By Wesley Gitahi

Many years ago, the African was keen on family. The word uncle or aunty never existed in the African vocabulary. All of a father’s peers were referred as baba and all of a mother’s peers were called mama.

Then the cousins were called sister or brother. If death happened in the family, the community sat down and discussed. If the children had only one parent they were shared among everybody. No orphans were left on their own. They were everybody’s responsibility.

However, things changed at some point. Maybe there were too many deaths and the community was overwhelmed. Nobody cared about orphans anymore. They have been left to take care of themselves. Children who are barely into puberty have taken over the responsibility of being mothers and fathers by taking over the role of sole providers.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic has had a major impact in Africa. Worldwide, it is estimated that by 2015, the number of orphaned children will still be overwhelmingly high. In African countries that have already suffered severe epidemics, AIDS is generating orphans so quickly that family structures can no longer cope. Traditional safety nets are unravelling as increasing numbers of adults die from HIV-related illnesses. Families and communities can barely fend for themselves, let alone take care of orphans. Typically, half of all people with HIV become infected before they are aged 25, developing AIDS and dying by the time they are 35, leaving behind a generation of children to be raised by their grandparents, other adult relatives or left on their own in child-headed households.

Access to ARVs

Even with the expansion of antiretroviral treatment access, it is estimated that by 2015, the number of orphaned children will still be overwhelmingly high. In African countries that have already suffered severe epidemics, AIDS is generating orphans so quickly that family structures can no longer cope. Traditional safety nets are unravelling as increasing numbers of adults die from HIV-related illnesses. Families and communities can barely fend for themselves, let alone take care of orphans. Typically, half of all people with HIV become infected before they are aged 25, developing AIDS and dying by the time they are 35, leaving behind a generation of children to be raised by their grandparents, other adult relatives or left on their own in child-headed households.

The epidemic is shaping up in a remote village in Kitui West District. orphaned children left under the care of grandparents are being nurtured to recollect their battered lives and re-establish the continuity of families. The children are being placed under the guardianship of a grandparent — not necessarily their own — who is charged with the responsibility of creating a normal home atmosphere.

Nyumbani village

Two generations devastated by the AIDS pandemic are finding a second home at the giant Nyumbani Village, one of Africa’s little known success stories. Nyumbani Village is a self-sustaining community centre that is restoring hope and healing by offering a new beginning to orphans and grandparents who have been left behind. As the name suggests, Nyumbani (Kiswahili for homes), harnesses the energy of youth and maturity of elders to create new blended families.

The village is run by the home care health programme of the local Diocese of the Catholic Church in conjunction with USAID. According to Sister Mary Owens, co-founder of Nyumbani Village, many of the children admitted are destitute. Majority of them were found roaming the villages, begging or scavenging for food after their parents died.

“The village is halfway between an institution and a community. We try as much as possible to simulate normal village life, with grandparents and the children forming blended families,” explained Owens.

The village stands out from the conventional set-up of children’s homes as it provides a family style way of life giving hope and home to AIDS orphans.
Voices of grandmas and grandpas
By WESLEY GITAGI

Pioneer beneficiaries of the Nyumbani village tell their stories...

Lena Muasya
A widow from Ikanga Location, Lena Muasya says she would be dead today had her admission to the Village been delayed by a just month.

She was admitted to the village with her two grandsons aged nine and 13 in February.

The children's parents died in 2001 leaving her with them in her care. Due to her advanced age, Muasya also needs attention and parenting was a responsibility that added an extra load on her back.

Ndumbuthu Ivate
An elderly widower, Ndumbuthu Ivate found himself in a precarious situation of having to wash and cook for his grandchildren following his daughter's death.

His wife of many years had died five years earlier and his daughter is the one who took care of him. Her sudden death ushered in the most stressful part of his life as he was forced to take up the responsibility of being parent to his grandchildren.

Malonza Malembwa
From Matinyani area, the elderly Malonza Malembwa was rescued with his three grandchildren from his desolate rural abashy in February.

It is his neighbours who alerted the provincial administration and church leaders of Malembwa's predicament after his son died leaving behind young children. They recommended he be admitted to the Village not only for his own sake, but also for the sake of the orphans under his care.

Damaris Ndana
From Kithivo area, Damaris Ndana's life nearly came to painful end after the death of her two daughter who left behind three children.

Crippled and widowed with no one to depend on, she relied on sympathetic neighbours and well-wishers for food and clothing until she was rescued in November, last year.

Her only wish is that in case she dies, her grandchildren will continue living in the Village so that they can complete their education.

Living the dreams of a priest
By Wesley Gitahi

The unique dream, which is slowly becoming Africa's potential solution to tackling the impact of HIV/AIDS on families is the brain-child of the late Catholic priest Father Angelo D'Agostino.

Four years ago, the priest modelled his outstanding vision alongside a small pilot project in Kwa-Zulu region in South Africa which is run by the Nelson Mandela Childrens Fund.

He then began to replicate the Mandela idea in Kenya, with ambitious plans to cater for more than 1,000 orphans.

Impassioned about making a difference in the lives of children orphaned by Aids, and left in the hands of caregivers who are already vulnerable and helpless, the priest approached several stakeholders including a coalition of donors to make his dream a reality.

Through careful planning and strategy, D'Agostino and his team obtained 1,000 acres of land, 14 kilometres off the Kitui-Nairobi road and started working on the project. The land was donated on a freehold lease basis by the Kitui County Council.

Each of the 28 households consists of a grandmother and the orphaned grandchildren. There are only two grandfathers in the entire Village, who take care of their grandchildren single-handedly.

The Village ensures that the children are brought up in line with the Kamba tradition. There is a separate house to accommodate the older boys who have undergone circumcision. The adolescents benefit from the knowledge of the elderly occupants, who in turn will benefit from the support of the younger population.

Families in the Village live in their own houses, tilling their own parcels of land and preparing their own meals independent of each other.

Situated within the Village is an all orphans primary school where each child narrates to the others about the loss of his/her parents.

Hot Courses Primary School, situated within the Village, is unique in the sense that its entire student population is orphaned. It is the first such learning institution to be established in the East African region. There are 218 children, 21 of them in different secondary schools while one is doing a degree course at Kenyatta University.

According to the manager, Mr Nicholas Makau, vocational opportunities in the form of training, tools, and start up financing for trades, cottage industry and agricultural endeavours will be provided with the goal of making them self reliant.

The Village which is geared for major construction works in its phase two expansion programme will eventually house 1,000 children and elderly guardians upon completion.

The programme is supported by private and public donor funding from individuals, foundations, corporations as well as government and non-government sources.

However, the administrators insist that the success and future growth of the institution will depend on the general support from the society.

Family way of life gives hope to Aids orphans

Continued from page 1

has been the case in the past where children are confined in an institution with a centralized authority to watch over them.

"It is unique in the sense that orphaned children live together with their guardians in a real family set up where they are provided with basic necessities," says Owens. She adds: "This is different from the traditional way of taking care of vulnerable orphans in children homes."

According to the Village manager, Mr Nicholas Makau, the set-up is geared to assist the orphans in recollecting their shattered existence and rise up to lead productive, fresh, safe and comfortable lives.

"We have basically translocated them to just another family home to overcome the trauma of losing their parents without necessarily herding them together into an institutional orphanage," he explained.

The Nyumbani Village discourages drastic changing structures of a rural home which could negatively affect the children's future.

"That is why we are hosting grandparents and the orphans together in a village but in separate self-contained houses," says Makau.

Family setting
He adds: "The Village was designed to provide a family-like setting for orphaned children under the stewardship of elderly adults and its slowly evolving into a big village within other rural areas."

