In the line of fire

Senseless act of impunity as police tear-gas school children

BY JANE GODIA

Guns, dogs, tear gas, marked the scene of a primary school where children were protesting against the grabbing of their playground. Television screens depicted scenes similar to the Soweto Massacre in 1976 in South Africa during the apartheid regime.

Wailing and crying marked the huge smoke of tear gas as children ran helter-skelter with their eyes burning from the gas lobbed on them. While the police were fully armed with AK-47 rifles, and dressed in bullet proof vests, the children had nothing in their hands other than the placards calling on those who had grabbed their playing field to give them back. Using their bare hands, the children were able to bring down the perimeter wall that had been constructed to block their access to the playground.

The human rights defenders who had gone to the school to give them support were not spared either as some of them were arrested.

Even as there were running battles ensued on Langata Road, on the other side of town, the battles of the grabbing of the playground of Our Lady of Mercy Primary School hardly got the same attention.

Vulnerable

Focus seemed to have been concentrated on Langata Road Primary School where a majority of the pupils are from the poor families who inhabit the sprawling Kibera slum. These children from the slum do not have anywhere else that they can exercise their right to play as children except in the playing ground of their schools. The shameless greed to grab a schools playground speaks of nothing beyond how low we have stooped as a country. The grabbers are parents of children yes, but their children go to high cost schools which have acres and acres of ground including where
Senseless act of impunity as police tear-gas school children

Continued from page 1

they can ride horses and go-karts; play rugby, football, basketball and any other game that would help a growing child. These are people whose children have been taken to the great schools of South Africa, Britain and the United States of America where no one would dare dream of grabbing any land leave alone public land and especially one that has been allocated to children to use.

Injustice

The public schools in Nairobi are already too squeezed with hardly enough room for the children to use fully. This was a case of Cry My Beloved Country as the placards carried by the children called on the president to come to their rescue. Five of the children were injured and taken to hospital.

In a way that tells how dirty the country has gone, it was even not easy to determine who had actually hived off this playing ground from the school. Greed to be rich and richer has made Kenyans to forget that children are the next generation and they must grow up in an environment that will see them ensure sustainable development.

The Minister for Internal Security Retired Major Joseph Nkaissery called on the person who grabbed the playing grounds to the school to bring down the wall within the next 24 hours. Giving his personal apologies to the schoolchildren injured in the discordance, Nkaissery said: “This land is a school property and I’m giving the private developer up to 24 hours to bring down the remaining wall.”

The land in question is adjacent to Weston Hotel and documents from the lands ministry shows that it belongs to the school.

Ownership

According to chair of the National Land Commission Mohammed Swazuri, the grabbed land belongs to the school. Speaking in Mombasa, Land Cabinet Secretary Charity Ngilu said that the land was public, reiterating that there was no shortcut to the matter and the land must be reverted to the school.

The police who tear-gassed the children failed on their obligation of Utumishi Kwa Wote (Service to all), clearly indicating that they are only out to protect the high and mighty. The police even forgot, or is it that they were not aware that in 1989, governments worldwide promised all children the same rights by adopting the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, also known as the CRC or UNCRC. The Convention changed the way children are viewed and treated — in other words, as human beings with a distinct set of rights instead of as passive objects of care and charity. These rights describe what a child needs to survive, grow, and live up to their potential in the world. They apply equally to every child, no matter who they are or where they come from.

Publicity

The events received international media coverage with media house across the world running the story. The Day of the African Child which is marked on June 16, was started in honour of children who were killed in the Soweto attack of 1976. The Day of the African Child has been celebrated every year since 1991, when it was first initiated by the Organisation of African Unity. It honours those who participated in the Soweto Uprising in 1976 on that day. It also raises awareness of the continuing need for improvement of the education provided to African children. In Soweto, South Africa, on June 16, 1976, about ten thousand black school children marched in a column more than half a mile long, protesting the poor quality of their education and demanding their right to be taught in their own language. Hundreds of young students were shot, the most famous of which being Hector Peterson. More than a hundred people were killed in the protests of the following two weeks, and more than a thousand were injured.

