Too soon to celebrate natural wealth, experts say

By JOYCE CHIMBI

It is estimated that the Kenyan population is growing at an estimated one million people per year. As the number of people continues to grow, the government is now finding itself at a crossroads, unable to raise enough resources to cater for the needs of those newly born while also keeping the rest of the population healthy.

With social amenities already stretched thin, it was clear during the recent budget reading that the government is becoming aggressive in raising domestic revenue in order to attain sustainable human development.

The budget, the highest in the history of the country at 2.1 trillion, means that the government is looking for ways to raise the much needed revenue with experts now saying that the extractive industry presents one of the most promising sources of revenue.

Against that backdrop, recent discoveries of sizable natural gas reserves and barrels of oil in the country has made experts predict that Kenya’s economy, that has been dependent on agriculture and tourism, will soon benefit from discovery of coal, oil and gas in parts of the country.

According to Hadley Becha, director of local nongovernmental organization, Community Action for Nature Conservation says: “environmentalists must take into account that economic policies are not driven by environmental concerns.”

Danson Mbwangangi, an Economist and market researcher in East Africa takes issue with the building momentum “to demonise fossil fuel at a time when Africa is discovering billions of oil barrels and natural gas reserves.”

Mbwangangi says: “global voices in favor of clean energy should not be seen to punish African countries such as Kenya. These countries must be given a window within which they can exploit their natural wealth and engineer significant economic take off.”

Discussions should be around defining the window in terms of years and setting up checks and balances to guide exploration at minimal risk to the environment,” he adds.

Now environmental experts are expressing concern that Kenya lacks the capacity to exploit oil and gas at minimal risk to the environment.

Unlike Egypt, which has specific guidelines on Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for oil and gas, Kenya only has one classification of EIAs, Becha says.

He says that oil and gas is a much specialised sector which requires detailed and specific environmental impact guidelines.

“There are specific guidelines for upstream, mainstream and downstream exploration. But in many African countries, an EIA for a petrol station can also be used for oil exploration,” he says.

But executive director of Green Africa Foundation, John Kioli, says that Kenya is looking into technology with fewer emissions adding that “coal will be mined underground as opposed to open mining.”

Kioli says that the discussion goes beyond environmental concerns to global trade and particularly who has power over who. He says that while Africa continues to use clean energy, they have not been sufficiently compensated for low emissions.

“The debate must recognise the geopolitics of climate change. Where so we are keen on cutting emissions, we know that Africa is responsible for about three percent of global emissions,” he says.

Other experts say that the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has the second largest forest cover in the world but is yet to receive any compensation from Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) program.

Nonetheless, REDD+ has committed to give DRC its first $60 million.

Others are concerned that the West is shifting to the kind of energy whose technology they are able to supply: “Africa is yet to benefit from technology in clean energy. Solar energy technology has remained too expensive for many African countries.”

Kioli says that while Africa is committed to climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts “the continent lacks the necessary resources. Africa cannot continue looking to the East or West indefinitely for these resources.”

He also says that these resources are given to Africa through double accounting where Official Development Assistance (ODA) is also reported as funding for climate change adaptation and mitigation projects.

The Kenyan government estimates that the 2013 –2017 National Climate Change Action Plan for climate adaptation and mitigation will require a substantial investment of about US$12.76 Billion. This is equivalent to the country’s 2013–2014 national budget.

As Kenya, like other African countries, continues to face the crippling effects of drastic climate changes to the economy and peoples livelihoods, Kioli says that nature has provided.

“We expect to use cheap petroleum to catalyse industries, mechanise agriculture, boost irrigation, and even plant more trees,” he says.

But Kioli, the brains behind the Climate Change Authority Bill 2012 expresses the need to address the issue of governance and legislation in Africa.

Becha says that oil and gas in Kenya is controlled by the archaic Petroleum Act of 1984, which was briefly updated in 2012. He also says African countries “the government cannot continue looking to the East or West indefinitely for these resources.”

And policy experts concur saying that the old laws must be comprehensively updated. “The Petroleum Act 1984 is a weak law, especially in benefits sharing and is also silent on the management of gas,” he says.