The children receive love, sustenance, health-care and education, aiming at their physical and welfare development.

Makau says distressed grandparents who toiled hard in their youthful years to educate and bring up their children responsibly had their hopes of ageing gracefully abruptly shattered by the death of the children. The grandchildren suddenly found themselves becoming breadwinners once again.

Ms Mary Kalekye, a pioneer beneficiary of the Village is her only daughter in 2001. The girl left behind four children and Kalekye automatically assumed the role of being their mother.

The old woman had to make a supreme effort to put a meal on the table for the orphaned children and also cloth them and ensure they went to school.

"I found myself in a precarious situation that even threatened my own health because I personally needed special care due to my age," the 79 year old granddaughter told The Reject.

In the middle of extreme anxiety and desperation over the uncertain future, she was admitted into the Village together with her grandchildren in February last year following a referral by the local Catholic Priest.

Kalekye is among the 28 pioneer elderly mothers who for the last one year have been receiving care at the rescue facility since it was established two years ago.

Their only duty is to ensure that the African culture is maintained and that discipline is instilled in the children as they grow up.

The orphans are enrolled at Hot Courses Primary School, situated within the Village which also pays for their education besides providing food, shelter and clothing to them.

Admission
Getting a place in the Village is not easy as it is highly competitive. There is a long waiting list which has forced the administration to enforce a strict admission criterion.

When the Reject visited the village, prospective beneficiaries lined up waiting to be considered for admission into the facility as a compelling pressure to expand its capacity intensified.

For any child to be admitted, he or she must have lost both parents with no extended family. They must be needy and the grandparent must also be destitute.

"We use a committee that includes a social worker as well as community and religious leaders to help us make the choice and ensure only those who really have no other option are taken in," explains Owens.
Fear of SLDF militia still grips Mt Elgon residents

By JOHN ORONI

More mass graves might be discovered in Mt Elgon District following the killings perpetrated by the Sabaab Land Defence Force (SDLF) two years ago,

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC) sitting in Mt Elgon recently discovered a grave where five men who disobeyed orders to join the Sabaab Land Defence Force (SLDF) were brutally murdered and buried in a water spring.

The well is in the compound of a villager who fled the homestead due to the threats. Now the villager is demanding for the removal of the bodies since it was an abomination for outsiders to be buried in his home.

“Help me remove the bodies since my family has been having sleepless nights and we have nowhere to go,” the man told the Commission’s statement takers.

The locals also demanded a chance to give more details in a different forum saying sympathisers of the SLDF were watching them. They feared they could be attacked if they disclosed further information to the Commission during the public hearings.

“Assure us of our security first and get another forum for us to give you more information if you want to reconcile us. We cannot trust everyone in these sittings since majority of the participants have been sent to see who says what about the SLDF for information if you want to reconcile us,” the villager said.

Reconciliation

They demanded that the TJRC ensure that those in prison over the involvement in militia activities are released and settled on their farms before the Commission embarks on a reconciliation mission.

“We are ready to be forgiven by anyone we wronged and we are also ready to forgive but reconciliation requires both parties to be involved. How will the process go on while we are in custody and the other group that was wronged is involved in the exercise?” asked Kanai while recording his statement.

He said problems in the region were as a result of land allocation in Chepyuk Settlement Scheme. “The allocation of the farm was done dubiously by the provincial administration. They should be held accountable for what happened in the area,” he added.

The SLDF spokesman, Mr John Kanai who spoke on behalf of the former militiamen currently in prison said the reconciliation process being undertaken in the region will have little consequence if both groups are not involved.

The old man dressed in traditional attire, accused the Government of treating residents of the region as second class citizens, prompting a rebellion from the youth.

Kiplagat also assured them that the Commission will work around the clock to ensure security has been beefed up to avoid such incidents in future.

Kiplagat also held meetings in Eldoret with Kalenjin Council of Elders and Kikuyu elders where post election violence was prominently featured.

Clans to put arms down, embrace peace

By ODHIAMBO ODHIAMBO

Clans living in the larger Kuria District have vowed to stop fighting among themselves and live peacefully.

Kuria council of elders, referred to as Nchama resolved to curse anyone from the community who will kill or steal cattle from another clan.

Representatives from the four clans — Ba-gumbe, Bairege, Bukira and Nyabasi — said recurrent conflicts caused by cattle rustling had retarded education standards and general socio-economic development in the region.

The elders, led by chairman Matiko Mahiri said they would condemn cattle theft “through traditional rituals.” He also appealed to Government support in promoting peace in the area.

“We want the re-introduction of the outlawed gangs such as SunguSungu because security officers do not have the capacity to combat crime in this country,” he said.

This was said during a peace workshop held at Kehanca Hotel. A Peace Caravan brought together the community’s professionals, who included teachers, civil servants, opinion leaders, chiefs, youth and women leaders.

The participants also demanded a cross border meeting with their Tanzanian counterparts saying some of the raiders disappeared with cattle into the country’s Tarime District.

Kuria West DC, Mr James Mugwe regretted that they spend a lot of time and fuel pursuing cattle rustlers who were wreaking havoc in the region instead of addressing other pressing development needs.

The elders formed a committee to monitor peace initiatives in the region. They noted that proliferation of small arms from the neighbouring countries, cattle rustling and clanism were retarding socio-economic development in the two border districts.

Senior assistant director of Kenya Wildlife Service Mr Richard Lesyiampe shared conflict experiences from the Laikipia region.

“Managing conflict is more costly and bloody than tolerating peace,” Lesyiampe said. He advised: “Allow peace to prevail in your midst . . . pastoralist communities have stopped fighting and we wonder why the Kuriass should continue to butcher one another,” he said.

A peace caravan official from the Turkana region Ms Faith Akiro said every Kenyan had a responsibility to keep peace especially this time that Kenya has won accolades from the international community for conducting a peaceful referendum.

The court's operations and success is based on countries' co-operation. “It is, therefore, important to have a wide network of states where suspects can be incarcerated,” said Song.

He said the move means the ICC has now more than doubled the number of facilities available to detain and lock up suspects.

The court has no prison of its own, but runs a detention centre at a Dutch prison in Scheveningen, The Hague. The centre only holds suspects who are on trial and not those convicted.

A Danish official said that the country is ready to provide detention facilities of the highest standards whereas Finland will have to present the signed document to its Parliament for approval.

Without infrastructure of its own, the ICC depends mainly on goodwill of countries to enforce arrests, investigation and incarceration of convicts.

By DUNCAN MBOYAH

There will be no shortage of prisons to lock up those convicted by the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Three countries, Denmark, Finland and Belgium have signed an agreement with the ICC, providing incarceration facilities that will go a long way in disciplining those found guilty of infringing on the human rights of others.

The three joined Austria and the United Kingdom, who committed to provide prison facilities to the international court in 2005 and 2007.

Kenyan perpetrators of the 2007 post-election violence, which is being investigated by the ICC, could end up in any of these new prisons if convicted.

While signing the agreements during the first Rome Statute review conference in Kampala, Uganda, recently, the ICC president Mr Sang-Hyung Song said the locals could end up in any of these new prisons if convicted.

The old man dressed in traditional attire, accused the Government of treating residents of the region as second class citizens, prompting a rebellion from the youth who felt sidelined.

The TJRC chairman, Ambassador Bethwel Kiplagat praised the locals for the bold move. He assured them that the Commission will protect those who will give evidence.

Kiplagat also assured them that the Commission will work around the clock to ensure security has been beefed up to avoid such incidents in future.