The scene clearly replicated on Lang’ata will live in our memories forever. Extra information from the Internet
Rural-urban migration taking its toll in slums

BY CAROLYNE OYUGI

When John Owino moved to Nairobi from his village in Siaya County, he had high expectations. He thought he would get a good job and support his parents and siblings back in the village.

“I had been at home for three years after completing my secondary education and had no job. I thought if I came to Nairobi things would change for the better once I get a job,” Owino explains.

Ten years later, Owino is unhappy with his life. All he has managed to do is get himself a job as a water vendor, something much below his expectations as he left the village.

He is a water vendor, ferrying jerry cans in a cart and selling it to residents of Kibera slums.

“People like Owino, however, these initiatives only exist on papers shelved in Government offices. The research further reveals that there is significant variation between slums and within slums in terms of income and expenditure. While households in the lowest income surveyed areas report spending almost 100 percent of their income on food, the overall food expenditure average is 63 percent. Households in ‘hot spots’ reveal vulnerable population that report very low income, higher food insecurity rates, less dietary diversity, higher prevalence of illness, more insecurity and higher use of coping strategies such as removal of children from schools and purchase of food on credit.”

Among the recommendations by Concern Worldwide Kenya is early warning systems that monitor for emergencies whether slow onset or acute should be part of wider systems monitoring for development progress (or the absence of it). Key responses should reinforce the very system upon which an affected population depends, whether rural or urban, and extend the capacity of that system.

Although the Government has experienced by the urban poor in the 46 slums and within slums in terms of income and expenditure. While households in the lowest income surveyed areas report spending almost 100 percent of their income on food, the overall food expenditure average is 63 percent. Households in ‘hot spots’ reveal vulnerable population that report very low income, higher food insecurity rates, less dietary diversity, higher prevalence of illness, more insecurity and higher use of coping strategies such as removal of children from schools and purchase of food on credit.

Statistics

According to the last census, Kenya’s population has grown by 10 million within 10 years making it the seventh most populous country in Africa and the third most populous in the East African Region.

A recent research done by Concern Worldwide Kenya on Indicators for Urban Emergencies points out that Kenya’s increasing population has created greater density of population. “The rate of urbanisation in Kenya, estimated at 4.4 percent, is one of the highest in the world,” states part of the research finding that was carried between August 2012 and February 2014.

Indeed, urbanisation is a factor of population movement towards growth as well as rural-urban migration. However, for many immigrants, like Owino, urban living is not necessarily better living.

Income

More than half of Kenya’s urban residents live in poverty; they dwell in peripheral urban areas on meagre incomes as well as in unsanitary and overcrowded conditions. This is common for the urban poor living in Kenya’s informal settlements or slums, particularly those found in the large cities.

According to Concern Worldwide, Nairobi alone hosts 45 percent of the Kenya’s urban population of which 60 percent live in slums on four percent of the city’s land.

Although the Government has recognised the problems in the informal settlements, many urban poor, still live a vulnerable existence where impacts of hazards such as global financial shocks and ethnic violence are magnified.

There is increasing awareness by the Government as well as humanitarian and development actors of vulnerable urban population sub-sets and the need to respond to crises as experienced by the urban poor in the 46 settlements classified as ‘urban’ found in the country.

Constitution

The Constitution and economic blueprint, Kenya Vision 2030, take cognisance of the country’s growing urbanisation and the need for urban development. A national Urban Development Policy and an Urban Areas and Cities Act have been enacted to provide a foundation for strengthening governance, productivity and inclusivity in the country.

For people like Owino, however, these initiatives only exist on papers shelved in Government offices. The research further reveals that there is significant variation between slums and within slums in terms of income and expenditure. While households in the lowest income surveyed areas report spending almost 100 percent of their income on food, the overall food expenditure average is 63 percent. Households in ‘hot spots’ reveal vulnerable population that report very low income, higher food insecurity rates, less dietary diversity, higher prevalence of illness, more insecurity and higher use of coping strategies such as removal of children from schools and purchase of food on credit.