But even as Africa is adamant that oil and gas exploration will continue, Becha says the gains will be short-term and unlikely to revive the economy.

With oil and gas, it is not just about licensing, there are also issues of taxation and a lot of revenue that goes to the government,” he says.

In the absence of capital gain tax as is the case with Kenya and many other African countries “the government will lose a lot of revenue from bauxite exploration companies who act as middlemen robbing national governments of significant revenue.”

Capital gains are the profits that an investor realizes when he or she sells the capital asset for a price that is higher than the purchase price. Ghana is one of the few countries that imposes a capital gains tax.

He also says African countries will have to establish a solvent fund where revenue from oil and gas will be stored to stabilize the economy: “oil can inflate the prices of certain commodities hence the need to control surges in inflation.”

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Vulnerable Populations in Emergencies

By Jane Godia

Some of the participants who attended a conference dubbed ‘The Prevention Now - Innovating a Prevention Strategy for Women,’ in Nairobi, during tea break. Photo: AWC Correspondent

Pacing and having children remains a challenge many years after contraceptives were invented.

And challenges are abound where unwanted and unplanned for pregnancies are still being experienced for the simple reason that women do not have access to contraceptives.

Globally over 225 million women in developing countries, Kenya included, who want to decide for themselves whether and when to have children do not have access to contraception. This is a saddening reality even as the World Population Day is marked in July.

In reality, this is a day that is marked to celebrate population achievements and development towards ensuring better lives for every man and woman, including access to family planning.

The family remains the cornerstone of existence and family planning is the foundation that should be used to make this possible.

Family planning is a major innovation that empowers women and enables them plan and have better lives. When women are able to space their child births they tend to have healthier lives and take care of their children better.

In developing countries, especially when women engage in family planning, they are more likely to survive child birth and have healthier newborns.

Unwanted and unplanned for pregnancies has seen a huge rise in the level of unsafe abortion especially in countries where it is restricted. Women living with HIV have unwanted pregnancies for the same reason as women with unknown or HIV negative status.

They may have been raped or suffered incest, had unprotected sex, as well as lack knowledge or access to reliable contraceptive methods, were prevented from using contraception consistently or their contraception method failed.

Just like women without HIV or with unknown HIV status, women living with HIV will always, if not often, present on whether safe or otherwise for unplanned and unintended pregnancies.

However, even with this challenge, a special population of women who are living with HIV are not able to access family planning, as they would wish. Out of 40 million people living with HIV, over half are women, out of this population, 70 percent are women of African descent. HIV within marriage remains high, and one out of ten married couples in Kenya, at least one partner is living with HIV.

In Africa, poor women bear the brunt of HIV pandemic to an extent that former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan sounded the alarm that AIDS bears the face of an African woman. While women remain the backbone of the continent’s economy, so many things are standing in their way to leading fulfilling lives.

There are special HIV related needs for women that are often ignored and this is not auguring well for them. One of this being access to contraceptives.

According to World Health Organisation, voluntary contraceptive services, in particular, will benefit the health of a woman in a variety of ways by delaying first birth, lengthening birth intervals and reducing the total number of children born to one woman.

Family planning, therefore, is important because it will prevent high risk and unwanted pregnancies, reducing the need for unsafe abortion.

A meeting held in Nairobi organised by Centre for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE) in collaboration with AVAC and Africa Women Development Fund among other partners noted the importance of integrating family planning and HIV prevention efforts.

The meeting noted that a proposed trial to answer questions of this relationship is currently being carried out by scientists and funders, reiterating the importance for civil society organisations to engage in the process and decision making.

Echoing that a women-centred prevention agenda is driven by the needs, preferences and perspectives of individual women which should be right based and integrates interventions to prevent HIV and STIs, unwanted pregnancy and reproductive cancers, it also stresses the importance that sub-Saharan African women and advocates should drive the prevention agenda.

The objective of the meeting was to identify regional advocacy priorities for advancing comprehensive health and prevention agenda for women and girls that make accessible existing HIV prevention and family planning options, and pave way for development and delivery of future technologies.

