

*Making*  
**PEACE**

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**in a time of political conflicts**





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## **Stories from the Field:**

Experiences of working with grassroots peace structures  
to address electoral conflicts and violence in Kenya

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# From Savannah, to Desert to the Sea: **A Quest for Peace**

In every election cycle Kenya sits ill at ease with herself. History has it that pockets of violence show their face in both likely and unlikely places and as a result lives, livelihoods and property are lost, leaving residents trying to rise from the ashes and reclaim past glories.

It was believed that the 2017 elections would follow the same script. The run up had all indications of following this dubious script. But this time though, a collection of concerned Kenyans made up of partnerships between government and nongovernmental agencies worked behind the scenes to try and make sure that the flames of violence stay out and that the sporadic incidences of bloody violence do not repeat themselves.

As the date drew closer, Kenya's security forces identified key Counties that showed potential to turn violent before,

during or after the polls. These Counties included Mombasa, Kwale, Garissa, Kilifi, Meru, Lamu, Marsabit, Isiolo, Nairobi and Tana River.

"We realised there was a thin line between conflict and electoral governance, that is why we focussed on an eight-month program intervention programme to promote peaceful and credible elections in the ten Counties," Anne Nyabera, the Executive Director of Act! says.

The programme, christened the Electoral Conflict and Violence Mitigation Program (ECVMP) focussed on working through influential individuals from all walks of life who address all forms of conflict within their communities and bunched up together in groups called Conflict Management Panels (CMPs).

As a result of their work, no violence was reported in a majority of these places, and in those areas such as Tana River that experienced some level of

"Elections present us with a special situation that needs all of us to add our voice to and we believe in reaching communities where they are. We approach peace from a community perspective and as we did this we delivered messages targeted at communities themselves."

Anne Nyabera, the Executive Director of Act!



"When war happens, women and girls are raped. When the husbands and sons die, we are the ones left as widows and as mothers mourning their sons."

Zeinab Ali, a member of the Garissa Conflict Management Panel (CMP)

violence, the incidences were dealt with in a manner that prevented it from escalating and spilling over into major conflicts.

“We understood that we had a lot of political heat during this period because we had a lot of competition for devolved positions,” Gabriel Kioni, the Assistant County Commissioner for Imenti North and a CMP member said. His region is in Meru County, one of those mentioned as a potential hot spot for electoral violence and conflict.

But when the final ballot was cast and everyone retreated to their houses to await election results, the anticipated violence was not to be. Not a single incident of election related violence was reported.

“We didn’t work alone to ensure this, we had a lot of stake holders that undertook peace building activities that eventually made the difference,” Kioni says.

Perhaps the success of the program lay in the simplicity of its organisation. Unlike many other prescribed solutions to problems affecting Kenyans, the approach during the period was not top down, neither was it bottom up but rather a consultative one that captured the views of the community members.

“Elections present us with a special situation that needs all of us to add our voice to and we believe in reaching communities where they are. We approach peace from a community perspective and as we did this we delivered messages targeted at communities themselves,” Nyabera says. “Peace is an important component of society. We are all stakeholders, that is why we brought everybody on board. You cannot afford to leave anyone behind.”

Zeinab Ali knows all too well the



Aboud Mohammed Kassim.

“People often come from far with solutions to problems they think we have. And often, they fail because the solutions they prescribe are not led by us;”

Aboud Mohammed Kassim.

impact that having an all-inclusive initiative can do to a community. She comes from the hugely patriarchal Somali community where ambition and leadership in women is frowned upon.

“I knew from the beginning that if women are given a chance they will turn this community into something better,” she says.

Through mediation and negotiation skills learnt through the programme,



she has managed to convince members of the Garissa Women for Peace and Development Group into persuading their husbands and sons to give up illegal arms.

“When war happens, women and girls are raped. When the husbands and sons die, we are the ones left as widows and as mothers mourning their sons,” she says. After her the women’s disarmament campaign, more than 50 guns were handed over to the police.

“Now even the men know we can add value to their lives,” she says. “No more gunshots. No more deaths.”

Hundreds of miles away from Zeinab, Aboud Mohammed Kassim sits at Mtangawanda Jetty on Pate Island looking towards the shimmering Indian Ocean in its all its blue glory.

Nearby, several people wait for an audience with him. Like many people his age, he is widely consulted on many matters. He often has the last word on family, security and even political

disputes.

From his favourite sitting place by the sea, he has seen many people try to solve perceived problems on the island. And many times, he has seen these people fail.

“People often come from far with solutions to problems they think we have. And often, they fail because the solutions they prescribe are not led by us,” Mzee Kassim says.

But not this time.

“The beauty of our approach was that the communities felt like they were being talked to by one of their own, who not only had their best interest at heart but also understood the underlying issues well.,” Nyabera says.

This Kassim says, is the reason why Pate Island in Lamu County did not witness violence or conflict during the electioneering period.

“We are the ones who led the whole process. We knew where the issues were and we solved them,” he says,

**Conflict Management Panel members in Vanga, a border town in the southern most tip of the Kenyan coast, talk to residents on the importance of keeping the peace during the election period.**



Often, boda boda riders are misused by political leaders to create chaos and intimidate their pay masters' opponents.

"This time though we were alive to the fact that we have been misused before. Through seminars and speaking to those who had our, and the communities best interest at heart we realised that we can do more for our people," says Francis Ngala, the boda boda association chairman in Mombasa County's Shanzu area. Boda boda were key partners of the peace programme.

"For many years we have seen our boys get involved in violence and political fights that they know nothing about. A politician would drive up to us, fill up our bikes, give each of us a thousand shillings and that would be enough to do whatever they wanted us to do," Ngala says

Boda boda riders are hugely influential in the areas that they operate in.

"First they are the first point of call for anyone getting into their areas or anyone seeking to know the pulse of the area. They can be used to influence decision making within the people either peacefully or violently. They can be used as enforcers," says Yusuf Lule Mwatsefu, who works for Human Rights Agenda, a local NGO based in Mombasa County.

"But by making them understand the kind of power they held, most of them

opted to preach peace and shun political violence," Mwatsefu says.

The influence they wield cannot be underestimated. As he sits at his operation base in Shanzu just next to the teachers college along the main Mombasa-Malindi Highway, Ngala plays the part of father, brother, business partner, mediator and advisor to the fellow boda boda riders. What he says is almost law to those hoping to operate in the area he commands, and his advice of peace and non-violence does not fall on deaf ears.

"The different forums we have had organised for us as boda boda operators greatly helped us," he says. "Now we all know our worth and know what is expected of us. This will no longer be regarded as a profession of failures and ruffians but rather that of peace makers," he says.

As he rides off into the main Shanzu bus stage, his reflector jacket says all that he and his colleagues have come to represent.

*"Chagua Amani, Sare Vita,"* the writing says.

Before, during and after the August election period, Ngala, Kioni, Mzee Kassim and their friends have all chosen exactly that. They have chosen peace and have let go of any forms of political violence or conflict.



"Often, boda boda riders are misused by political leaders to create chaos and intimidate their rivals."

Francis Ngala, the boda boda association chairman in Mombasa County's Shanzu area

# Radio tunes in to positive messaging in search of lasting peace



Information is power. Its availability can have a massive impact on how a community relates with itself and others. It shapes perceptions and opinions and because of this, its access can turn once politically volatile regions into islands of peace.

Elias Mugambi has a morning routine that he has adhered to for as long as he can remember. When he gets to his fruits stall at Meru Market, he first turns on the radio. He then spends a minimum of half an hour catching up on the news of the day.

"I believe what they tell us is true. I get to know what my County is talking about even before I open my business," Elias says.

For decades radio has been one of the most powerful tools in times of conflict. From spreading propaganda in war time Germany to fanning the flames of hate speech in pre-genocide Rwanda.

In 2007, just as the post-election violence descended on Kenya, radio was fingered for having stoked ethnic hatred amongst different tribes. Ten years later, the same medium is being used to spread peace rather than war as a key component of the Electoral Conflict and Violence Mitigation Programme.

"We have to keep speaking truth to the people," Stellah Karimi says. "Politicians will say whatever they want to say and disappear behind their gated communities leaving us going at each other's neck."

Stellah works for Mugambo FM which broadcasts from Meru County in the Meru dialect. The station is located at Meru town's Kenya National Library



**Stellah Karimi (right) of Mugambo FM with her guest Silvia Nkatha, Act! Programme Officer in Meru County.**

Services offices primarily reaching the whole Northern Frontier District.

"We know the power we wield over the people and we exercise this power with responsibility," she says.

In the months leading to the August general elections, Stellah hosted a popular current affairs breakfast show.

"My guest and I talk about politics, health and peace," she says. "Our aim was to make peace part of the political conversation."

A 2015 Kenya Audience Research Foundation survey showed that radio still rules the airwaves as the most preferred source of news for a majority of Kenyans both in the rural and urban areas.

"Up to 54 per cent of Kenyans regularly gets their news from radio as their primary source," the report reads.

Elias forms part of this percentage.

"I have no time for television, neither do I have time to read newspapers. But I am always on radio," he says.

One of the key things that Stellah and her team at Mugambo FM set out to achieve was to debunk

"Social media platforms were used to circulate rumours. It was up to us to fact check whatever claims and allegations that were going around and tell people the truth."

**Stellah Karimi!**

certain myths that had come to light in the course of vigorous campaigns for the different political seats in the County.

"Social media platforms were used to circulate rumours. It was up to us to fact check whatever claims and allegations that were going around and tell people the truth," she says.