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Cases of child labour on the rise . . . . as parents in Embu defend action

By ROBERT NYAGAH

Ivans Njiru, a Standard Six pupil at a rural primary school in Karurina, Embu County is partly covered by a flourishing crop of maize as he struggles to keep pace with adults in his company tilling the land.

Once in a while as the group tilling continues he and his elder sister who just did her Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) are left about two meters behind by the adults who include their single mother and aunts.

Master Njiru has to cope with the adults’ pace of tilling the land because at the end of the day, he will be paid a full day’s dues the same as the adults in his group, KSh300.

Labour

“We take at least a metre wide portion of the land and till until we reach a selected end of the lane about 30 metres, before returning to communally take another lane. This ensures that each individual tills the same size of land,” explains Njiru as he sips water from a plastic bottle with sweat falling from his face.

Njiru joined his mother and aunts courtesy of the long end of year school holidays which will eventually culminate with Christmas and New Year festivities when demand for finances in households grows with the need for food, clothes and gifts growing.

The first weeks of the long school holidays coincide with the planting and land tilling season with large amounts of work. This often becomes a challenge at family level and farm owners who have to hire casual labourers to work on their farms.

Availability of casual work in various farms in Embu County at this time when thousands of children are on holiday means children are joining their parents and relatives to work or are hired as labourers.

Like hundreds now toiling in the farms for pay and family work, Njiru is already a wage earner and as he confesses that in a good month, he could earn up to as much as KSh9,000.

Gather

Apart from cultivating the land to eke a living, Njiru has been gathering fodder for sale since he was in Standard Four. This is work that he does every evening after school and earns him at least KSh50 per sack.

“I wake up early and I’m able to cut grass and other vegetation suitable for dairy cattle fodder amounting to two bags and each bag earns me at least KSh50 from zero-grazing dairy cattle farmers,” says Njiru. He adds: “This means that I am able to earn KSh100 before farm every morning.”

Njiru then joins relatives and friends to undertake tilling of land earning KSh300 per day. In the evening the young boy again rushes to the bush to gather at least another two bags of green fodder to sell at KSh100.

Calculations indicate that Njiru earns at least KSh50 per day. Although the work is tough for a boy of his age, he says: “It is worth suffering and struggling and this way I am happy to help in family food expenses and perhaps buy myself clothes including good such as bread, cakes and soda.

In the village where Njiru is from, child labour is illegal in Kenya according to the Children’s Act, the practice is widespread in various parts of Embu County and on many occasions it is disguised as ‘family work’ especially during the cultivation season when entire families are seen tilling the land.

Lacy Bagaria, a single mother of five who has for some years involved her three children in child labour thinks it is all right to have her children work for pay sometimes against their will.

Law

When The Reject explained to her that child labour was illegal, she confessed to not being aware that there were laws which could get her charged and jailed together with the child employer.

However, she wonders: "Why should I leave them at home when there is paid work and they also eat from the meagre earnings I make as a casual labourer?"

She adds: “And by the way they are used to this casual work and they are happy to also spare some pocket money for themselves mainly because I only demand a small fraction of what they earn. In fact sometimes the payment is made directly to me.”

Muthatari Community Village elder, Joseph Nyoka, agrees witnessing a huge number of children mainly in primary school in company of parents working at family farms and also in paid labour during cultivation season and other holidays. He notes nothing is done to dissuade them from being involved in child labour.

“I know that child labour is illegal but we have not taken the issue seriously as a problem in need of a remedy in our elders’ forums,” explains the elder. He admits that without doubt any attempt to deal with the parents, guardians and children encouraging the vice would be viewed negatively and cause conflicts at community level.

Act

Those involved would take the campaigns against that to interference in a people’s right to a source of income.

Education stakeholders in Embu County admit that rampant cultivation and consumption of miraa (khat), where some pupils and students are directly involved in harvesting and sale of the leaves, has contributed to lowering the standards in Embu and Mbeere regions where the produce is grown.

The National Council for Children Services reported that 24 per cent of children aged between five and 14 are involved in child labour in miraa growing parts of Mbeere and Embu.

An admission from a cross-section of people in authority that child labour is rampant comes even when there are clear laws such as the Children’s Act prohibiting child labour.