Kiplagat also held meetings in Eldoret with Kalenjin Council of Elders and Kikuyu elders where post election violence was prominently featured.
Memories of Lancaster Talks that led to Kenya’s first constitution

By Nzinga Muasya

Despite his advanced age, Mr Eliud Ngala Mwendwa’s political memories of pre and post independent Kenya are still fresh and sharp.

Born in Kalia village, Matinyani Location in the larger Kitui District, Mwendwa, 87, is one of the few remaining politicians who actively participated in the Lancaster Conference in London that gave birth to Kenya’s first constitution that was voted out during the recent referendum.

A one time powerful minister in the late President Jomo Kenyatta’s government, Mwendwa says that the new Constitution endorsed by Kenyans during the referendum was a people driven document. The Lancaster Constitution was to a great extent imposed on Kenyans by colonialists bent on safeguarding their interests, he argues.

“We have seen wider consultations in this new constitution and everybody was involved. During the Lancaster talks the peoples’ input was minimal. Only a few African nationalists attended the talks in London,” remembers the former Minister for Labour and one time MP for Kitui Central.

Mwendwa says the Lancaster conference talks were held in 1960, 1962 and 1963 in which Kenya’s constitutional framework and independence were negotiated.

“The first conference in 1960 was under the chairmanship of Mr Ian McLeod, the secretary of state for colonies which did not bear any fruit,” says Mwendwa. He adds: “McLeod issued an interim Constitution.”

He explains: “The second conference in 1962 resulted in a framework of self governance that was negotiated. The last conference in 1963 ended constitutional arrangements for Kenya’s independence.”

The 1963 Constitution of Kenya marked the end of more than 70 years of colonial rule.

However, Mwendwa says, the journey to the birth of post-independence constitution was not easy. “The process unlike now was fraught with many difficulties and challenges as not everyone’s views were sought.”

He says the Constitution was arrived at under exceptional circumstances where the colonialists arm-twisted the Cabinet to accept its provisions.

Taking time to recall his colleagues who attended the Lancaster Talks, Mwendwa scratches his head and explains that Mr Tom Mbaya, who was the secretary of the group of ministers, led the delegation to the conference.

In the delegation there was Mr James Gichuru, Mr Martin Shikuku, Dr Njorge Mungai, Dr Gikonyo Kiano, Mr Oginga Odinga, Mr Mbiyu Koinange, Mr Jeremiah Nganga, Mr George Ntihenge, Mr Duncan Mwanyumba, Mr Lawrence Sagini and Mwendwa himself.

Mwendwa recalls the above named individuals were regarded as African nationalists and were held in high esteem as people who would give the country independence through a constitution.

“Property rights

Property was a matter of intense conflict just before independence. The most valuable land being the tribal land which was exclusively owned by white settlers who believed their property rights must be protected. However, nationalists wanted land reforms and resettlement.

The 999 years lease on land was a contentious issue because Kenyans realised the colonialists wanted to protect their huge chunks of fertile land snatched from the locals.

“Majimbo and detention without trial were other contested issues in the talks,” he reveals.

“The bottom line is that Kenyans were eager for independence and after protracted talks, Mr James Gichuru, the eldest among the ministers said it was better to accept the document as a step to attaining independence and make amendments later,” Mwendwa says. “We all saw the sense in that and accepted although we knew the document was faulty.”

The octogenarian recounts that the only procedural undertakings during the promulgation of the old constitution were the trips to London by members of the Cabinet to attend the Lancaster talks in which he was given an entry pass number 045 which he has safely kept over the years.

The delegation felt that the colonialists wanted to use them as rubber stamps and the talks were punctuated with heated debates.

Inclusive process

Drawing parallels with the newly endorsed Constitution, the former legislator notes that the document drafted by the Committee of Experts was all inclusive and people driven. He adds that the new law caters for the welfare of all Kenyans. He says: “Kenya has finally broken the yoke of colonialism by enacting a people driven constitution negotiated within the country and among Kenyans.”

He avers: “The new Constitution will certainly play a key role in changing the country’s status from the Third World to First World and guarantees attainment of Vision 2030 and UN Millennium Development Goals.”

He points out that the new set of laws provides for creation of independent institutions that make it impossible for an individual to flout it for selfish reasons unlike the Lancaster Constitution that was abused by politicians for self gain.

“The former minister says that it may take time for the fruits of the new Constitution to be felt and urges Kenyans to be patient.

“The new Constitution has clearly stipulated the implementation stages, procedures and time frames. The process is gradual and it could take five years before Kenyans feel the real change,” he asserts.

On the thorny issue of 999-year lease on land, Mwendwa recalls how the clause was sneaked into the old constitution without the Africans approval during Lancaster Conference talks.

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Memories of Lancaster Talks that led to Kenya's first constitution

Continued from page 4
talks. He says that a Mr Thurgood Marshall, an American civil rights activist and a constitutional lawyer who was representing the Kenyan delegation as legal adviser cunningly and single-handedly sneaked the Bill of Rights into the document.

Bill of Rights

Hidden somewhere in the Bill of Rights was in the proposed Constitution presented at the Lancaster talks, Kenyans did not regard it as an urgent matter, saying there were more pressing issues.

During his time in the country's leadership, Mwendwa held ministerial docket's of Labour as well as Power and Communication. He is credited with initiating a bill to introduce the National Social Communication. He is credited with initiating sets of Labour as well as Power and Communication.

Mr Thurgood Marshall, a constitutional lawyer who was representing the Kenyan delegation as legal adviser cunningly and single-handedly sneaked the Bill of Rights into the document.

Entry into politics

It is while in the teaching profession that he met former Health minister and a nominated LEGCO member Mr James Muimi Nzau who prevailed upon him to join politics. Ironically Mwendwa challenged Nzau in the 1961 hotly contested General Elections and trounced the incumbent MP. He retained the seat until 1974 when he was edged out by a new comer, Mr Daniel Muimi who was then appointed Minister for Information and Broadcasting.

He says that Kenyatta's men campaigned against him after he fell out of favour with the powers that be for being too close to the President's opponent, Mr Tom Mboya, who was then Minister for Planning.

Another conflict between Mwendwa and the President was in the offing and it soured their relationship beyond redemption. During 1971 attempted coup against Kenyatta's government, Mwendwa's brother, the then Chief Justice Kitili Mwendwa was implicated along with Army Chief Joseph Ndolo. When a motion was brought in parliament to discuss the CJ, Mwendwa flatly objected to the motion remarking that "blood was thicker than water." These remarks dealt him the final blow and threw him into political oblivion.

The retired politician is a now a commercial farmer leading a quiet life in his rural home in the outskirts of Kitui town where he grows grafted mangoes, beans, maize and vegetables in his 50 acre farm.

By NZINGA MUASYA

New law creates foundation for unity

A few days before the referendum vote early last month tension was high in the country. There were fears that violence could break out if certain groups' desires were not fulfilled in the voting. A month after the vote, calls for unity are still being heard across the country as Kenyans urge that people move forward to constitutional implementation.

The unity should be based on the strong foundation of peace and harmony. It should transcend the borders of ethnicity, religion and social standing. The Bishop of the Kitui Catholic Diocese Antony Muheria has been at the forefront in urging unity despite having been against the new Constitution.

Unity

"As a church, we have a bigger role to unite all the people regardless of how they voted. We must remind our people of the National Anthem which is a prayer that should be recited by all for the love of this country," said Muheria.

The Bishop said that the decision by the majority must be embraced by all but the country must accommodate the contentious issues that were raised during the campaign period.

"It is our hope that the government will call for discussions and dialogue with the church leaders to see how these concerns can be addressed. In the meantime, the church will seek all the avenues to engage with the leadership," said Muheria.