Among the things she did was put rival politicians on air and get them to agree, on live radio, to peaceful campaigns as they crisscrossed the County in search of votes.

"After I heard my favourite politician and his rival agree to peace, I realised there was no point of me fighting someone else because of politics. If the two big boys were for peace, what excuse would I have to get violent," Elias asks.

Gabriel Kioni, the Assistant County Commissioner for Imenti North says the broadcasts played a key role in their fight against electoral related violence and conflict.

"For the first time we saw restraint and responsible reporting from radio stations in the region. They focussed on issues and debunked rumours. This helped us very much," Kioni says.



Radio Rahma presenters Omar Mwalago Omar (left) and Salim Ahmed at their Studios in Nyali, Mombasa County.

Conversations around a peaceful election period were not unique to Meru. In Mombasa these were facilitated in part by Radio Rahma, which was instrumental in making sure the electorate had its pulse on the promises offered by politicians.

The radio station broadcasted a series of live debates featuring all politicians who sought office.

"The people listened to and watched their favourite candidates on radio and TV and made their decisions. The response was good and the turnout impressive," Yusuf Lule Mwatsefu, director at Human Rights Agenda, a non-governmental organisation on human rights and governance in Mombasa that helped organise the forums.

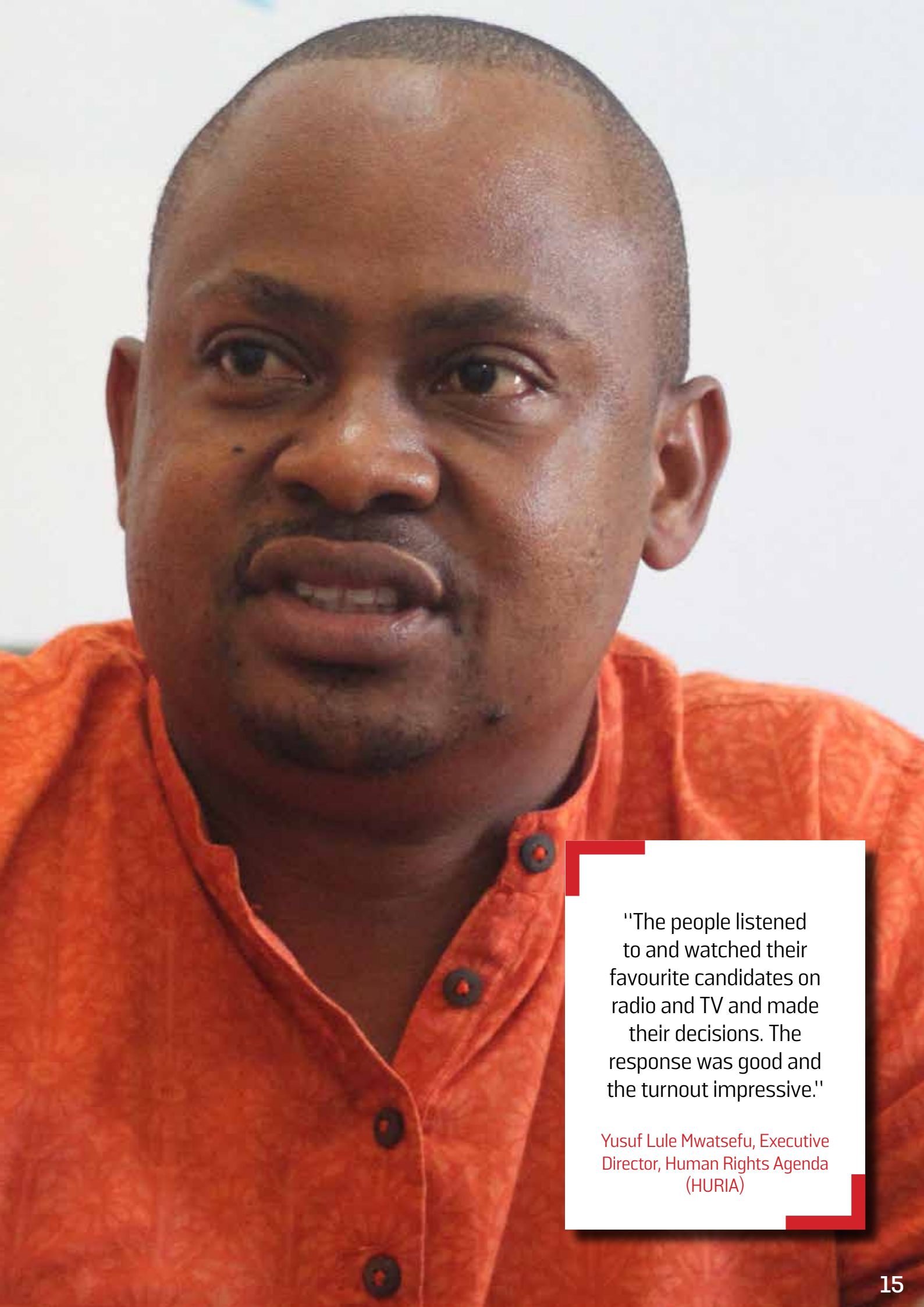
"Our intention was to shift the mindset of the people to a more progressive, peaceful thought process, and we succeeded in that," Yusuf says adding that for the first time, politicians were questioned on their motives for leadership, their association with violence and violent gangs in the region as well as the practicality of their promises.

"Of importance though was that after the debates, the electorate was less inclined to propagating violence on behalf of their candidates and as a result incidences of unrest greatly reduced in comparison to previous elections," Yusuf says.



"For the first time we saw restraint and responsible reporting from radio stations in the region. They focussed on issues and debunked rumours. This helped us very much."

Gabriel Kioni, the Assistant County Commissioner for Imenti North



"The people listened to and watched their favourite candidates on radio and TV and made their decisions. The response was good and the turnout impressive."

Yusuf Lule Mwatsefu, Executive Director, Human Rights Agenda (HURIA)



Felesia Odada, Programme Coordinator, Act! during a National Conference on Peace in Nairobi

# FROM NO GO ZONE TO **NO WAR ZONE**

**T**he announcement of election dates in some regions in Kenya often sounds like a warning to the residents. A warning to brace themselves for tougher days ahead. Days of possible violence and even death. 2017 was no different.

The Kenya Police, the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) as well groups of local and international elections observers all pointed towards the possibility of violence in some areas as the poll date drew closer.

As a result the government assembled a huge security machinery to man the general elections in the 20 Counties prone to violence pre and post-election. The Counties include; Nairobi, Kisumu, Mombasa, Nakuru, Uasin Gishu, Narok, Kisii, Homa Bay, Isiolo, Turkana, Bungoma, Kiambu, Kilifi, Lamu, Migori, Baringo, West Pokot, Elgeyo Marakwet and Meru.

There were sparks of pre-election chaos in some areas and killings believed to be motivated by resurgence in gang




killings associated with election years.

A 2016 report by the National Cohesion and Integration Commission termed the mapped Counties as “problematic and requiring close monitoring,” failure to which may lead to instability. Because of this, officers drawn from the Kenya Police, Kenya Prisons, Kenya Wildlife Service, National Youth Service, Kenya Forests Service, Administration Police and the General Service Unit were deployed to help keep the peace.

History however shows that the presence of ground troops is not a guarantee of peace. The bulk of the 2007 post-election violence took place in heavily policed regions, hence the need for an alternative conflict resolution method, in support of the ground troops.

“It is with this background that we decided to work in ten of these Counties which we felt would be key in addressing and arresting violence,” Felesia Odada, the Programme Coordinator at Act! says. “We decided to begin an eight-month programme and cover ten of the twenty Counties pointed out by the government.”




“It is with this background that we decided to work in ten of these Counties which we felt would be key in addressing and arresting violence,”

Felesia Odada, the Programme Coordinator at Act!

The aim of the program was to work through local peace structures to address the root causes of the simmering conflicts.