Says a section of the law: “In this Act, child labour refers to any situation where a child provides labour in exchange for payment and includes any situation where a child provides labour as an assistant to another person and his labour is deemed to be the labour of that other person for the purposes of payment.”

Further the Act details that, the same also covers “any situation where a child’s labour is used for gain by any individual or institution whether or not the child benefits directly or indirectly.”

Any situation where there is in existence of a contract for services and where the party providing the services is a child whether the person using the services does so directly or by agent is also covered under the Act.

By YUSUF AMIN

Business entrepreneur in Kilifi County are educating the youth on how to seize the opportunities that have arisen in the region.

The experts want the youth in the County to exploit their potential in business by sharpening their entrepreneurial skills.

Prof Ross Stewart, who is an entrepreneur expert from Seattle Pacific University in cooperation with Pwani University and US Embassy, says Kilifi has many resources that can help the youth start their own businesses.

Strategy

According to Stewart, the youth should not fear acquiring loans from financial institutions to start their own businesses. He observes that the days of over reliance on getting white collar jobs are a thing of the past.

“Kilifi County government should come up with more strategies of making sure that more entrepreneurship skills are given to the youth so that they can succeed in their businesses,” says Stewart.

He called on local leaders to ensure that they set aside a special kitty to help finance small-scale businesses for youth in the area.

“The youth should be given opportunities to conduct their businesses since it is the only solution to the biting poverty in this region,” notes Stewart.

He asked the youth to register their companies and apply for tenders in the county government so that they could be given preference in line with the procurement policy of reducing unemployment.

“According to William Kingi, chairman Kilifi County Strategic Think Tank Organisation, the youth have been marginalised for too long in terms of development and the only solution to have them engage in business.”

“The youth are experiencing many challenges and the Kilifi County government should focus on the problem in time as it takes shape,” said Stewart during a youth seminar on business issues.

On his part, Amason Kingi, Kilifi County Governor said they will give youth projects priority.

Opportunity

Kingi promised the youth that his government would ensure that more opportunities were directed at them so that their businesses take off.

Kingi, who is a former Minister for East African Affairs, asked the youth to cooperate with the County government to have right information on the available youth projects.

During a stakeholders forum recently, Kingi revealed that his government will make sure that youths have been fully involved in their business.

Already there are some investors who have shown interest in investing in Kilifi County and the youth should be ready to cooperate with the party ensuring that they have their own companies and businesses.

The youth will be given priority by the County Government but they must apply for the tenders in time.

According to Linet Shaha, Community development leader, more sensitisation programmes should be conducted for the youth since they had more fresh ideas and energy to offer the County.

Shaha has been conducting some barazas for the youth, especially in Kilifi, Mtwapa, Malindi, Kadelani, Ganze and Malaba to educate them on the importance of entrepreneurship.

“I am calling upon the Kilifi leadership to intervene and help the youth in registering their companies since most of them do not know where to start from,” Shaha said.

On his part, Asli Abala Randani, who is a youth leader, identified lack of funds as their biggest challenge.

Randani said that some of the youth have been involved in selling fish in the towns but the challenge was on how to manage their businesses.

“More effort was needed to make sure that the youth were empowered and equipped with the necessary management skills.’’

Boost

According to Randani, financial institutions should also lower their interest rates on loans so that more youth can use the credit facilities to boost their respective businesses.

Ezra Khoi, a community leader in Ganze asked youth to collectively come together and invest in agriculture so that they could supply vegetables and other farm products to hotels and colleges in the county.

“The youth should be more involved in agricultural activities instead of depending on white collar jobs that do not exist,” Khoi said during a meeting held in Matanoane in the county.

Kilifi County government should focus on the problem in time as it takes shape, said Stewart during a youth seminar on business issues.
Sweet potatoes to boost nutrition in children

By ANTONIA MUSUNGA

Kenya is among nine African countries that are benefiting from a sweet potato project to boost nutrition especially among children.

The initiative is coordinated and funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and has been launched in Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

“In the last year alone, we have helped seven million farmers boost their harvests with new technologies like this, and reached 12.5 million children to tackle under nutrition — one of the leading contributors to child death that also undermines global growth,” said Dr Rajiv Shah, USAID Administrator.