The clergyman notes that the laws endorsed by Kenyans should not just be "written texts but ought to be enforceable to weed out impunity and many ills that plague the country."

A studio technician in Kitui town, Mr Marc Musembi, concurs with the bishop that the passage of the document does not mean it is good or that the common man is going to benefit immediately. He says: "The contentious issues should be looked into immediately for the benefit of all Kenyans," he says.

However a businesswoman in Kitui, Mrs Lena Mutunga, sees the new Constitution as a new dawn for women and a big achievement.

"As women of this country we feel honoured since the new Constitution promises better things. Men have intimidated women for a long time thinking they are the only ones who can lead," reiterated Mutunga.

However, she says even as implementation begins, all the sticky clauses should be ironed out as soon as possible.

And former Cabinet Minister, Mr Ngala Mwendwa, 87, says that the new constitution lifts the country from the yolk of colonialism. Mwendwa was one of the key leaders who participated in the Lancaster conference that gave birth to the old constitution that was recently voted out by Kenyans.

"The old constitution which I helped to midwife was purely to serve colonial masters but this new document is Kenyan made having been written by Kenyans and endorsed by majority of Kenyans," said Mwendwa. He added: "Kenyans now have a new Constitution they can identify with."

Civic education intervention gives Nyanza high voter turnout

By OLOO JANAK

There has been voter apathy in Nyanza over the last two decades even as people in the region are deemed to be the most politically active and conscious in Kenya. However, in the just concluded referendum, Nyanza recorded one of the highest voter turnouts among Kenya's eight provinces. This has largely been credited to intense campaigns by civil society organisations.

Nyanza residents are known to engage in animated and often heated political discussions at markets, homes, villages and bars, virtually the whole day.

People from other parts of Kenya have often expressed amazement that during campaigns or any other political activity, Nyanza residents often suspend other engagements including jobs and farm work to fully participate.

Yet on the voting day, the enthusiasm at rallies and public discussions has never translated to massive votes as desired.

Nyanza returned a vote of 1,740,033 in favour of the Constitution against 101,491. The change has been attributed to determined and consistent campaigns by civil society organisations in the province that had long expressed worry over low voter turnout.

Voter mobilisation

Different civil society groups mapped out Nyanza, taking different constituencies, first to mobilise residents to turn out in large numbers to register as voters when the Interim Independent Electoral Commission (IIEC) began the process in May.

The politicians entered the campaign trail to find an already converted population — enthusiasti-cally ferried people to polling stations but refused to carry those who had not voted saying they were "sabotaging the referendum process".

Most shops and business premises remained closed in the morning and only opened later in the afternoon after people had voted. And even then, some people were keen to check with workers at various business premises if indeed they voted and asked them to confirm if their employers had released them to go and vote.

"We closed our business to allow workers to go and vote because we know how important the new Constitution is for peace," said a businessman of Asian origin interviewed in Migori.

During the post election violence, the Asian business community in Kisumu incurred heavy losses after most of their premises were looted by demonstrators.

"A new Constitution can bring peace through free and fair elections. We do not want violence again, it was bad," said another Migori businessman of Asian extraction.

Peace building

The civil society organisations also worked closely with the institution of elders including the Luos Council of Elders whose leaders including Ker Rüga Omolo led a team to meet their Kuria counterparts including the Irongo, both powerful socio-political outfits that ensured harmony prevailed between the two communities.

"This new Constitution is going to deal with the electoral loopholes that brought violence and will stop rigging, displacement of people and address the skewed distribution of resources," was a common message to people at civic forums.
Making money out of waste material

Jobless youth get innovative with the troublesome water weed

By CAROLINE OYUGI

While the water hyacinth has been a menace to many a people along the shores, those who have accepted that it will be with them in a long time are putting it to good use.

In some countries, water hyacinth has been used to produce biogas and compost. Zingira Youth Group in Kisumu District has experienced the beauty of water hyacinth.

Recycling

The group recycles waste and makes furniture, ornaments and other household goods. For the past four years, they have been using the water hyacinth to make artifacts for sale.

The group has given an opportunity to more than 30 youths who are now self-employed. According to Mr Dennis Otiendo, they try to use any waste material to make functional things.

“Waste management is one of the big problems that Kenyans are experiencing right now and recycling waste as raw materials is one of the best ways to cope with the problem,” explains Otiendo.

He adds: “Using waste helps one to make maximum profit because most times they are freely available. This means that production costs are very low.”

A visit to Kick Innovation Centre in Kalo- leni Estate is a true testimony that one man’s meat is another man’s poison. These youths can make something out of anything.

Creativity

They make necklaces out of bottle tops, handbags from used paper bags, bones, tins, wood or almost anything that has been thrown but they think can be useful.

“One has to be very creative in order to survive in this market,” says Edgar Owino, one of the group members. “People keep on trying to copy what you have done and this means you have to come up with something new now and then.”

He says the solution would be in patenting Kenyan products. Ownership of Kenyan products has suffered because unique products such as the kikoi and kyondo have been taken over by other countries because the country did not take initiative to patent them.

Products made from water hyacinth are beautiful but the process is tedious. It takes one man seven days to make a one-seater couch. A full sofa set, with two and three-seater couches takes between 20 to 30 days depending on the design and the individual’s speed. “Water hyacinth are very delicate, they can easily be attacked by bacteria which leads to rotting if not well taken care of. They also have a lot of water and are very spongy,” explains Otiendo.

The weed, therefore, has to be dried over a period of time, mixed with some chemicals to avoid rotting then made into weaving ropes. The end product is then covered in varnish to have a shiny finish. The weaving process requires a lot of skill and patience. Members of this group have been getting their daily bread here and some have ever furthered their education through this.

Mr Mark Oyoo will forever be grateful to the friend who introduced him to this business. Oyoo had just completed his secondary school education and had no college fees despite having attained a B in KCSE. As it is the norm in Kisumu, he joined the bodaboda (bicycle taxi) business.

Income

“After being in this business for four months, I got tired. The bodaboda business is mostly associated with rowdy and illiterate people which I believe I am not. That is when I approached Otiendo who was already a member of the group,” says Oyoo. He adds: “Through this business I have been able to pay for my fees at a local university. I work throughout the day and attend evening classes.

Residents of Kisumu and Kenya at large have accepted these products and are buying them on a large scale. “We started by advertising them on our own. We made sure that each one of us had an item made from water hyacinth in the house. People would admire and enquire about them. With time, they placed orders and visited our store,” says Otiendo while swinging on a hyacinth office chair. “With time the group has spread its wings around Kenya and even overseas. This they achieved by attending exhibitions and advertising their products online hence reaching many potential customers.

“We are happy with the response. Right now we are always sure of selling everything we make,” explains Otiendo adding that they prefer foreign to local buyers because they do not bargain and hence pay more. A set of seats goes for between KSh25,000 and KSh55,000. They also sell magazine stands, tables, carpets and doormats ranging from KSh500 to KSh10,000 depending on the size and design.

Their products are now readily available even in the markets, supermarkets and show rooms.

Mrs. Margaret Omondi who owns a salon at Mega Plaza in Kisumu bought the first item two years ago and has gone back for more. “I first bought a magazine stand and my customers always asked where I bought it. After noticing many people admired the merchandise, I started buying more items for my salon and house,” says Omondi.

She has since directed more than 20 customers to Zingira Youth Group. Most customers like the creatively done products that have a unique African touch.