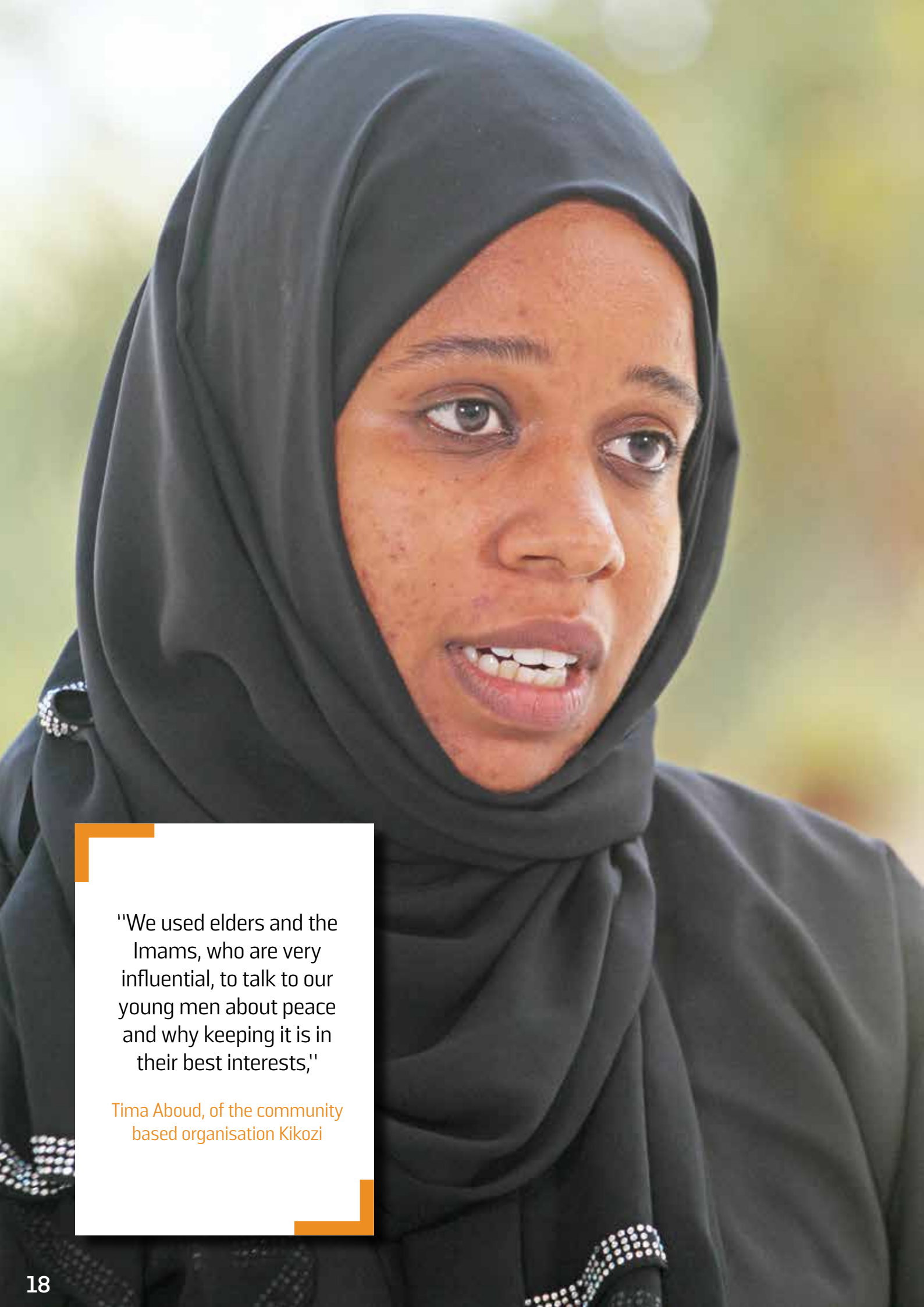
The causes of possible conflicts in this regions varied from place to place.



Nairobi has always been a battle ground for the party in power and the opposition. When tension builds up and violence erupts, almost the whole city is zoned out in terms of political bases with the informal settlements bearing the brunt of the violence. Here Kibera, Dandora and Mathare were constantly under the radar.

“We were aware of the intricacies of this project and thus fostered positive partnerships with state agencies such as the ministry of interior to make sure the program, through peace messaging, mediation or rapid response reached its intended audiences,” Felesia says.

In places like Meru, Isiolo and Garissa, conflicts are centered around age old rivalries such as boundary disputes, such as the one between the Borana and the Embu in Tigania East Constituency where violence between Meru farmers



"We used elders and the Imams, who are very influential, to talk to our young men about peace and why keeping it is in their best interests,"

Tima Aboud, of the community based organisation Kikozi

and Borana herders almost always recurs.

Frequent trainings of locally respected elders from both sides of the conflict greatly reduced the chances of these two communities going at each other as the elections drew closer. For the first time in decades, dialogue was looked at as a viable conflict resolution method.

In Mombasa, the problem was the emergence of juvenile gangs which reigned terror on the residents and were up for hire by political outfits to disrupt political meetings.

"We ignored the early warning signs that would have told us our young boys were getting themselves into trouble," Ramadhan Fujo, a youth social peace worker in Mombasa's Likoni area says.

"Boys were disappearing from home for days but no one would bother to ask them where they had been when they came back home. They had a free will to do what they wanted. Until the life of crime caught up with some of them. Tragically."

Apart from sharing a culture, Mombasa and Lamu also have the chip of violent extremism on their shoulders. This is what the peace messaging in the archipelago was all about.

"We used elders and the imams, who are very influential, to talk to our young men about peace and why keeping it is in their best interests," Tima Aboud, of the

community based organisation Kikozi said.

The reasons for Garissa and Marsabit being on the list are similar to Lamu's. Garissa goes one up though, having to grapple with intense political rivalries between candidates on all elective seats.

Tana River's issues mainly centre around resource conflict often pitting the farmers against pastoralists. Resource instigated violence in the County was witnessed towards the end of 2012 as the 2013 election drew closer where close to 500 people were killed from attacks and subsequent revenge missions between the Orma and Pokomo.

Kwale was unique. It is seen as the birthplace for secessionist movement the Mombasa Republican Council (MRC), which has always been on the government watchlist since inception.

"The danger has always been for the members of this group being exploited by sitting or aspiring politicians eager to leverage the MRCs influence and numbers for their gain," Hiram Kahira, the Kwale County Commissioner says. "And we had to talk to them, train them together with Act! to abandon violence and embrace peace."

The ten hotspots defied the bookmakers and chose peace, and in so doing went from hot spot zones to no war zones in eight months.

Bangladesh slums, Mombasa County: Bangladesh has for years been the epicenter for some of the most violent forms of crime in the coastal resort city.



# In the footsteps of peace

Talking about peace is not easy. Talking about it to a population that feels disenfranchised is even harder and requires skill, patience, charm and persistence. Luckily, Rehema Fue has all these qualities that have enabled her thrive as a community worker for more than two decades, carving out a niche for herself as a much trusted ear for confession, shoulder to lean on and from whose lips wise counsel can be found by the hundreds of youth in her neighbourhood.

To get to her house, you will have to go through the winding roads of Aldina B and when you get to the end of that road, her house will announce itself on top of a slope. From her backyard, the Nairobi- Mombasa highway is visible. Also, every so often, plane will interrupt your conversation because her stone and cement bungalow also seats beneath a flight path.

"The government has refused to give us titles to this land, but this is our home and we have built here nonetheless," she says as she welcomes you into her home.


The program has enhanced the capacity of community peace structures to best mediate on electoral related tension in the pre and post-election environment

Sofa sets line the four walls of her thickly carpeted seating room. One of the walls has her favourite verse from the Quran;

"Peace be upon you and me," it says.

Since 1994, Rehema alias Mama Manchester as she is known by many of her friends has been crisscrossing her community wearing different caps and fighting different wars.

"I started out as a volunteer HIV/AIDS campaigner after I got tired of seeing my people suffer from the disease and the stigma that came with it," she says. When she started out in the HIV advocacy work, HIV in Kenya was nearing catastrophic levels. A government in deniability and a lack of knowledge among the potential posed the greatest threat to the population. So much so that in 1999, the then president Daniel Arap Moi declared the disease a national disaster and finally gave mitigation measures the seriousness they deserved.

A woman with a determined expression is the central focus. She wears a vibrant blue and red patterned headwrap and a white dress with intricate purple, red, and gold paisley patterns. Her hands are clasped in front of her, holding a small orange smartphone. The background shows a dusty, outdoor environment with some structures and debris.

"What keeps me going? The fact that I am contributing to peace and understanding in my own little way," she says. "When will I stop? When I am in the grave."

Mama Manchester



Mama Manchester at her local pool den where dozens of youth spend their time. Here, she has a ready audience for her peace messages.

"People were dying from a lack of information and it was so painful seeing this," she says.

But the mother of two soldiered on, and as the decade turned the corner, her work started to bear fruit.

"People started opening up, talking about the diseases and slowly people started understanding it," she says.

But before she celebrated any victory, other challenges started rearing their head. In 1997, the Kenyan coast saw one of the bloodiest election related violence. Clashes erupted throughout the coast between natives and those perceived to be outsiders. This prompted Mama Manchester to train her efforts in trying to curtail violence in her own little way.

"What struck me most during this time when I started out in electoral violence and conflict mitigation was how the young men in my neighbourhood were being used by politicians," she says.

"A lack of jobs, poor education and drug abuse

meant it was very easy to manipulate them."

Being a peace crusader is not as glamorous as Mama Manchester makes it sound. More than once she has found herself in the middle of danger, most recent being in a campaign rally in Kenya's coastal resort city of Mombasa.

At the height of political campaigns, Mama Manchester was invited to a women's meeting at Mombasa's historic Tononoka grounds. But midway through the meeting, two women's groups that supported two rival factions for the County's gubernatorial seat started exchanging words.

"I was caught in the middle and could not pick sides because on either side were women with whom I had a good working relationship," she says. Soon, after, some fracas ensued and the police had to intervene to keep the two sides from going at each other.

"I was however more embarrassed than afraid," she says. "With all the challenges we face in the world there is no reason for women to fight each other just to please their male politicians."



Mama Manchester engaging with some of the youth she mentors in Aldina B, Mombasa County

Born in Makupa and educated in Mvita, Mama Manchester thought her future lay in the hospitality industry, the key economic driver for the coastal economy. In pursuit of this dream, she enrolled for language classes and landed what she thought was a dream job in a popular Mombasa hotel

"But the hours were too long and I was not giving my family enough attention. So I quit," she says, and since then, home has remained her second most favourite place, and when you walk in, she will lay down a tray filled with swahili dishes. Sugar coated mahamri, bhajias, viazi vitamu, and tea laced with vanilla as well as cardamom.

To eat it the sumptuous meal, you will seat on her carpeted floor, legs crossed at the knees while she answers numerous phone calls, and heads out of the door every so often to her favourite place- outside- meeting and talking to the people around her.

But with many years of volunteerism experience and now a member of the a Conflict Mitigation Panel (CMP) where does she find the strength to

continue and will she ever stop?

Under the auspices of the Electoral Conflict and Violence Mitigation program, Act! initiated a consortium of peace actors dubbed CMPs at the County and National levels to manage conflict at the grassroots. The program has helped build the capacity of community peace structures to best mediate on electoral related tension in the pre and post-election environment.