According to the British Journal of Nutrition, while there are over 200 million women and children in the world, African regions record the highest number of pre-school children with night blindness and over 25 per cent with Vitamin A deficiency.

Indeed, for the first time the White House’s kitchen garden introduced the orange sweet potato to bring to light its contribution to improvement of nutrition in the Sub-Saharan by providing Vitamin A.

Challenges

This was especially important as many countries experience the challenges of Vitamin A deficiency affecting more than 50,000 pre-school children as well as women.

Experts say Vitamin A deficiency affects immunity hence increasing chances of having diarrheal disease, causing eye damage which can lead to blindness or even death. This is prevalent among children under five years, affecting 42 per cent of children in Africa.

The use of the White House kitchen garden to educate people especially children by including herbs, fruits and vegetables is important as it emphasizes the importance of vegetables in improving health in all parts of the world.

In order to enhance food security, President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama unveiled a food security initiative named Feed the Future whose aim is to increase the consumption of the orange sweet potato, especially in communities face these challenges.

Vitamins

While there are other sources of Vitamin A such as orange fruit, dark leafy greens, as well as some animal products, they are not always available or affordable to some people in certain areas.

Fortunately, many people in the sub-Saharan Africa consider the sweet potato a staple food and consume it in large quantities though the most common types eaten are the yellow and white in colour which are low in Vitamin ‘A’.

This prompted the introduction of the orange potato which produces higher yields, is resistant to viral infections and has adapted to the growing conditions in Africa.

According to Harvest Plus, an organisation committed to ending global hunger as a result of lack in essential vitamins, this initiative has borne fruit.

For instance, among the farming communities in Uganda, the impact of this introduction is already being felt by farmers in the country.

“I began feeding my child on these nutritious foods following the knowledge I attained in the recommended feeding practices for children under five,” explains Agnes Amony. She adds: “My child began gaining weight steadily and I’m in no doubt that these foods have saved my child’s life. I am forever grateful and will never stop feeding my child on these food crops.”

Adoption

Research backs up the experiences of farmers like Amony. A study conducted revealed that children between the ages of six months to three years received Vitamin A from the orange sweet potato.

Elsewhere, in Mozambique, the orange sweet potato has successfully been adopted as a staple food. According to the British Journal of Nutrition, three years after introduction, an average of 77 percent of households across the country cultivated the crop for subsistence use. This consequently increased the intake of Vitamin A through in the diet.

“We’ve now shown that you can scale up efforts to distribute orange sweet potato to poor rural communities and see this translate into increased Vitamin A intake especially in women and children, who are most vulnerable to mineral and vitamin deficiencies,” explains Dr Christine Hotz, former HarvestPlus Nutrition Coordinator.

Children targeted in ambitious nutrition project

By ROBERT NYAGAH

The Children’s Act clearly indicates that every child shall be entitled to education, the provision of which shall be the responsibility of the Government and parents.

In the same breath, every child shall be entitled to free basic education which shall be compulsory in accordance with Article 28 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Act is also clear that every child shall be protected from economic exploitation and any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child’s education, or to be harmful to the child’s health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.

Protect

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A study was recently carried out in Kyeni Division, Embu County to test whether child labour affected performance in schools. It was overseen by senior Nairobi University scholars.

The study noted that children’s work activities at home affect their performance in school and further intended to find out whether a child’s socio-economic background contributed to their engagement in child labour.

The research also seeks to find out whether a child’s personal attributes determined their involvement in child labour.

A study supervised by two senior scholars Prof C. B. K. Njoka and Prof O.N. Gakuru, confirmed that a child’s socio-economic background was a major contributing factor to their engagement in child labour.

According to the study, the higher the socio-economic status of the child, the fewer hours he or she is engaged in child labour with children whose parents had secondary education and above being found to have been working for fewer hours than those whose parents had primary or no formal education at all.

Discover

Similarly, it was discovered that children whose parents were in employment registered fewer hours of work compared to children whose parents had no other source of income apart from tilling the land.