Care and maintenance

Otiendo advises that consumers must take good care of these products because when neglected they can be attacked by insects. They should also be as dry as possible to avoid being attacked by bacteria. Otiendo is of the belief that there is nothing like lack of jobs in Kenya. From his observation, people do not want to think and start something new. He believes that if you cannot get a job then you must create it.
Menace that is the water weed

By CAROLINE OYUGI

To those living by the shores of Lake Victoria, fishing is the main source of livelihood. It earns income either directly or indirectly for the residents. However, when anything happens to the lake, then this source of livelihood disappears.

In the early 1990s, a weed appeared on the waters of Lake Victoria. From afar, it gave the lake waters a green look. On getting nearer, it gave the lake the impression of a green carpet.

While green is beautiful, this green weed, known as the water hyacinth actually spelt disaster for the lake.

The water hyacinth which is found in lakes, swamps, dams and riverine wetlands and most significantly in Lake Victoria, has been associated with negative environmental and economic effects. It has caused havoc to the marine transport, fishing activities and water supply system.

The weed has interfered with the fish’s natural habitat by blocking light and interfering with oxygen circulation leading to reduction in fish population. According to scientists, the weed spreads out at an alarming rate doubling its biomass every 15 days.

Fishermen interviewed by The Rejeck in Kisumu, say fishing is now very cumbersome. Some fishermen now have to work two jobs in order to cover their day-to-day expenses.

Alternative

“I am at times forced to wash cars in order to supplement my income,” says Mr. John Odoyo, a fisherman at Dunga Beach in Kisumu.

Before the hyacinth attacked the lake, Odoyo solely relied on fishing as his source of income. The hyacinth has also drained domestic water for many residents along the shores of Lake Victoria as it has been affected by the rotten weeds which often lead to discoloration and foul smell.

“The water is very dirty and one has to paddle out, “ says one fisherman. “The weeds have provided a habitat for animals such as snakes, crocodiles, hippos while removing the water hyacinth and are exposed to water borne diseases such as bilharzia.

The group decries lack of adequate finance as a major setback. They are appealing to the Government and non-governmental organisations to help them in acquiring modern and efficient equipment.

“People need lab coats, protective suits and uniforms when we begin using this equipment,” says Onam.

The group also stresses on the need for regular training on the latest technology in clearing the lake of weeds.

“People need to be updated on the latest technology so as to be able to clear the lake,” says Onam.

Manure

According to Mr. Bernard Odinga, the project’s chairman, the group is making use of the weed for manure. The organisation has resorted to selling a portion of it ferried to farms as manure.

One chair cost KSh35,000 while the table mats cost between KSh550 to KSh600. The products are so fascinating and attract as much as KSh35,000 which many clients pay without batting an eyelid.

Many will never think of using weeds without them already being a menace. But not this self-help group that is making use of the old adage, if you cannot beat them join them. The group has learnt to make good use of the water hyacinth and are tapping income from it.

Kisumu residents have resorted to using the otherwise noxious plant for economic gain. Looking at the end products, one has to acknowledge and appreciate the creative and innovative mind of the group.

Under the umbrella of Agulu Environmental Improvement-Okoa Ziwa project, a community based organisation, fishermen have resorted to the manual removal of the plant within the larger Kisumu District. The organisation comprises of all the fishing community including men and women.

The organisation’s field coordinator, Mr. Peter Onam, says farmers have experienced bumper harvests for the short duration they have used manure made from the weed.

“I managed to harvest 20 bags of maize and beans last year when we began using this manure. It works better than artificial fertilizers that are also expensive,” says Onam.

The plant is allowed to decompose after which it is ferried to farms as manure. Due to the large volumes of hyacinth, the organization has resorted to selling a portion to an association of Women in Fishing Programme (WIFP). Some of the WIFP members who are living with HIV, earn a living from the same.

A woman pulls a cart loaded with water hyacinth to decompose for manure. Picture: Maurice Alal

Farmers reap from the hyacinth manure

By OLICK FELIX

Many will never think of using weeds with-in their farms as they already are a menace. But not this self-help group that is making use of the old adage, if you cannot beat them join them. The group has learnt to make good use of the water hyacinth and are tapping income from it.

The plant hampers lake transport and adds much congestion to the voyage. It has also caused havoc to the marine transport, fishing activities and water supply system.

The manure thus gained from the weed also has a high market value in agricultural activities. Therefore, the organisation is planning to use the manure made from the weeds for agriculture.

Manure from the weed is also expensive.

“I am at times forced to wash cars in order to supplement my income,” says Mr. John Odoyo, a fisherman at Dunga Beach in Kisumu.

The weed also has an added advantage of being able to produce very good manure. It works better than artificial fertilizers as well.

The fishermen encounter dangerous animals such as snakes, crocodiles, hippos while removing the water hyacinth and are exposed to water borne diseases such as bilharzia.

The group decries lack of adequate finance as a major setback. They are appealing to the Government and non-governmental organisations to help them in acquiring modern and efficient equipment.

“People need lab coats, protective suits and uniforms when we begin using this equipment,” says Onam.

However, it has not been an easy journey for the Agulu Environmental Improvement group. They have faced a myriad of challenges in their quest to put food on the table.

Challenges

The water hyacinth has in the past caused a lot of misery to thousands of fishermen in the larger Lake Victoria region, with many getting trapped in the cold for days.

The plant hampers lake transport and adversely affects business.

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The group decries lack of adequate finance as a major setback. They are appealing to the Government and non-governmental organisations to help them in acquiring modern and efficient equipment.

“One chair cost KSh35,000 while the table mats cost between KSh550 to KSh600. This has really improved the lives of the fishing folk,” says Odinga.

I managed to harvest 20 bags of maize and beans last year when we began using this manure. It works better than artificial fertilizers that are also expensive.”

— Peter Onam, field coordinator, Agulu Environmental Improvement-Okoa Ziwa project
Uncelebrated athletics hero
Kenya’s first Olympics medalist fades into oblivion

By WILSON ROTICH

Kenyan athletes have been breaking record after record on track events. Even as Kenyans celebrate David Rudisha for having shattered the 800 meters record recently in Berlin, there is one man who remains unsung for having won Kenya’s first medal in the race.

As the Kenyan national anthem keeps playing over and over again, one man stands tall quietly for having provided the template for athletes to put the country on the global map.

Olympic icon

There is nothing to show of the fact that he was the first athletic hero to bring Kenya its first Olympic medal. The unsung hero is none other than Wilson Kiprugut Chumo, the first ever Kenyan Olympic medalist.

Nurtured and inspired, Kiprugut lives on his five acre farm overlooking the vast multinational tea companies, three miles West of Kericho town with his equally ageing wife.

Looking back to that first race, Kiprugut remembers how he won the bronze medal in the 800 metres at the Summer Olympics in Tokyo Japan in 1964, becoming the first Kenyan athlete to win an Olympic medal.

He blames his third position on a Jamaican who allegedly pushed him.

Kiprugut recalls that due to his stamina, he did not fall down but instead it is his opponent who hit a stone on the margin. “Since then, I learnt to be a front starter to avoid mischievous competitors who might want to trip me,” he says with nostalgia.

Kiprugut was among those who formed part of the audience at the Africa Senior Championship held at the Nyayo National Stadium in Nairobi in July 2010, a week after he celebrated his 70th birthday. Speaking to the Reject after the event he says: “That day I came third while a Canadian was second as Peter Snell from New Zealand took the gold medal.”

Since the day he set the country on the Olympic medals map, Kenyan athletes have won over 75 medals in athletics for both track and field events.

Kenya first participated at the Olympic Games in 1956 and has sent athletes to compete in the Summer Olympic Games every year except in 1976 and 1980.

In the 1966 British Empire and Commonwealth Games, Kiprugut won the 880 yards bronze medal.