No conflict is too small or too big for Mama Manchester. She will talk to parents who mistreat their children. She will talk to politicians with ulterior motives to misuse young men and women. She will talk to drug addicts and advise them on the ills of the vice. She will give hope to people who feel angered by a lack of title deeds to land that belonged to their forefathers. But the most important thing is that she will not rest until a solution is found. Conflict resolution is her opium, and she is hooked for life.

"What keeps me going? The fact that I am contributing to peace and understanding in my own little way," she says. "When will I stop? When I am in the grave."

# Shining a light on shadows of Violent Extremism



Lamu County is mysterious in its composition. On one side, Kenya's County number 005, is made up of near endless grasslands and thick forests perfect for farming and pastoralism. On the other end, it is home to spotless white beaches that extend as far as the eye can see, only ending at the point where the water kisses the clouds and the sun either runs to every morning or evening.

Sometimes though this natural beauty is only skin deep, and underneath it all, unresolved issues ranging from historical injustices to modern conflicts ruffle the peace and calm.

"The biggest threat to peace and security here is the threat of violent extremism," Tima Aboud of Lamu based Kikozi Programme Group says.

Lamu is seen as a gateway County to violent extremism and has over the years seen some of the country's worst terror related attacks, which can be traced to close to ten years back.

On October 1, 2011 at around 3am, an armed gang docked their speedboat on the white sandy beaches of Manda and stormed into the house of French national Marie Dedieu and abducted her. The Kenyan government said the abductors were Al Shabaab militants. The kidnap came three weeks after a UK couple was attacked further north.

Two weeks after the abduction, Kenya waged war on the Al Shabaab, resulting in a drawn out guerrilla war that snaked out of Somalia and into Kenya, bringing with it venom that threatened to eat away the peaceful existence of the island. The repercussions of Kenya's foray into Somalia were immense.

On the mainland, where Mpeketoni town lies, fear was planted. It sprouted. Then grew into a conspicuous tree.

"People and some have never come back," Tima says.



Lives were disrupted. Trade and agriculture came to a standstill. Life became harder and the aftermath of the orgy of violence hit hard. A dawn to dusk curfew that lasted almost a year was imposed. Livelihoods for a County that depends on trade on the mainland and tourism for the archipelago suffered.

And perhaps, for the first time in their lives, Lamu residents, both on the mainland and the Islands were not in control of their own fates.

"That is why we decided to step as a group and address some of the key issues that led to these incidences of violence," she says.

As the country approached the election cycle, the fears grew even further.

"It would not be unique for politics to hijack the precarious position that Lamu currently sits on," she says.

The fissures and fault lines in the County could easily be exploited by the politicians of the day to stoke raw emotion.

"We had tensions during the period and tried to have peace meetings with all communities in the County," she says.

One of the main bones of contention was the feeling of exploitation by indigenous communities and the feelings of hostility by communities that have come to settle in Lamu.

Tima says bringing these two sides together was key in ensuring a peaceful electioneering period by creating a Spatial Plan that officially demarcated the County into zones for farmers, pastoralists and fishermen. This, she says, was to deal with any past or

future resource related conflict.

"We also ensured there was dialogue between the youth and the security agencies," she says. "It emerged that the main cause of violence was a lack of information.

In Lamu, like many other parts of the country, partnerships are key, and one such partnership exists between Kikozi and Act!.

"Act! have been instrumental in giving us a platform to explore all the possibilities of peace," she says.

The efforts of Kikozi Program Group and other partners, Lamu is seeing a semblance of peace.

Then tourists that had shunned its pearly white beaches are slowly streaming back. Farmers who had abandoned their watermelon farms and vegetable patches in Mpeketoni have begun filling the land again.


Sunsets that once evoked fear and uncertainty can now be enjoyed in all their glory, and the enchanting, mysterious nature of the County that had become haunting is too, slowly becoming beautifully bewitching.

Through the work of community peace structures, Lamu is walking again and soon she will have the strength to jiggle and dance away her past burdens.

"The biggest threat to peace and security here is the threat of violent extremism,"

Tima Aboud of Lamu based Kikozi Programme Group.





"The programme was successful but we need to make sure the seeds of peace we have planted are watered and tended for them to benefit the coming generations ."

Ali Libondo

## Flying the kite after the wind dies down

**A**li Libondo walks into the offices of Ummah Initiative Group every morning with a mind fixated at changing his corner of the world, and this is exactly what he has been doing over the past eight months.

"People have heard our messages. Most importantly they responded positively to it," he says.

His organisation in Kwale County has been instrumental in holding the different pieces that make the region all together.

"Like many parts of the country the rising political temperatures threatened to undo the County at the seams," Ali says.

One of the things he says were key in maintaining the peace was the act of making political aspirants sign peace declaration pledges throughout their campaigns. "They had to sign the forms before their supporters so

that they too knew that there was no point of engaging in violence," he says.

Ummah Initiative is one of the many local organisations that partnered with Act! in the Electoral Conflict and Violence Mitigation Programme to provide solutions in the run to the August 8 elections.

Kwale, was one of the Counties mentioned as a possible hotspot for electoral violence.

However, like many of those who were part of the problem, Ali says there is more that still needs to be done to resolve future electoral related conflicts.

"The programme was successful but we need to make sure the seeds of peace we have planted are watered and tended for them to benefit the coming generations," he said.

Marsabit Women Peace Corps chairperson Madina Dambi addresses a peace meeting in Moyale town. Previously, women in Moyale hardly participated in peace meetings. The CMPs are slowly changing this perception.



Through the programme, hundreds of individuals around the country have been trained in mediation techniques and are, months after the election, soldiering on as peace ambassadors.

Some 1,000 kilometres north west of Ali's office, Mohamed Nur Korme echoes a similar message.

"You can see the work we have done in a few months. Imagine the amount of work we can do if we had more time to implement what we have been taught and to reach out to more people," Korme says.

Moyale has for long been a battle ground for clannism and inter-border conflict between communities living in Moyale and those living in Southern Ethiopia. For decades, border disputes and instances of cattle rustling have propagated a history of conflicts and subsequent retaliatory attacks that have led to the loss of lives and destruction of property.

Korme thinks that the programme is one of the only homegrown solutions that has come with the promise of peace.

"Often civil society walks into such situations thinking that they have all the solutions. This time though we were pleasantly surprised to learn that the grassroots have better solutions to the problems affecting them."

Felesia Odada, the ECVMP Programme Coordinator

"Now everyone here knows that peace does not just mean no fighting, but it also means progress," he says.

Numerous community leaders and volunteers have benefitted from the program and although it is drawing to a close, many of them have proceeded to independently pursue peace through methods discovered from trainings and workshops.

"Often civil society walks into such situations thinking that they have all the solutions. This time though we were pleasantly surprised to learn that the grassroots have better solutions to the problems affecting them," Felesia Odada, the ECVMP Coordinator says, adding that the commitment displayed by

the local community structures in dealing with their problems should be harnessed and encouraged.

After eight months of probing, investigating and investing, the fruits of the efforts are just beginning to flower.

"If we get more time, we shall have a good harvest," Ali says.



# Pulling together for peace

Halima Dida, the Chairlady of the Isiolo County Women of Faith Network (WoFN), one of the members of Religions for Peace (RfP) Inter-religious Council of Kenya's (IRCK) in Isiolo town opens her radio session with a word of prayer. Radio has played a major role in pacifying regions previously thought of as violence hot spots.

**O**n the day of the August 8th elections, a frantic call came through Halima Dida's midmorning show on Angaaf FM, a community radio station operating out of Isiolo Town. The caller had something important to say.

"He quickly identified himself and proceeded to report an irregularity he had observed," Halima says.

On the eve of the elections, rumours had circulated on social media and through the grapevine of massive vote rigging, but all these reports proved to be mere allegations.

But on this day, the concerned Isiolo resident called into the studio to confirm the rumours. Minutes later, the police arrived at Bula Pesa polling station and arrested one person suspected of voter bribery.

The arrest was a culmination of a simple partnership

between a network of individuals and organisations, both hoping to keep their areas of operation safe from politically instigated violence.

"For us to succeed, we had to make sure that we brought everyone on board. From County government officials, religious leaders, the police force, village elders, reformed drug addicts and even reformed criminals," Shabo Ibrahim Aden says. "We would only succeed if we had everyone take part in the peace conversation," he says.

Shabo, a programme officer with Act! say, the success of the programme largely depended on its inclusivity.

A key partner in the ten Counties that had been marked as volatile in the run up to the election and were in need of intervention was the County governments.



**Hiram Kahiro the Kwale County Commissioner**

"We knew none of us would keep the peace on their own, so we opted to present a united front in addressing the challenges facing us. We all have something unique to contribute to the peace process."

**Hiram Kahiro, the Kwale County Commissioner**

"We looked at the program as a win-win for everyone involved," Hiram Kahiro, the Kwale County Commander says.

"We knew none of us would keep the peace on their own, so we opted to present a united front in addressing the challenges facing us. We all have something unique to contribute to the peace process," Kahiro says.

Although a state officer, the nature of his office has not prevented Kahiro from working with individuals previously shunned by community and hunted by government.

Three years ago, Raphael Mwamuye Konde spent most of his days and nights on the run- crisscrossing the hills and maize farms of Chonyi, the navel of the Mombasa Republican Council (MRC) running from what seemed to be a certain fate. Raphael was the chairman of the North Coast brigade of the MRC.