According to the research, children whose parents were single, worked for more hours than those who had both parents.

The study also revealed that boys and girls were found to perform household duties regardless of their gender.

“Boys cooked, cleaned utensils and fetched water yet these activities have all along been considered to be girls work” noted the report adding that boys were also found to be satisfied in performing such activities.

Interestingly, birth order significantly determined the child’s engagement in child labour with the study finding out that first born children were found to work for longer hours than those who were born later in the family.

“It was established that parents entrusted a lot of responsibilities to first born children compared to their younger children,” the research revealed.

A major finding of the study was that child labour impacted negatively on school performance because children found to work for many hours at home performed poorly in examinations.

This was because the children appeared to be always left with fewer hours to study and rarely completed their school homework, with those in primary day schools performing below average.
Residents of parts of Kwale County, which borders the Indian Ocean, are an unhappy lot because their only source of fresh water has been contaminated by firms mining minerals in the area.

They are now demanding that the authorities step in so that they can enjoy water, which is one of the targets of the United Nations Millennium Development Goal.

Millennium Development Goal number Seven seeks to ensure environmental sustainability. One of its targets is to halve, by 2015, the proportion of the population without sustainable access to safe drinking water.

This would ensure the world has met the target of the situation to avert any major health crisis.

“We don’t anticipate any serious health related issues but we will be closely monitoring the situation to forestall any major crisis. Water will be checked on regular basis to ensure it is of good quality,” noted Forbes.

According to Forbes, the mineral separation process at the processing plant uses about 27,000 cubic metres of water per day and that no waste water runs out to the environment as it is recycled.

However, due to prolonged drought and famine in Kwale County, poor rural communities have been forced to walk for many kilometres daily in search of the precious liquid.

Of late, the weather at the Coast region has become erratic and increasingly unreliable leading to food insecurity caused by unreliable rainfall.

Residents have been forced to buy a 20 litre Jerry-can of water for KSh50. This is very high considering that most families live below the poverty line.

Nakuru’s youth to benefit from tertiary training

For the past two years, over 400 disadvantaged youths, majority of them being girls in Nakuru County, have benefitted from a vocational training scheme in driving, hairdressing and beauty therapy.

The money, drawn from the Constituency’s Development Fund (CDF) kitty, has helped unemployed youth who would have easily drifted into alcohol and substance abuse by empowering them with knowledge for self-reliance and sustainability.

Assess

Bahati member of Parliament Kimani Ngunjiri says after a thorough needs assessment in the five administrative wards in his constituency, they found that majority of the youth do not proceed with water and basic sanitation. This has been a major security threat since most had resorted to anti-social activities like crime as well as excessive consumption of alcohol and hard drugs.

However, according to Lucy Muthee, Principal of Bahati PCEA Girls School, a beneficiary of a CDF funded laboratory, the kitty has made learning for girls in the school easier with provision of enough offices to accommodate teachers.

Muthee says that the laboratory would have taken parents a longer period to construct adding that the school can now easily increase class enrollment without affecting other available learning facilities.

Indeed, experts have stated that gender inequalities can undermine the effectiveness of development policies in fundamental ways, but this has been down played or ignored.

“One of the more transformational ways in which gender inequality can be addressed is through gender-responsive budgeting, a concept that seeks to link government policy commitments on gender equality to the budgetary policies and decisions that are made by the Government,” explains Ngunjiri.

Project

Community participation in development project plans and effective management of public resources have changed the livelihoods of the poor and marginalised in the country. Since the inception of the Constituency Development Fund (CDF), proper utilisation of public funds in which transparency and accountability has been the guiding principle of operations, has seen communities enjoy unprecedented access to education, water, health facilities and improved road network.

Investing in the people in order to improve their quality of life by targeting a cross-section of human and social welfare projects and programmes is the spine that holds Ngunjiri’s resolve in transforming the livelihoods of its constituents.

He says that the Bahati CDF has continually involved the community in project identification and implementation through Project Management Committees to enhance equity and wealth creation opportunities for the poor.