A couple of years later, the little known hero increased his speed to win the silver medal at the Summer Olympics held in Mexico City in 1968 after sprinting for 1 minute 44.5 seconds. He won two Gold medals — in the 400 and 800 meters — at the All Africa Games Athletics in 1965.

He recalls that in 1967 he came second at the indoor games in Toronto, Canada. “I did my warm up exercises close to an electric heater to keep warm because I did not have proper attire for the extremely cold weather,” remembers Kiprugut. He says: “I was not used to running on a wood-en-carpeted indoor field. I thought it would be slippery but they gave me nice spikes.”

Growing-up

The 800 metres champion went to school at Kaptebenet Primary School in Kericho District from 1950 to 1954 and shifted to Sitotwet Intermediate School 20 kilometres away from his home from 1955 to 1957.

Kiprugut recalls walking for 40 kilometres each day to school. He says this is what helped him develop athletics stamina.

Asked if he remembers how he found his way to the top echelons of athletics, Kiprugut remembers one soldier who inspired him. Captain Kiptonui from North Rift identified him as a potential athlete and in 1959 he recruited him into the Kenya Armed Forces, then known as the Kings African Rifles where he specialised in driving.

The athletics guru advises the current budding athletes to seize the provision of dual citizenship in Chapter 3 of the new Kenyan law to benefit from athletics globally instead of crowding at home.

Forgotten hero

Despite all this, nothing has been named after this hero except his nine children and equally ageing wife of 49 years. No street, no stadium, no school, nothing has been christened after him yet the Kenyan flag was hoisted internationally for the first time ever in his honour in 1964, one year after independence.

Kericho District Sports Officer, Mr Charles Ngerechi says he is working closely with the Kericho Municipality to ensure that the Kericho Green Stadium is named after Kiprugut Chumo. “Wilson Kiprugut deserves to be honoured as one of Kenya’s Heroes on the Mashujaa Day (Heroes’ Day) that is provided for in Chapter 2 of the new constitution,” says Ngerechi.

Athletics Kenya, in conjunction with the Go to Sports Marketing Company Limited and Kericho Municipality have organised the Great Highlands Marathon on September 4th 2010 in Kericho. The Director of Go to Sports Marketing Company Limited, Mr David Ruto says the event will allow Kiprugut and other athletes who have won awards and admiration across the world to be celebrated in their own backyard.

A number of athletes who hail from the great highlands will be present. These include Mr Sammy Maritim (veteran marathoner), Mercy Cherono (2010 World Youth Champion), Paul Koech (Olympic gold medalist), Emily Chebet (World Cross Country gold medalist), among others.

Since the day he set the country on the Olympic medals map, Kenyan athletes have won over 75 medals in athletics for both track and field events.
ARV programme threatened with funding shortage

By ARTHUR OKWEMBA

The Government is putting on a brave face over reports that it has lost significant financing from the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria but behind the scenes is a picture of growing unease.

In a dossier prepared by a team of technical experts and presented to senior officials in the ministries of Health and Finance, the future of ARV treatment hangs in the balance unless the Government comes to bridge a huge gap or scouts for new donors.

Funding for paediatric treatment, which is done mainly by the Clinton HIV/AIDS Initiative, will not happen after the end of this year. The Foundation is going to use close to one billion shillings this year on treatment and care of HIV positive children. Over 25,000 children are on ARV treatment, with more than 50,000 still waiting to get access to these life prolonging drugs.

With this funding coming to an end, the Government is expected to have scouted for a new donor or provided budgetary allocation to take over the children treatment programme.

Funding gap

In recent communication to the ministries of Medical Services and Finance, experts warn that in view of the fact that PEPFAR funding will remain the same for the next five years and the Clinton HIV/AIDS Initiative is coming to an end in 2010, the Government needs to come urgently to bridge the gap in funding.

Overall, the funding situation does not look good for the country with a huge funding gap remaining even after all the funding from the approved Round 7 of the Global Fund, PEPFAR and Clinton HIV/AIDS initiative, put together.

In the year 2010-2011, the country needs KSh7.8 billion to manage over 540,000 adult and children on ARV treatment. It can raise only KSh5 billion from the three sources, leaving a funding gap of about KSh2.5 billion. In the year 2011-2012, the ARV treatment programme is projected to cost over KSh10 billion to manage about 680,000 patients.

New funding sources

Only KSh4.5 billion is assured from development partners, leaving a gap of about KSh6 billion. For the year 2012-2013, the projected ARV cost for 770,000 people is KSh12 billion, but only KSh4.5 billion is assured from Round 7, PEPFAR and Clinton Initiative put together.

Meaning new sources need to be found to bridge the gap of KSh7.5 billion.

The committee that came up with this costing now wants the Government to fill the gap for the next three years, which totals to KSh16 billion. By the end of last year, 360,000 people were actively on antiretroviral treatment.

These increased costs take into consideration the new World Health Organisation's guidelines and recommendations of the technical committee whose membership was drawn from the two key ministries of Health, WHO, universities and other key stakeholders.

In their recommendations, the committee agreed that HIV positive persons should be put on antiretroviral treatment once their CD4 count — the measure of the immune strength — falls below 350 instead of the current 200. The new rule was expected to start in July, this year.

Recommendation

Shifting from the stavudine to less toxic drug tenofovir; aggressive use laboratory to monitor CD4 count and viral load and initiating antiretroviral therapy in HIV positive patients who have active TB and chronic active hepatitis B irrespective of their CD4 cell count; are the other recommendations of the technical committee which are going to push up the cost of managing the disease.

Funding problems are emerging at time when the country has lost an appeal for Round 9 funding totalling $75 million, making life very difficult for the patients and those in charge of running ARV treatment programmes.

The only money the Government is assured of from the Global Fund is about KSh6.5 billion, the remaining disbursements for Round 7.

Government functionaries are said to be mad with the loss of appeal of round 9, terming Global Fund funding as problematic and very competitive.

During a recent meeting to discuss the round 9 outcome, official from the Ministry of Medical Services, National Aids Control Council and National Aids/ STD Control Programme are said to have asked a team to look into other sources of funding to avoid the nasty encounters with the Global Fund.

“There are serious considerations to look for other sources funding from China, World Bank and other bilateral arrangements since Global Fund funding can no longer be assured,” says one of the officers who attended the meeting.

Also being explored is putting an extra tax on air-time and flight tickets, which will go towards financing HIV/Aids programme. This is one of the innovative ways the Clinton Foundation raises its funds through what is referred to as French airline ticket solidarity levy.

Government is also toying with the idea of renegotiating with PEPFAR to support more patients on its programme.

Individual Kenyans and companies may also be asked to contribute to the treatment of the patients in the manner they are comfortable with such as adopting a patient(s). Managing one patient in a year costs about KSh15,000.

Pharmaceutical

There are further plans to enter into public-private partnerships with pharmaceutical companies, especially the locally based, for them to produce and sell the government antiretroviral drugs at a cheaper price. The team tasked with looking at these alternative sources of funding is expected to come up with a concept paper detailing the way forward.

Failure to get Round 9 may have other implications. It is likely to affect the enthusiasm to apply for Round 10, which Global Fund is expected to start calling for proposals from May. Morale among some of the key ministry officials involved in preparing the proposal is said to be very low.

This sorry state of funding the country finds itself in is bound to have serious consequences on the treatment programme if nothing happens.

More than 100,000 current patients on treatment and new ones who benefit from Global Fund may be forced to interrupt treatment if drugs are not forthcoming. If this happens, then the chances for the development of resistance strains, which cost 10 times more to treat, is very high.