"Through seminars with my area chief and meetings with the County government I now know that violence is not the means to attain true peace, there are many things we can talk about and agree on without shedding blood."

Raphael Mwamuye Konde, former Chairman of the North Coast Brigade of the Mombasa Republic Council (MRC)

"At the time all I thought about was violent protest. Little else mattered," he says. Finally though, the law caught up with him and he was imprisoned for 18 months for belonging to an outlawed group.

Today, though still a member of the MRC, he preaches peace instead. And where violence reigned supreme, dialogue has taken over.

"Through seminars with my area chief and meetings with the County government I now know that violence is not the means to attain true peace," he says. "There are many things we can talk about and agree on without shedding blood."

Of equal importance, was the fact that he has found a willing ear to listen to the contributions he has to make.

"These partnerships are good, and if maintained for a longer period, we will comfortably deal with many of the challenges we face," Kahiro says.

The voter bribery tipoff Halima got that morning on election day would have been useless if she operated as a lone wolf. But a network of the



Abdia Mohamud, the Chairperson of Isiolo County Conflict Management Panel demonstrate the workings of a Command Centre. The centres were vital in helping the public report incidences of violence and elections malpractice.

"For us to succeed, we had to make sure that we brought everyone on board. From County government officials, religious leaders, the police force, village elders, reformed drug addicts and even reformed criminals,"

Shabo Ibrahim Aden



community, her radio station and the County administration proved to be the key ingredient in the pursuit of a peaceful and just election period in Bula Pesa.

"Once we got that information from Halima, we quickly relayed it to our command centre where every detail of the allegation was put to test. After these had been checked out, I was able to deploy my officers to the scene of the alleged crime," Charles Ontita, Isiolo County Commander says. It is these officers who, after confirming the allegations proceeded to make an arrest.

The command centre is a simple room based at a police station and equipped with telephone lines and walkie-talkies manned by a host of volunteers and a police officer in charge, who in most cases ranks as an inspector. The centres also have a fully manned women's desk.

Telephone numbers of the centres located in

"Once we got that information from Halima, we quickly relayed it to our command centre where every detail of the allegation was put to test. After these had been checked out, I was able to deploy my officers to the scene of the alleged crime."

Charles Ontita, Isiolo County Commander

several places around the country like Isiolo and Malindi, were circulated to the public through public service announcements on partnering radio stations and announced during peace caravans and peace walks.

"This way the public felt closer to us. We ensured their anonymity was maintained and had professional officers and volunteers manning the lines every day," Ontita says. "Every reported incident was logged onto our occurrence book after verification."

From pastors, policemen and social workers to reformed gang members and drug addicts, these partnerships went a long way in keeping the peace in areas initially thought to tether on the brink of sporadic, large-scale election related violence. This proves that nothing is impossible if we all pull together for the common good.



# Engaging youth to keep vice at **arm's length**

**K**enya's youth stare at a myriad of challenges each and every day in a world that seems harsh and unforgiving. This becomes more challenging in periods leading to elections like the just concluded 2017 general elections where these problems become compounded.

Often, it is those aged under 30 years that become an easy prey for politicians eager to turn their hopelessness into their advantage by paying off these young men and women to cause chaos and disrupt rival political rallies.

The proportion of Kenya's youth to the population is among the highest globally, presenting the economy with, if put to good use, vibrant manpower. The country's ratio of youth (aged 15-24) to the population stands at 20.3 per cent, above the world's average of 15.8 per cent and the continent's 19.2 per cent.

The millennials add up to 10.1 million out of Kenya's population of 49.7 million, data from US-based



"We couldn't just sit idle and wait to be used by the politicians. We needed to get up and be the change we wanted to see".

Mary Simon



Population Reference Bureau (PRB) shows.

"A high youth share means that the trajectory for population growth in coming decades will be strong," said Peter Goldstein of PRB. Ethiopia boasts the highest youth population share globally at 21.8 per cent, or 22.8 million, while Bulgaria has the least at 9.1 per cent.

Although these numbers are in many occasions used negatively, many of them ending up as political hirelings, drug addicts or criminals, one group of young men and women in Mombasa County has harnessed these numbers to positively impact their community.

"We couldn't just sit idle and wait to be used by the politicians. We decided to get up and be the change we wanted to see," Mary Simon says. "We needed to be the change we wanted."

Every weekday afternoon, Mary and a group of friends calling themselves Zinduna Africa meet at





their offices deep in Changamwe. Their sole agenda being to rehearse their latest theatrical masterpiece.

“We discovered that theatre has the ability to touch anyone’s heart. If our acting is good enough, the messages we pass will stick with our audiences,” she says.

During the election period Zinduna Africa staged various plays in and around Mombasa showing the dangers of negative ethnicity and being involved in tumultuous world of dirty politics.

“We made sense to a lot of our agetates and as a result we had fewer youth being used for political violence in Changamwe,” she says.

On the other side of Mombasa lies a jewel that has been a star attraction to many visitors to the Kenyan coast for many years. But decades of unemployment and neglect of its youthful population has led to a hopelessness that has forced many into a life of crime.

“My heart would skip a beat any time my three sons would leave home, I never expected them to come back,” Fatma Abdalla says.

Like many mothers in Mombasa’s Old Town, she too has seen her children slow dance and eventually get embraced by delinquency.

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**"My heart would skip a beat any time my three sons would leave home, I never expected them to come back."**

Fatma Abdalla

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"Landlords, tired with dealing with violent robbery cases gave up and started selling off their property. But things are now returning to normal, We had to do a lot of work but it is paying off. Some of the work included creating employment for the young men."

Ahmed Abdul Razak, the Old Town Chief, Mombasa County.



As a result of this, a crime wave hit Old Town, a UNESCO world heritage site so bad that the constant stream of tourists who provided the main source of revenue to the little Swahili restaurants and souvenirs shops dried up.

Landlords, tired with dealing with violent robbery cases gave up and started selling off their property.

"But things are now returning to normal," Ahmed Abdul Razak, the Old Town Chief says. "We had to do a lot of work but it is paying off."

Some of the work included creating employment for the young men.

Fatma's sons have become beneficiaries to an economic empowerment programme. Her eldest son, Doggo Prezzo, through a loan guaranteed by his mother and the chief has managed to set up a grocery shop.

"This has given me some hope," she says. "Now I can go to weddings and funerals without women hiding their purses away," she says, remembering the stigma she faced as a mother of three criminals.

Her last born son, so notorious that he once graced the police's most wanted list, now operates a carwash in partnership with some of his friends, also trying to stick to the straight and narrow line as law



**Fatma Abdalla and her sons. The grocery store behind them has been the saving grace for her two sons, who experimented with violent crime. The store now earns them enough revenue to keep them off the streets.**

abiding citizens.

"These activities keep the boys alive," he says. "Any false move and their mothers will bury them in no time," the chief says.

Young people in Kenya today live in complex and challenging times. The political and social turmoil of the 1990s left scars that today are being borne disproportionately by young people.

For them, surviving the turmoil created by previous generations means crime. It means not caring about tomorrow. It means being easily swayed by the intentions of an aspiring politician.

However, the silver lining is that an increasingly large number of them and those in belief of their untapped potential are charting a different path.

"We have everything within reach. If I stretch out my hand I can touch crime or peace. I chose peace. That is what we try to tell those who watch our plays. Ultimately the choice is yours," Mary says, changing costumes while on set during a rehearsal.

Youth unemployment and the dangers associated with it are not unique to Kenya's coast. In Isiolo County, Act Transform Change (Act!) has also supported the group dubbed Nomadic Women for Sustainable Development (NOWSUD) to create opportunities for thousands who have failed to secure employment in the formal sector.

Unemployed youth in Isiolo have become easy targets for recruitment into violent extremist groups, often riding the promise of monetary gain.

The NOWSUD center is imparting skills in tailoring, shoe making, embroidery and computer literacy to the dozens of youth who go through its doors every day.

"We just help them be creative and innovative. This way they can address unemployment and underemployment," Sammy Kariuki, the Program Manager at NOWSUD says.

"Here we are all about teaching them how to fish. We want them to be self-reliant," he says.



# A voice for peace

**G**rowing up in the dusty and rugged Isiolo plains, Halima Dida experienced firsthand the conflict associated with the scramble for dwindling grazing areas, cattle theft and animosity between clans and ethnic groups living in the larger Isiolo County.

According to Halima, these conflicts, which often escalate during electioneering periods, have negatively impacted the community's growth more so, the lives of girls and women from the pastoralist communities.

Over the years, Isiolo stood out as one of the Counties that were greatly affected by the vicious wave of armed conflict, including banditry, always witnessed in the run up to elections as communities scramble for the elective posts. The repeated wave of violence pitting nomadic communities has scared away investors

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"I have been doing so many radio talk shows in Borana and Swahili languages. I realized my community relates more with radio stations that broadcast in local languages than the national stations."

Halima Dida

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and tourists who would have otherwise enjoyed the scenic and expansive Isiolo County-side, including the game sanctuaries and conservancies.

Halima, who doubles up as the Chairperson of Women of Faith Group and a member of the Inter-Religious Council of Kenya, recalls a cattle rustling incident between Somali and Borana communities, which left many families maimed and lives lost. Having experienced all that, her urge for peace grew bigger by the day. Pestered by this unpleasant situation, she resolved to find solutions to what ails her community.

"During such conflicts women are exposed to gender related violence and some even lose their husbands in the process. The effects of these conflicts are also felt by the child headed families," says Halima.

"I have been doing so many radio talk shows in Borana and Swahili languages. I realized my community relates more with radio stations that broadcast in

local languages than the national stations", she says.