Speaking in Bahati, Ngunjiri lauded the CDF under his patronage for starting new schools, improving dilapidated classroom structures, construction of new health facilities, repairing roads and constructing bridges to ensure access to remote areas that are agriculturally productive.

“The selected community projects are managed and implemented by the Project Management Committees in liaison with relevant government departmental heads for technical inputs whereas the Constituency Development Fund committee supervises, monitors and evaluates the project.”

Ngunjiri observes that good health is a key resource that affects one’s productivity and earning capacity. This fact necessitated the Bahati CDF committee to prioritise the establishment of dispensaries and equipment to ensure women and children do not trek for long distances in search of quality health care.

Contaminated river water leaves Kwale residents worried

A child drinking stagnant water at Oda,Tana River County. Scarcity of water is exposing the residents of Coast region to health risks.

By Larry Kimori

In Balango area, Kwale County residents have been complaining of discolored water that they now feel is a danger to their health.

The affected villages are Zigira, Kolo, Mwandumbo, Masideni, Maangattufo, Vidziani, Nyumba Sita and Baseasola in Kinondo and Msambweni locations in Msambweni Constituency.

Msambweni locations in Msambweni Constituency.

The residents also complained that there is a reduction of the water capacity in the river as the company taps the water for their processing.

They said the said the process is the cause of contamination and misuse of water that has changed colour and sometimes it stinks, explained Mwazoa. He added: “We are sure that this is the cause and we want the County government to intervene.”

According to Rama Ali Mwazoa, Nyumba Sita Village elder, the chemical had caused water discoloration in the river which is a danger to their health.

“We are using water from Mkurumudzi River for all our needs, but since this company started its operations we have seen changes. The water has changed colour and sometimes it stinks, explained Mwazoa. He added: “We are sure that this is the cause and we want the County government to intervene.”

Due to this challenge, most of the residents are forced to walk for many kilometres to fetch clean water from other sources.

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Dam constructed in Kitui, saves thousands from searching for water

BY NZINGA MUASYA

In most parts of Kitui County, looking for water can be a daylong grueling affair characterised by walking several kilometres under scorching sun.

So when the distance to search for the precious commodity is reduced by bringing water closer to the people, there is always untold joy.

This is what has happened for residents of Itivanzou sub-location in the arid Kyuso District of Kitui County after an earth dam constructed by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) was completed and handed over to the community.

Unveil

When the Principal Secretary Fred Sigor of the Department of Livestock in the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries unveiled the plaque to commission the earth dam which was sponsored by UNDP.

The dam constructed along the Masiundu River with a capacity to hold 18,000 cubic metres of water will be pumped to quench the thirst of livestock.

Siaya's island of wine and sin a barrier to interventions on curbing HIV

By OMONDI GWENGI

Nocturnal activities at Mageta Island on Lake Victoria are enough to write a book about. It is dark, ordinary workers and traders are returning to their homes after a day's toil, but for 32-year-old Christine Achieng, her day is just beginning.

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Small holder poultry farmers to benefit from cheap vaccine

BY MARY MWENDWA

Many rural small-scale poultry farmers have a reason to worry about a deadly disease that has seen them lose chicken in masses. They are now benefiting from a cheap and easy to administer vaccine that will save lives of their poultry.

The vaccine was invented by scientists to help communities alleviate poverty by preventing chicken deaths caused by Newcastle disease. Scientists are optimistic that once the vaccine penetrates every household in Kenya, more chicken will be saved.

**Vaccine**

“The Newcastle disease vaccine is a saver to small scale poultry farmers. This disease is a viral and very contagious in nature, it kills up to 100 percent of infected chickens,” explains Dr Jane Wachira, Deputy Director Kenya Veterinary Vaccine Institute (KEVEVAPI). She adds: “We developed this vaccine together with other scientists to produce 32,000 million chicken kept by Kenyan small-holder farmers.”

According to Wachira, since the launch of the vaccine in 2012, they have witnessed an increase in farmers seeking to get the vaccine which is thermo-tolerant (can withstand heat).

The vaccine retails for KSh1.50, a syringe and a dropper are bought separately. Wachira together with other scientists to prevent deaths for more than 100 percent of infected chicken, “ explains Wachira. Nyinge says this should be performed in a shade, during morning hours to avoid direct sunlight when administering the vaccine.