Treatment disruption

HIV experts fear problems with funding and any disruptions in treatment programmes will dampen the interest of people to get tested. Studies have shown that ARVs are an incentive to get tested as many people believe they will receive treatment and continue leading productive lives even if found to be HIV positive.

About three months ago, the country launched an ambitious four year HIV programme, The Kenya National Aids Strategic Plan 2009–2013, which includes all aspects of the disease control at an estimated cost of KSh267 billion.

The success of this project was hugely pegged on the Global Fund’s continued support especially for the next two years.
Kenya urged seek other options for HIV funding

By GEOFFREY KAMADI

Accountability allegations and a lack of transparency on the utilization of funds for HIV/AIDS has placed the country at a crossroad. These claims have had Kenya lose out on global funding for HIV/AIDS. This therefore, nudges the country to look for alternative sources of funding if the war against HIV/AIDS has to be won. As things stand now, Round 10 of Global Funds is likely to be delayed. The Funds should have come in June, meaning the money will not be available until November 2010 or by early 2011. “The time gap is quite big, hence we may have to ask to the same Global Fund to facilitate a donor’s conference so that we can breach the gap if we do not get the grant,” says Mr Allan Ragi, Executive Director Kenya AIDS NGO’s Consortium (KANCO).

Other possible sources for funding need to be explored says Ragi who cites the Zimbabwe example, which has successfully managed to source funds from within for its ARV’s programme. “Zimbabwe has subjected cellphone calls to a kind of levy to very good effect and as a result, only a very small segment of its population is paying for ARV’s,” explains Ragi. Early last November, the Government sent a powerful delegation led by Public Health Minister, Mrs Beth Mugo to the Global Fund 20th board meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The country was desperate for an opportunity to appeal against the decision by Global Fund managers to deny it KSh25 billion grant. It was a uphill task, considering the allegations the country faced over its use of previous funds, and the lukewarm relations with the United States over the same. “We will not realise the harmonisation goal to bring all donors on board following our failure to secure the grant, something which has been happening in the past,” says Ragi. Whereas much has been said about what lies ahead following the country’s failure to secure the grant money, little has been highlighted about the country’s other options. Ragi, who is a member of the Country Coordinating Mechanism (CCM) says the country should make use of whatever money is already available.

Accountability

“This can be achieved by re-programming. There is money in the country but it may not be enough,” explains Ragi. CCM sets all organisations in the country seeking Global Fund money, and is held accountable by the Global Fund. He urges that a donor conference may need to be held to assess the gap between Global Fund Round 9 and the Global Fund Round 10, when it comes. According to Dr William Muraah, a health and strategy consultant, the country missed out on a golden opportunity, when it failed to adopt recommendations proposed by an NGO known as Poverty Eradication Network (PEN). PEN had contracted a consultant to develop a standard by which every Civil Society Organization (CSO) should abide by when applying for funds. The move would have ironed out issues of mis-management of funds by CSOs.

Muraah says mismanagement of funds contributed a great deal to Kenya missing out on Global Fund for HIV in the previous rounds. “Many CSO organizations took the grant but never implemented HIV programmes. In addition, these organisations never accounted for the money,” explains Muraah. The Executive Director of Blood Link Foundation, Mr Joseph Wangendo, says that organisations should become creative on source funding. As far as he is concerned, there are a lot of opportunities existing within the country and that the need to look for funding elsewhere is not all that necessary. “Donors want to see new thinking. They are willing to put their money in organizations which come up with a new kind of thinking,” he says.

Blood Link Foundation has been in operation for the past 16 years and has succeeded in sourcing for funds for its programme from within the country. It works in partnership with the National Blood Transfusion Service.

Its function is to collect safe blood by targeting corporate organizations in the country. The Foundation saw the need to collect safe blood after the World Health Organisation (WHO) established in 2004 that 20 percent of HIV infection resulted from transfusion of contaminated blood.

Saddle wood traders invade Isiolo

By HUSSEIN DIDDO

The Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) officers have managed to intercept and arrest two suspects with a tonne of saddle wood on transit at Oldonyiro Division, Isiolo District.

The officers, acting on a tip off from the public, intercepted the truck on its way to Nanyuki town and recovered the precious tree species that is under threat of extinction due to its high commercial value in perfume industry.

The officers also managed to recover 21 carving axes which were used in extraction of the commodity in the area.

The suspects were taken to Nanyuki Police Station where they are assisting police with investigations.

Illegal harvesting of saddle wood roots and stems is rampant in Oldonyiro as unscrupulous traders cast their nets to remote areas of Isiolo, taking advantage of the community’s ignorance.

The KWS warden in Isiolo, Mr Thomas Mailu said saddle wood traders moved to Isiolo at the beginning of the year because people in the district do not understand the tree’s commercial value.

He said the businessmen have moved from high alert areas like Maasailand and Ukambani by secretly approaching herders and paying them as little as KSh300 per ten kilograms to dig out the roots and cut stems of the wood while tending to their livestock.

“Unscrupulous traders are focusing on Isiolo as they are fleeing from high alert areas such as Ukambani and parts of Rift Valley especially Maasailand,” said Mailu. He added: “They are secretly contracting herdsmen for as little as KSh500 for every ten kilograms of saddle wood stems and roots.”

Mailu reiterated: “They will not escape our surveillance and we shall catch up with them.”

Saddle wood plants are scattered in parts of Northern Kenya but are yet to be identified by pastoralists who know little about the plant.

Traders transport the illegal consignments in trucks transporting charcoal to other major towns before embarking on a discreet mode of transportation to the factory in Tanzania.

Saddle wood has a high market demand for its high chemical components which is used in processing of perfume in the Middle East. Major- ity of the traders first transport the products to Tanzania for packaging.

Child trafficking on the rise

By RYAN MATHENG

Cases of child trafficking have started coming up in Kigumo District with police arresting a suspect who lured two young girls to Kisumu and Litein towns.

The suspect was arrested by police in Kisumu after a ten-year-old girl was found abandoned in Litein town by members of the public who alerted the police.

The suspect is said to have visited villages in Kigumo saying the girls would be employed as house girls by well paying families.

Kigumo OCPD, Mr Saidi Mohammed said the minor from Kamukambi was rescued as efforts were being made to trace the other girl in Kisumu. He said his counterparts in Nyanza were helping trace the missing girl.

At the same time Mohammed warned parents to monitor their children’s movement.

"Investigations revealed that the mother of one of the girls is mentally challenged and did not know how the minor was picked," said Mohammed.

Saddle wood stems and roots that were confiscated by KWS officials in Isiolo. Saddle wood harvesting has become rampant as unscrupulous businessmen cash in on its economic value. Picture: Hussein Dido
Charcoal ban to stay

By NZINGA MUASYA

The ban on charcoal burning and transportation in the larger Kitui District will remain in force despite the new Government rules licensing charcoal burning and transportation across the country.

Consequently, the Kenya Forest Services has suspended issuing of charcoal movement permits until a leaders’ meeting is called to discuss implementation of the new rules and regulations contained in the Forest Act 2009.

The decision was arrived at during a consultative meeting on the charcoal industry held at a Kitui hotel recently where it was agreed that the ban should be sustained to allow for a leaders’ meeting to chart the way forward.

“We have, therefore, suspended the issuance of charcoal movement permits until the matter is discussed conclusively by local leaders. Any lorry caught transporting charcoal will be impounded and the owner penalized,” warned Mr Maurice Wanyiri, Kitui zone forest manager.

Environmental degradation

Though the Forest Act 2009 provides for the lifting of the ban on charcoal burning and transportation, there are fears that charcoal burners will exploit the noble idea and that could eventually result in severe environmental degradation.