"Beyond the normal peace dialogue, we needed to have wider conversations around the prevention and response to electoral violence at the grassroots hence my goal of reaching a wider audience", she added.

Looking back at the electoral campaign environment in Isiolo and its environs, Halima regrets the challenges that still underpins women's participation in elections and peace building processes.

"Being a pastoralist community, our culture does not take into account women's voices as that of their male counterparts. We still have to fight for our space," she explains.

That notwithstanding, the mother of three is happy that the work she has done in the community has yielded fruits. It is the first time that a woman has been elected as a Senator among the 'conservative' pastoralist Borana community.

"It is a good direction but we still have a big gap in appreciating the important role women play in a democratic environment," she says while noting that women who vie for political positions are still marginalized and viewed as outcasts going against culture and religious teachings. In such communities, women are also missing in the "negotiated democracy" table where sub clans, clans and ethnic community elders meet to share power (read elective/appointive positions).

"Our community believes that women should not venture into politics. There is need to sustain momentum in creating awareness on such issues at the grassroots," Halima explains.

She however notes that "the conversations on radio have been very interactive and effective. You can tell the enthusiasm of communities on issues that affect their livelihoods and peaceful co-existence from the way they ask questions and give feedback on issues relating to elections," she narrates. Women also discuss the radio conversations during their 'chamas' (local women gatherings), meaning that the radio programmes have touched their lives.

Halima is a member of the Isiolo County Conflict Management Panel (CMP); a consortium of peace actors initiated by Act! under the auspice of the Electoral Conflict and Violence Mitigation program to mediate electoral conflicts. As a CMP, she underwent training on conflict mapping and management.

"Working as a CMP has made a great difference. We have never had such a consortium of peace actors. In the past elections, we experienced lot of conflict in the pre and post-election periods. In 2017, we made gains in our community engagements; the County was largely peaceful," she notes.

"Our community believes that women should not venture into politics. There is need to sustain momentum in creating awareness on such issues at the grassroots."

Halima Dida



# Past Solutions for Current and Future Problems

"I do not like to see conflict around me, particularly if it is about something that people can sit down and talk about."

Mzee Galma Dabaso

A young boy grazes his goats at a site that has seen age old battles between warring Somali and Turkana herders. The years between 2009 and 2011 saw the worst violence between these two groups.


**M**zee Galma Dabaso calmly sits under a shade in his homestead just outside Sololo market some 80 kilometres from Moyale town. His favourite spot, right next to a goat kraal, has hosted many meetings between him and aggrieved parties in search of solutions for more than two decades.

For Dabaso, mediation and peace building is almost second nature.

"I do not like to see conflict around me, particularly if it is about something that people can sit down and talk about," he says.

Although he has been an elder for the Borana community for many years, the nature of conflicts has changed. The aggressors too have changed.

"It is not just about cattle. We have a worsening climate to think about which feeds into toxic political discourse as well," he says.



"I grew up knowing that the Borana were the enemy, but when I finally understood where the animosity came from, I realised we, the youth, were fighting over challenges that we can easily solve with dialogue. There is no conflict that cannot be solved amongst ourselves."

Litarakwa is a resident in Marsabit's Leyayi area, which has a long history of violence

Among these conflicts is the long running Songa-Badaasa conflict that threatened to further polarise the Rendille and Borana communities living in these areas.

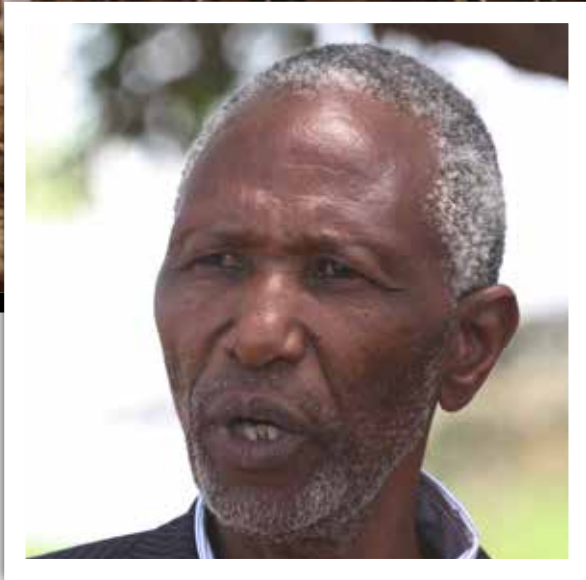
The points of conflict between these two communities in Marsabit County revolve around ethnic rivalries, cultural identity and fight for supremacy manifested through competition for access to resources, political power and opportunities like employment in the County government.

"These are the things that fuel animosity among our people and always come up whenever we have an election," Mzee Dabaso says.

Because the rivalries are old, the role of the elders in seeking solutions to these points of contention is key, particularly to sections of the population born without the context of the strife between these two communities, and John Litarakwa Leto knows this all too well.



Camels take a break from the scorching heat to drink water in shifts at Dambala Fachana area in Marsabit County, just a few kilometres from Sololo Town.



"I grew up knowing that the Borana were the enemy," Litarakwa says, as he sips spiced tea under a mango tree in his manyatta.

Litarakwa is a resident in Marsabit's Leyayi area, which has a long history of violence.

"But when I finally understood where the animosity came from, I realised we, the youth, were fighting over challenges that we can easily solve with dialogue. There is no conflict that cannot be solved amongst ourselves," he said.

Mzee Dabaso, is the chairman for the Borana Council of Elders and is among those who spent weeks shuttling between villages in Marsabit and Moyale preaching peace, urging the youth to shun violence in all its forms in the run up to the August elections.

"We had meetings with fellow elders from other communities. We understood our problems and found ways to work around them," the 81 year old says, adding that they would not want to go through what they have gone through during past election seasons.

He adds: "This time, our peace mission was so successful that when the elections came, there was neither interference nor harassment. We had no violence."

Litarakwa attributes this calm to the work put in by elders such as Mzee Dabaso.

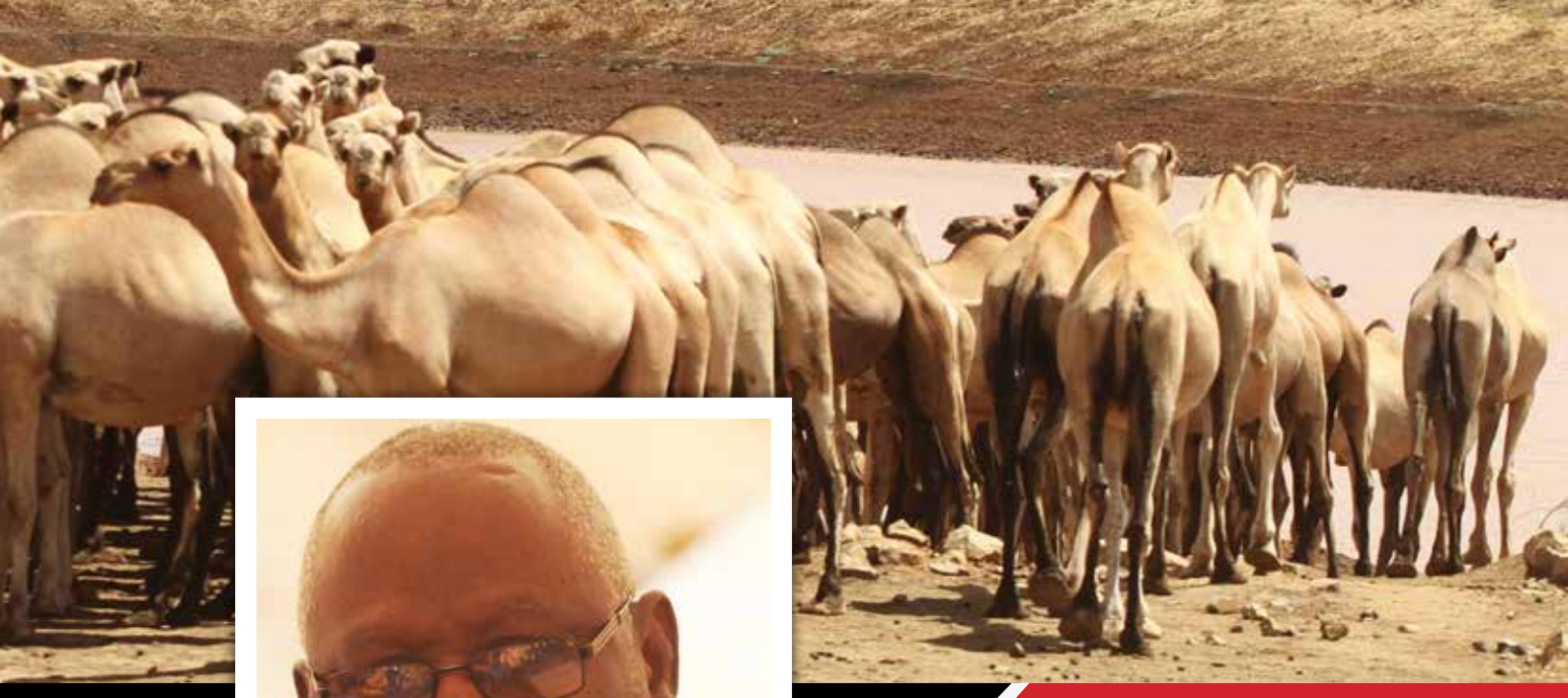
"We warned our leaders against exploiting our lack of resources for their political gain. They listened to us because they know we speak for the people,"

Frederick Maina

"They made us see that the problems we face are similar and it is easier for us to defeat them while united. If we stand divided, favouritism, poor resource distribution, corruption and the ever changing climate will finish us," he says.

