nathans Browne, a consultant APSEA who spoke about the natural resource management and mining bill in relation to the Kitui County, the current Mining Act in Kenya was enacted in the 1940s and the Petroleum Act is that of 1948. He noted that these were too old and needed to be changed to meet the present day demands.



# Kenya joins global fight against neglected tropical diseases

By DAVID NJAGI

Had a community health worker not found him at Olenarau village, 65-year-old Tonke Nalakiti would still be blaming his failing sight on old age.

However, Lester Moitai, a health worker trained to identify patients infected with trachoma, succeeded in convincing Nalakiti that his condition could be corrected through simple surgery and a prescription of antibiotics.

After a swab of iodine, and a jab of anaesthesia to ease the pain of incision, the elder from the remote village south of Nairobi had the infection surgically corrected in less than 15 minutes.

National surveys indicate that Nalakiti is among some 3.4 per cent of patients in Kajiado County whose trachoma has reached the blinding stage, making it a serious public health problem in the region and many other similarly remote areas with little access to health care and screening.

The bacterial infection is spread by direct contact with eye, nose and throat secretions from others who are infected. Blinding trachoma is the most severe form of the disease and occurs in impoverished areas with poor access to clean water and adequate hygiene.

"Trachoma is a chronic eye infection that develops when one is below nine years," says John Soine, an ophthalmologist at Olenarau Dispensary where Nalakiti currently goes for treatment. "The infection gets worse with age and by the time the eyelashes turn inwards blindness starts to set in."

Officials with the African Medical and Research Foundation (AMREF) estimate that of every 100 people screened for trachoma in Kajiado alone, 17 will have active stage symptoms such as redness and irritation of the eyes. People aged 40 years and above are the most affected.

## The trachoma belt

The high prevalence may continue to look like a generational problem to hundreds of others like Nalakiti who the community health workers are yet to reach.

However, to the Washington DC based Global Network on Neglected Tropical Diseases, the extent of trachoma infection in this part of Kenya with poor clean water access and sanitation is no anomaly.

The advocacy body, whose brief includes raising awareness on neglected tropical diseases as well as pooling funds to finance efforts for their eventual elimination, estimates that more than 1.4 billion people in the world are affected. Most of these people live on less than a dollar a day.

According to the Trachoma Atlas — a collaboration between the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, the International

Trachoma Initiative at the Task Force for Global Health, and the Carter Center, both in the United States — the greatest burden of trachoma is found in sub-Saharan Africa.

It is particularly prevalent in Senegal, southern Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, southern Algeria, Niger, northern Nigeria, Chad, Sudan and South Sudan, northern Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Kenya is also hard hit. A 2006 study by the East African Medical Journal identifies Kajiado, Samburu, Narok, West Pokot, Baringo and Meru North, as some of the more prominent Kenyan regions of Africa's trachoma belt.

In the last decade, 16 sub-Saharan African countries have conducted surveys providing clinical data that indicate large endemic regions of trachoma within their borders.

However, a paper published in June 2012 by the Public Library of Sciences (PLoS) indicates that many countries still don't have enough data to provide reliable estimates that would inform control strategies.

Through the Alliance for Global Elimination of Trachoma established in 1998 by the World Health Organization (WHO), 2020 was set as the year that the world hopes to eradicate trachoma.

To Nalakiti and many other poor households, this is good news because the Global Network lists trachoma among eight out of 10 neglected tropical diseases that are targeted for eradication in Kenya.

The others are leprosy, leishmaniasis, elephantiasis, river blindness, bilharzias, intestinal parasitic worms and guinea worm disease.

This promise appears to be gathering steam. In September last year, the push to eradicate neglected tropical diseases received a huge boost when a group of scientists, private sector leaders and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) announced a new collaboration

*"I am appealing to community workers to reach out to other villagers who still think that blindness is caused by old age."*

— Tonke Nalakiti



A medic observes 65-year old Tonke Nalakiti's eye before the operation. He was almost going blind before a community health worker introduced him to the facility for check ups.

Pictures: David Njagi

that will see Kenya join the ranks of 30 African countries keen on eliminating neglected tropical diseases.

The collaboration is counting on the few medical successes that have changed the course of human survival to drive its agenda.

"Just like the discovery of penicillin, the development of vaccines for immunization, and the discovery of antiretroviral drugs opened a new chapter for mankind, eradication of neglected tropical diseases is possible," according to Dr Neeraj Mistry, managing director of the Global Network for Neglected Tropical Diseases.

However, it is a test that will need collective goodwill to acquire a progressive bounce.

Despite varying records that try to explain the extent of the problem, the Global Health Council, a USA based agency that identifies priority world health problems says Africa continues to shoulder the heaviest burden on neglected tropical diseases.

But as with emerging chronic illnesses, such as diabetes and heart disease, neglected tropical diseases do not often register as health priorities in many countries. HIV and Aids as well as malaria and tuberculosis still attract most attention and funding from governments and donor organizations.

The Global Network's efforts, however, seek to highlight the significant toll on health and development, especially for children, caused by neglected tropical diseases. While parasitic worms may not kill a child, the costs in term of mental and physical debilitation radically reduce the quality of life and can needlessly shorten lifespan.

Often, private sector partners step in to

fill the gaps. For example, the pharmaceutical company GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) expects to contribute about one billion tablets annually to treat neglected tropical diseases, once its South Africa-based factory is complete, according to John Musunga, GSK managing director and manager of pharmaceutical operations for East Africa.

"We have also opened our research facility in Spain for use by any scientist not necessarily from Africa who is interested in researching on neglected tropical diseases," says Musunga. He adds: "We are receiving proposals from different scientific groups. The facility is to be used free of charge to advance science in this area."

Back in Kajiado, it seems that basic information, along with targeted interventions such as medical missions to provide free surgeries, are critical elements in the strategy to eliminate trachoma.

Ophthalmologist Soine says his team at the dispensary can perform 350 to 530 eye surgeries in a year but this is way below the envisioned 800 operations needed to meet the annual target in the county.

"The main reason is because patients do not come to the hospital in the early stages of infection and only come when it is too late," notes Soine. He adds: "This explains the high prevalence because trachoma is a slow-eating disease."

Perhaps because time is of the essence, collaboration and a master plan on neglected tropical diseases that the government is to unveil in November 2013, could prove useful in reducing prevalence.

## Guide

The first of its kind in the region, the plan provides guidance for control and elimination of five of the neglected tropical diseases in Kenya.

"With support from WHO and other partners, the distribution of these diseases in the country has now been clearly mapped out," says Dr Joyce Onsongo, the disease prevention and control officer representing Kenya at WHO.

As for Nalakiti, he is hopeful that many more villagers will in future be made to understand that trachoma is a disease that is caused by poor access to water and sanitation services.

"I believe I will soon regain my sight once the wound heals," says Nalakiti. "I am appealing to community workers to reach out to other villagers who still think that blindness is caused by old age."



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