“There is massive charcoal burning in this region and if the ban is lifted without clear methods of control and regulation on charcoal production, the forest cover will soon be depleted,” said Mr Joshua Chepcheng, Kitui District Commissioner.

The DC lamented that the charcoal burning that was being carried out in arid and semi-arid regions hence resulting into severe droughts which affect food production.

The meeting was informed that charcoal burners had encroached into Kitui South National Reserve in Mutomo.

“If this trend continues and the charcoal burners are not checked, the Reserve will be completely destroyed within a few years,” warned Chepcheng.

Wanyiri said that the Act requires that all commercial charcoal producers, retailers and transporters are to form associations before being issued with permits to trade in charcoal.

Conservation committee

“The associations must be registered and it will facilitate sustainable production of charcoal. A forest conservation committee will implement reforestation conservation plans to ensure the forest cover is maintained,” he explained.

The new rules are meant to enable the Kenya Forest Service to regulate the industry and improve charcoal production methods as well as ensuring the environment is conserved.

Wanyiri noted that KFS was facing challenges in curbing charcoal burning in the district saying that the only way to deal with the problem was to regulate and control its production.

“Charcoal accounts for 80 per cent of fuel source in the larger Kitui District and it is impossible to completely ban it. People need to be educated on how to cut fewer trees and produce more charcoal as well as planting more trees to conserve the forests,” he said.

Road set to open up eastern corridor

By HUSSEIN DIDO

The Chinese firm undertaking tarmacking of the first phase of the Isiolo-Moyale road is optimistic that it will complete its work by September, three months before schedule.

The construction of the road along Isiolo town to Merille River Bridge to a bitumen standard kicked off two years ago after the President Kibaki commissioned the work in Isiolo.

The firm will tarmack the first phase of the project at a distance of 136 km. An official with China Wu yi told reporters in Isiolo town that the firm would complete work within September instead of December as earlier announced.

Security concerns

“We expect to finish the work within September instead of December as earlier announced because we work 24 hours a day,” said the official. He added: “Improved security and co-operation by locals and availability of water is helping us a lot.”

A year ago, the work almost collapsed following insurgence of insecurity as well as the drought in both Isiolo and Samburu districts that forced the company to reschedule completion of the construction from May to December.

The KSh4.3 billion project is funded by the Africa Development Bank and the Government announced that both the second and third phases of the 526 km road had attracted donor funding.

Deputy Prime Minister, who is also the Minister for Finance, Mr Uhuru Kenyatta said African Development Bank and the European Union would fund the remaining phases between Merille River Bridge and Marsabit town as well as between Marsabit town and Moyale town.

The two phases are estimated at KSh10 billion.

The key road is expected to connect the port of Mombasa and the proposed Lamu port with landlocked Ethiopia that is keen to use Kenya as its export route to the international market.

During an inspection tour of the road by leaders from Isiolo, Samburu East, Laisamis and Marsabit Central, the firm’s official said actual tarmac had reached the 70 km mark, pavement layer at 95 km and earth work at 118 km.

They said last year the firm had difficulties because of insecurity in areas where the road passes and drought that set them behind schedule for about three months.

Last year residents of Samburu East took to the street to block the firm’s work demanding to be served with water for both domestic and animal use which the company was forced to oblige as corporate social responsibility.

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This year, the el-Niño rains that led to floods in both Isiolo and Samburu East also delayed the work. The firm was forced to assist by fixing the bridge at Archer’s Post.

Heavy rainfall especially at the source of Ewaso Ng’iro River at the Aberdares caused massive damage in gameparks in Isiolo and Samburu East. It also damaged the key Archers Post Bridge and game lodges.

The official thanked local leaders and the Government for having given them maximum co-operation that had resulted to increased performance by the firm.

Water

The firm helped locals in provision of water during the drought period and assisted to equip schools in the area with learning materials to get their confidence last year following a prolonged drought and rising cases of conflict.

The locals’ co-operation is also derived from the company’s policy that gives locals first priority in employment opportunities in both unskilled and professional categories.

Isiolo civic leaders led by Wabera ward councillor Mr Ismail Ali Galma hailed the firm saying despite the problems they encountered it had done its work well.

With an accessible road between Isiolo town and Sereolipi in Archers Post, transport in upper Eastern and Samburu East has improved considerably.

With an accessible road between Isiolo town and Sereolipi in Archers Post, transport in upper Eastern and Samburu East has improved considerably.

Beneficiaries include the tourism sector in game reserves in Isiolo and Samburu East where access to the parks has reduced from about two hours in the past to 30 minutes.
Dairy goat project sets off youth

By HENRY OWINO

Youth groups in Mukurwe-ini District in the larger Nyeri region will no longer be idle indulging in drugs, illicit brews and crime.

The youth groups in the region have received 14 dairy goats from the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

The international organization partnered with the Ministry of Livestock and Constituency Development Fund (CDF) in the project to help youth uplift their standards of living.

The youth groups’ leader, Mr Stephen Njoroge acknowledged IFAD’s contribution to boosting their self-help initiatives.

Njoroge said youth in the area have been selling chang’aa which has ruined many lives.

The youth came together after realising that the Government had come up with initiatives to support registered youth groups.

**Tree seedlings**

Njoroge said the group started by planting tree seedlings in 2005 with the aim of selling them to the community and other organisations.

When demand for tree seedlings rose, they recruited more young men and women so they could meet the rising demand from various schools and organisations.

He said currently many youth have joined them that is why they have three different groups but under one umbrella.

“The dairy goats have boosted the groups’ morale and many young men and women will join because they will see the dairy goats will provide them with income,” he explained.

Njoroge said most youth in the area lack empowerment but if they could get involved in similar self-help initiatives the whole Mukurwe-ini community could change for the better.

Many youth in the region are unemployed and their only source of income has been selling chang’aa which has ruined many lives.

Njoroge called upon other organisations to replicate what IFAD has done for the youth.

He also called upon the Government to start some polytechnics to train the youths. He also called upon the Government to replicate what IFAD has done for the youth.

The youth groups’ leader, Mr Stephen Njoroge acknowledged IFAD’s contribution to boosting their self-help initiatives.

**Youth empowerment**

He lamented that most youth engaged in drugs, illegal brews and other crimes.

“Most of the groups are being trained on how to feed the dairy breeds as well as house, treat, milk and even transport the animals,” said Kanyi.

She told the area youth that they are lucky to have received the variety of goat breeds since the maturity stage is only eight months. The goats are highly profitable as one mature goat costs between KSh14,000 and KSh16,000.

The Project Manager for Central Kenya Dry Area Projects (CKDAP), Mr Mark Botangore, said the three youth groups — Karaba-Kimuri, Mutonga-Kou and Kibuto-Rembesha — which received the goats should consider themselves economically stable.

**Benefits**

Botangore said: “The goats are of advanced German Alpine breeds that any livestock farmer would aspire to rear.”

He highlighted major benefits of the goat breed as being of highly nutritious milk as well as giving forth off springs twice a year. The goats also produce four litres of milk per day and one litre costs KSh45. This breed is not prone to diseases like any other local breed of goats. They also mature early at eight months.

Botangore urged the youth groups to take care of the goats and use them only for milk production as intended.

Present to oversee the project function were Robert Wamini who is the District Livestock Officer and the chairman of the youth groups Mr. Harrison Gachuiir Wanja who assured the leaders that the goats will be used only for milk purposes. Others were James Nyaga Gachuri Assistant Chief of Kibutio, Joshua Kiberu Kamama Assistant Chief Karaba sub-location and the community.

“The dairy goats will be an eye opener to other youths in the region when they see our sweat bear fruits,” Njoroge reiterated.

— Stephen Njoroge, youth groups’ leader