For pastoralist communities, the biggest danger has been a threat to their livelihoods. Pastures have disappeared. Rivers have shrunk. Water dams are forever parched. This changing weather pattern often proves to be the Achilles Heel that politicians go to





"We have to give direction to the people. If they know we are for peace, then they too will be for peace"

James Muchokaa,  
a member of the council

while riling up communities against each other.

Frederick Maina is a known face in Isiolo town. As a farmer and Chairperson of the Minority Tribes Council of Elders, he is often pulled into mediation processes. Maina says that if the counsel of elders is sought, many conflicts within the County will be dealt with.

"When the Somali and Turkana fought over pasture and water between 2009-2011, it is us who helped calm the people down," he says. To date, the battle field for that epic confrontation still lays bare. Where farmlands existed, now grows bush. Where

houses stood now remain unremarkable foundation stones.

"We warned our leaders against exploiting our lack of resources for their political gain. They listened to us because they know we speak for the people," Maina says.

And across the border from Isiolo is Meru County, the seat of power for the Nchuuri Ncheke, a carefully selected group of mature, composed, respected and incorruptible members of the community.

They too have played a key role in keeping the peace in Meru County. They have played a critical role in mediating cross-border conflicts between agrarian communities in Meru and pastoralists from the neighbouring Isiolo, Turkana and Samburu Counties.

"We have to give direction to the people. If they know we are for peace, then they too will be for peace," James Muchokaa, a member of the council says.

Conflicts from around the country may have changed in the way that they manifest, but their root causes remain the same.

"The world cannot know of any new problem. There can be no new solutions to conflicts," Mzee Dambaso says. "People should look back to solve current and future problems and we, the elders have most of the answers."



# From the Brink: Tales of Hope after Dark Days

**W**hen one thinks about Meru County, one gets the image of undulating hills covered with lush green vegetation of crops and natural forests, but that is just half the story. Another part of the County is an almost exact opposite. Instead of lush greenery, the areas are covered by an inconsistent brown. Instead of the undulating grasslands, the land is covered by rock and dust and the shade is provided by canopies of pygmy acacia trees.

But though extreme, the weather is not the greatest concern for Kiremu residents. For Lucy Kibirithu, the greatest fear lies in a known danger nearby. A danger which took away her husband and paralyzes her each and every day.

"A friend called and asked me if I had heard the news," she says.

"Let them keep doing what they do, maybe somewhere a mother will be saved the heartache I have been going through and one man will not kill another just to settle a political score,"

Lucy Kibirithu

A day before the call that changed her life forever, her home was attacked by raiders who were after the family's herd of cattle.

"They came at night, shooting in the air. None of us could leave the house. We stayed inside with the children," she said. The raiders got what they wanted, the family's eleven heads of cattle as well as eight calves.

In Kiremu, once an agriculturally productive area, small holder farmers like Lucy keep a few animals as a backup plan for the erratic weather that might destroy whole crops. For Lucy, the few heads of cattle they had were a means of livelihood.

"We could sell milk and use the money for our daily needs. We sold one or two cows at the beginning of every school year to get fees for our children," she said. So when dawn broke, and her husband saw the kind of loss the family was staring at, he made a decision.

"We are the ones who feel it most. No one knows death like we do. No one knows pain like we do. We have been beaten. We have been raped. Conflict is always violent to us, we are the ones who are undressed during war, not the men, us!"

Leila Tinga, a resident of Maweni Santa Fe in Malindi

A decision that altered the path that he and his wife had painstakingly carved out for their family. Unknown to him, politicians from a



neighbouring pastoralist community had incited their community against their farming neighbours.

Lucy's husband never came back home.

Lucy's tale is not isolated, and as a Senior Chief in Tigania East, Joel Githirikia Nkunya has seen many of such cases.

Chief Githirikia's favourite sitting place is at the DC's offices, under a jacaranda tree in the middle of the compound. From this position, he sees everything that goes on. But as much as he would want to know everything, there are things in his jurisdiction that he has no control over.

"This year it could have been worse because of the elections," he said. "The stakes were very high."

Every time Lucy hears about the threat of violence during this election period, she goes back to that day when she was told of the death of her companion, friend, husband, breadwinner and father of her children.

And whenever she remembers this, tears freely exit her eyes and painfully find a path down her cheeks before resting on her dark blue blouse in spots that disappear as soon as they blot the fabric.

"This year it could have been worse because of the elections," he said. "The stakes were very high."

Joel Githirikia Nkunya, Senior Chief, Tigania East

Through the years, women have always borne the brunt of conflicts of any kind. For instance, in the 2007- 2008 post-election violence, women were displaced, beaten, raped and lost the small businesses they were running with others dispossessed of hard earned small holder farms.

"We are the ones who feel it most. No one knows death like we do. No one knows pain like we do. We have been beaten. We have been raped. Conflict is always violent to us," Leila Tinga, a resident of Maweni Santa Fe in Malindi says. "We are the ones who are undressed during war, not the men, us!"

Leila says that because it is the women who feel it most, it should be them who fight the hardest to keep the peace.

She says women can't fight, but they can talk to their men and sons to stop fighting each other.

"When they fight we are collateral," she says. "We have to tell our fathers, husbands, brothers and sons not to take up arms."

But is dialogue with the family enough to stem the tide?

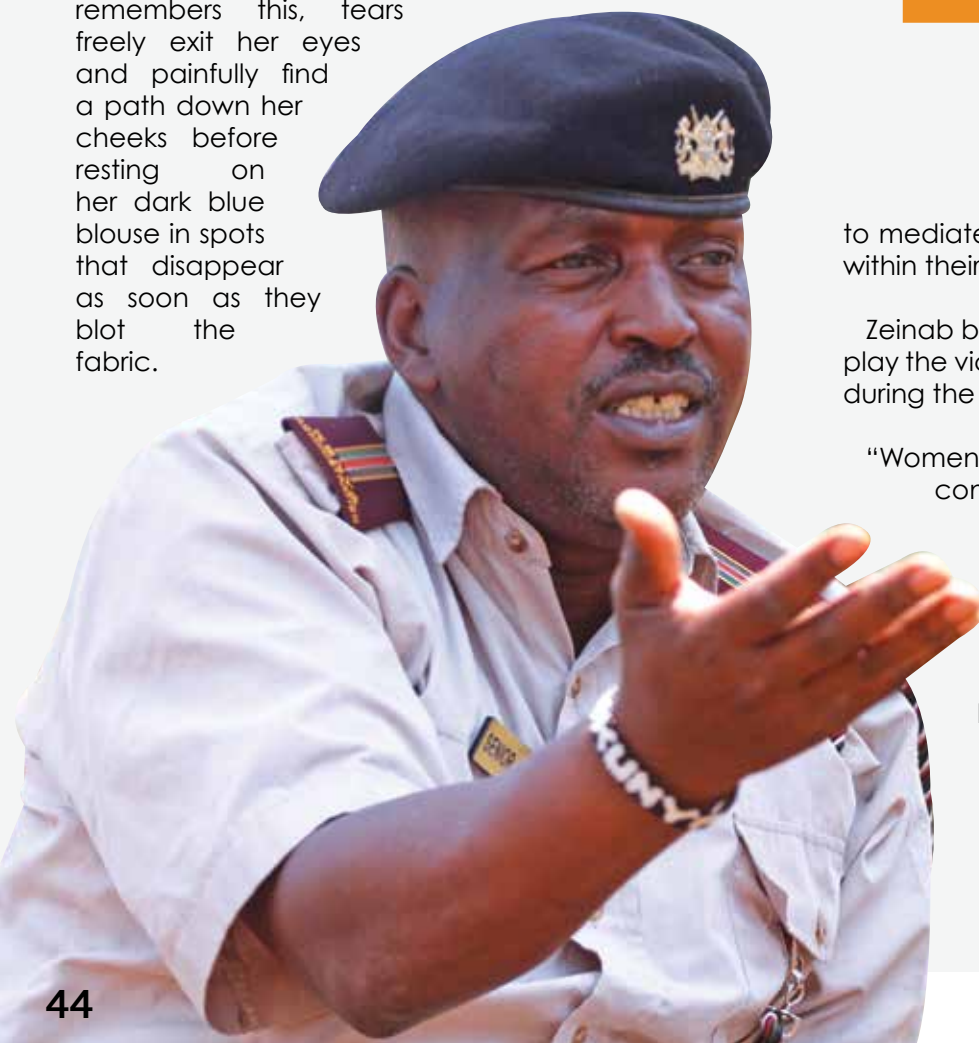
"Not at all," Zeinab Ali, a member of the Garissa Conflict Mitigation Panel (CMP) in Kenya's Eastern town of Garissa says. "We have to do much more than that."

The Conflict Management Panel (CMP) is a consortium of peace actors charged with the mandate to mediate and mitigate electoral related conflicts within their communities.

Zeinab believes that in as much as women always play the victims, they have been used to fan conflict during the electioneering periods.

"Women in my community have been used to compose songs and poems to not only diminish political opponents but also to rile up the men and incite them to violence," she says.

In one such song, a woman with a beautiful, melodious voice sings her heart out to the man in her life. The singer in a long drawn out chorus chides the man asking him what he is doing at home, when all his other agemates are



**"The County government understood and supported what we were doing. When we decided to organise and take part in peace caravans they bought into the idea and gave us security,"**

**Abdia Mohamud, the CMP Chairperson in Isiolo County**



out fighting for what is right. The coup de grace, it seems, occurs when the singer tells the man to take her headscarf in exchange of his trousers if he is unwilling to go out.