Wachira concurs saying that this type of vaccine is easy to use as it is also environment friendly to those farmers who commute for long distance to get to agro dealer shops.

“So far we have sold new castle vaccines on more than 1.2 million farmers across Kenya,” observes Wachira. Clinical signs of Newcastle disease vary considerably according to the type of virus involved, type of bird, age and health of the bird and environmental conditions. Commonly, greenish diarrhoea, sleepy and not feeding, slight difficultly in breathing with distress and gasping (twisted neck), swelling of the head and neck and marked decrease in egg production, are some of the symptoms that manifest in chicken.

It is advisable that sick chicken be separated from healthy ones once the disease is detected to avoid more infections to spread further.

**Outbreak**

Farmers are also advised to vaccinate chicken three to five times during the life span of a healthy bird. Only healthy chicken are to be vaccinated, once they get infected there is no cure for Newcastle disease.

Newcastle disease is common in Bussia, Bungoma, Mwingi and Mwea. These communities actually know when the outbreak sets in and have local names for the disease. For example in Ukambari they refer to it as Wenzi and in Central they call it Kihuruto.

Because of its nature of very fast transmission, people usually get worried and frustrated once they see the symptoms and start spreading word around about the looming disaster in households. This vaccine is a dream come true to KEVEVAPI scientists who worked round the clock to save many farmers from the huge losses brought by New-

**To be vaccinated or not to be?**

**WHO and UNICEF clear the air as Catholic Church remains adamant on tetanus vaccine**

BY CAREN NASIMIYU

The recent controversial nationwide tetanus vaccination programme, piloted by the Catholic Church against the Government and the international organisations.

In defence, the World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) have confirmed that the tetanus vaccine supplied in the country was safe and had been procured from a pre-qualified manufacturer.

**Target**

The statement came in the heat of allegations by the Catholic Church that tetanus vaccine was supplied in the country was safe and had been procured from a pre-qualified manufacturer.

**Fertility**

Timmerman revealed that the manufacturers and national control authorities had provided WHO with unequivocal statements that their vaccines contained only the Tetanus Toxoid vaccine components and that there was nothing in the vaccines which could interfere with fertility or pregnancy.

However, Catholic Bishops believe that they have proof that the doses being supplied are “laced” with a hormone that has a contraceptive effect and that it’s a government secret plan to control reproduction.

“We want the Ministry of Health to allow the church to sample the vaccines before they are given. We are alarmed because tetanus vaccines tested earlier in the year contained an antigen that could cause sterility in women,” said Dr Stephen Karanja on behalf of the Catholic Church.

The WHO and UNICEF disclaimed that these “grave allegations are not backed up with evidence” stating that testing for content in vaccine like Tetanus Toxoid requires a suitable laboratory and the sample to be tested should be from an unopened pack and not a blood.

On its part, the Government also expressed their concern to the assertions and said that the same vaccine had been tested and no form of eCG hormone was found, hence declaring them safe for consumption.

Tetanus is a bacterium disease that affects nervous systems leading to muscles contractions with severe pains. In most cases it occurs when a flesh wound becomes contaminated. According to UNICEF, it is an excruciating disease that kills one newborn every nine minutes, or approximately 160 babies each day. It is typically contracted through unhygienic birth practices. In 2010, 58,000 newborns died of tetanus in and the numbers are still disheartening.

These scepticisms continue as the Millennium Developments Goals (MDGs) where re-

duction of child mortality and improvement of maternal health are highlighted on Goals 4 and 5 respectively.

**Risk**

Kenya is among the 25 countries in Africa where tetanus remains a public threat killing hundreds of newborns each year. The vaccination targets girls and women aged 15-49 with keen emphasis on the marginalised areas due to their exposure to the risk. Mothers with lower parity and those living in urban areas are more likely to receive vaccination injections than those in higher parity regions and in the rural settings.

According to a report by Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), the vaccine is given to pregnant women to prevent neonatal tetanus. For a woman to have a lifetime protection, a total of five doses are required.