"That was then. Now we have managed to convince them to sing about peace and non-violence," Zeinab says.

Like Leila and many other women CMPs around the 10 Counties, Zeinab has managed to train women from the four Sub-Counties within Garissa on the importance of peace and mediation mechanism for a peaceful co-existence.

"As a result, inter-clan violence has reduced and we are no longer burying our men daily. Neither are we consoling our girls with each rising sun," she says.

The freedom enjoyed within the space in which women CMPs operate in was not easily attained: Stereotypes and cultural beliefs provided a high, albeit surmountable hurdle, and to jump over it, a helping hand was needed.

"The County government understood and

**"Women in my community have been used to compose songs and poems to not only diminish political opponents but also to rile up the men and incite them to violence."**

**Zeinab Ali a member of the Conflict Management Panel in Garissa County**



supported what we were doing. When we decided to organise and take part in peace caravans they bought into the idea and gave us security," Abdia Mohamud, the CMP chairperson in Isiolo County says.

"Even in politically charged meetings, we were given a chance to address the groups and we somehow managed to calm people down," she says. "There is something about a woman's voice that can pacify any situation," Abdia says.

The help may have come too late for Lucy Kibirithu, but as she sits under the sole umbrella tree in her compound that offers the only shade while staring into the horizon towards which her husband walked and never returned, she says the efforts of women like Zeinab and Leila will save another woman from the heartache she underwent.

"Let them keep doing what they do, maybe somewhere a mother will be saved the heartache I have been going through and one man will not kill another just to settle a political score," she says



# Diamonds in the rough

**D**andora dump is a sprawling dumpsite that sits on over 30 acres of land located in Nairobi's slum heartland where more than 90 per cent of the Kenyan capital's trash ends up.

It is surrounded by Korogocho, Baba Ndogo, Mathare and Dandora informal settlements, all which were identified by the National Cohesion and Integration Commission as potential hotspots for electoral related violence in the run up to the August 8 elections.

Unemployment, crime and drug abuse have made the youth in these areas easy pickings for politicians who use them to cause violence or settle scores with their political opponents. From a distance, the dumpsite looks to be in the throes of a constant battle between good and evil, and two individuals, through collaboration with Act!, have



**Lamech Osieko, a peace ambassador in Dandora estate and a member of the Nairobi Peace Forum.**

now devoted their lives to make sure good prevails.

"You cannot succeed in anything without peace. It is the backbone of everything," Lamech Osieko, a peace ambassador in Dandora estate says. For him, and many others, lives gets disrupted every five years as a result of political jostling. Like many others, the violence of every election cycles has touched him personally. In 2007, at the height of the post-election violence, he lost a cousin.

The dumpsite itself is almost as old as the Kenyan nation. It was opened in 1975 with World Bank funds and was deemed full by 2001 according to Environmental Justice Atlas. Yet it continues to operate, and people at the very bottom ranks rungs of the socioeconomic ladder come here as their last hope to make a

living from scavenging the waste while exposing themselves to tremendous pollution.

On the flip side though, the dump is a giver of life to hundreds who make a living from scavenging waste materials and selling them to recyclers.

"Those who do not know what goes on here say the dumpsite harbours criminals. But so does anywhere else in Nairobi. There are people here who raise their families from the treasure within the trash," Samuel Guoko, the chairman of the dumpsite says. "And I am one of them."

He says every election period, business in the dumpsite slows down and at times come to a standstill.

"There is less trash and companies that ordinarily buy things from us shut down because of the uncertainty of the market," Guoko says, adding that this then leaves a lot of youth idle and easy to exploit.

This is also the time that he and Osieko are busiest.

"We try to be role models and talk to the young men. We tell them there is no point in allowing themselves to be used by politicians simply because work is drying up at the dump," Guoko says. "We tell them to think of the future and what they will do after the politics have died down."

In the past, the troubles around Dandora have not been restricted to the radius of the dumpsite alone. Tentacles of unease and suspicions anchored on the unstable foundations of tribal political divides spread far into the settlement.

"There was a time that landlords would not allow tenants from certain parts of the country to live in their houses," Osieko says.

Through constant dialogue and use of conflict mediation methods learnt from various trainings organised by Act! and other peace actors including leaders from the area, they have managed to reduce tension among residents before and the aftermath of the elections.

"We managed to convince our people to continue living as one. There is no point fighting over



"We managed to convince our people to continue living as one. There is no point fighting over politics yet we have been living as neighbours and even borrowing salt from each other through the years. It just looks stupid,"

Samuel Guoko, the chairman of the dumpsite

politics yet we have been living as neighbours and even borrowing salt from each other through the years. It just looks stupid," Guoko says.

As a long-time resident of Dandora, Osieko says that the peace initiatives provided by community leaders in Dandora only causes temporary relief.

"Unemployment and a lack of government services which are the root causes of most of the violence in Dandora need to be addressed," he says. "Perhaps these are things that we can work on slowly, if given a chance to continue this partnership with Act!. This programme has allowed us to own the peace process and provide local solutions to our unique problems."

Osieko is also a member of the Nairobi County Peace Forum.

Working for peace in Dandora can sometimes mean danger.

"Several peace ambassadors have been killed while trying to mediate between warring sides," Osieko says.

But even in the face of death they soldier on.

"The animosity between our leaders is just on face value, they never fight, so there is no reason why we should walk around with stones and pangas. If you have a panga (machete), pray that God gives you a cow so that you can use it to cut grass and feed it. If you use stones as a weapon, pray that God gives you a piece of land so that you can use the stones to put up a foundation for your house," he says.

The local communities understand they must be participants in the change process and that they must spearhead the advocacy and the struggle for a better future. Act! in its own little way is helping these local communities find their feet and their voices in this struggle.



A section of Old Town, Mombasa County

# Closing the door on crime

**A**t 16 years of age, the scrawny looking baby faced Noordin Kamal was a bad man. Despite his stature he walked the narrow streets of Mombasa's old town like a colossus. It took little motivation for him to maim and grab whatever he wanted from a passing mother. He was Escobar, and Old Town was his Colombia.

"They used to call him Mbavu Mnene," Chief Ahmed Abdul Razak says. "He got that name because when he had a knife, he always went for your ribcage."

As Noordin and his gang lay siege in Old Town, another of his peers was slowly taking over another part of Mombasa one violent mugging at a time.

With his tall, lean body, Abu Athman Hamisi would pass for a basketballer. His athletic physique though, served him better in another

world where, unlike sports, no rules existed. It was survival for the fittest, and he wanted to be among the survivors.

"We never cared about anything. Sometimes we would just rob for the adrenaline," he says.

Both Noordin and Athman know death.

They have lost friends to crime or by being members of a gang, colluded to bring it to another.

However, a deliberate intervention by the elders of Old Town snatched the young men from a life of crime that would almost certainly come to a violent end.

Now, you are more likely to see Noordin at Piggot Centre Car Wash with a sisal basket, hawking fish around for a commission.



"It is less prestigious but at least I do not have to run every time I see the Chief or policemen," he says. "Now I can just concentrate on being a boy again," Noordin says.

He gets fish from the fishmongers and takes them around the neighbourhood looking for buyers.

"The transformation is amazing. People still wonder if at the end of the day he will bring back the money to the fish sellers. There is always someone surprised at seeing him come back without fish and with money," the Chief says.

Quitting crime has not been easy though.

"There are always those who think that we have now become informers and are always looking for ways to get back to us," Athman says.

Before he decided to walk the straight and narrow, his days were spent on the ferry picking out marks.

"We would pick pocket or snatch or just threaten people into giving us their valuables. We would also get into furious turf wars for control of what we thought were the most profitable routes. At times we would just fight and hurt each other for no reason. It was an ego thing," he says.



"The only thing I fight today is a lack of knowledge. I do not use my fists any more. I fight through reading,"

Abu Athman Hamisi

Local elder Tom Odhiambo talks to reformed gang members in Likoni on matters crime and drugs. Tom, a Likoni resident for all his life has seen the township morph into a crime infested neighbourhood and he has decided to do something about it. He and like minded individuals mentor and rehabilitate youth from a life of crime and drugs.





Over the past three years, large sections of Mombasa town and its environs have been grappling with insecurity brought about by the emergence of vicious teenage gangs. So bad were the problems that the areas controlled by these gangs were not only no go zones for the residents, but for law enforcement too.

But through the work of Conflict Management Panel (CMP); a group of County level peace actors trained to mediate on conflict, Athman and Noordin have managed to get themselves out to the murky world of crime.

The CMP model of conflict management was a formation of Act! under the Electoral Conflict and Violence Mitigation program charged with the mandate of mapping out and managing conflict within their localities. Key in their work was constructive engagement of youth to create safe and secure communities while promoting peaceful co-existence.

"We have people who have talked to us and engaged us in meaningful activities now. We do not have to steal to survive," Athman says.

After giving up on crime, some of his friends have gone back to school.

"I lost three years running around with these gang members. If it were not for them maybe I would have finished school by now! Salim Shafi says. Shafi, just like Athman, got himself entangled in the world of crime while in his first year of secondary school. A year later, he abandoned school for the thrill of life as a delinquent.

However, through the work of local leaders and some of the reformed peers, he has now quit crime and returned to school.

"The only thing I fight today is a lack of knowledge. I do not use my fists any more. I fight through reading," he says.

Noordin Kamal spent most of his formative years on the run as a fugitive. However, interventions from the area CMPs and his local Chief made him change his ways from a feared criminal to a much loved fishmonger.





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