Noting that there continues to be uncertainty about the relationship between hormonal contraception and potential HIV risks, the meeting served to ensure that HIV and family planning advocacy strategies are integrated as the need for family planning and HIV prevention actually is in the lives of women.

Held under the theme Prevention Now: Innovating a Prevention Strategy for Women by Women, the meeting noted that so many regional and national campaigns have laid groundwork to increase and integrate family planning and HIV prevention efforts.

“Such integration is essential if we are to ensure that women and girls are able to avoid both unintended pregnancies and HIV with care that places their needs and agency at the centre.”

The meeting noted the importance of advocates working on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) to unite to create new strategies to maximise HIV and unplanned pregnancy prevention efforts.

In 1998, UNAIDS and the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights issued guidelines on HIV and AIDS as well as human rights.

One of their key recommendations at that time was: “Laws should also be enacted to ensure women’s reproductive and sexual rights including access to independent access to fully informed and voluntary contraceptive services and means to prevent HIV and unplanned pregnancy in a rights based manner.”

The meeting also highlighted the importance of advocates working on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) to unite to create new strategies to maximise HIV and unplanned pregnancy prevention efforts.

Also, the meeting’s key recommendations were: “Why do we continue to have limited resources to health? How much is being committed to research and development of family planning commodities?”

She noted: “Social norms remain a barrier to accessing family planning within and outside of the healthcare sector.”

It’s important to note that majority of new HIV infections are sexually transmitted. The same people who are at risk of unintended pregnancy are also at risk of HIV infection. Voluntary family planning programmes give women, youth and men information and services they need to protect themselves and their partners from unintended pregnancies as well as HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. Things will only work out better when a family planning strategy is integrated into HIV programmes for women to have informed and better choices.

Vulnerable Populations in Emergencies

Why family planning has everything to do with women living with HIV

By Wahinya Henry

The dusty town of Narok in Narok County will host this year’s World Population Day.

Global theme of this year’s World Population Day is Vulnerable Populations in Emergencies.

According to National Council for Population and Development (NCPD) and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), fights over water and pasture are more common in northern arid and semi arid of the country.

Narok is significant for the event that is being showcased after flash floods turned the dusty town in South Rift into a raging river which led to loss of 15 lives and destruction of property worth millions of shillings.

But despite that disaster, the 40,000-plus population stood firm and have since soldiered on with their work and businesses.

One of them is Yusuf Ali who is a landlord turned tenant in Narok town.

Remotest was in June when the heavy rains and flash floods damaged his property and turned his life upside down.

Ali had secured a loan from a local financial institution to build shops and a residential house for his family at the back of the building.

And as if that is not enough, Ali is still traumatised after he watched hopelessly how a woman and a teenager aged were swept away in broad daylight by the charging waters after River Narok burst its banks.

They were later identified as Elina Wambui Njenga and George Kaitiiki who were among the 15 people to be claimed by the disaster.

It is said that I now have to rent a house for my family. Income from my seven shops is no longer forthcoming.

Then the loan from a local bank I took for my business was gone.

The heavy rains and floods in the country in March to June left a trail of destruction with the director of Narok County government, James G. Kongoti, asking Kenyans to brace for more rains.

The official had said the outlook for June-July-August (JJA) 2015 sea...

Continued on page 11
Africa’s food security threatened by ‘strange’ maize disease

By DUNCAN MBOYAH

Farmers in sub-Saharan Africa are counting their losses following a maize disease that continues to destroy their crops.

According to the Principal Secretary for Agriculture Sicily Kariuki, the Maize Lethal Necrosis (MLN) disease has caused losses worth millions of dollars for farmers and seed companies in the affected regions in sub-Saharan Africa, where maize is both a food and cash crop.

The disease that was spotted in Kenya four years ago has been spreading in most of the Sub-Saharan Africa hence threatening the food security.

The disease is widespread across most maize-growing areas in Kenya and is causing an estimated loss of 10 per cent of national maize production per year valued at KSh 50 billion, says the Principal Secretary, while opening a Sub-Saharan Africa conference on the disease.

She revealed that Kenya had made losses of 0.3 million tons valued at KSh 110 million since the disease was reported in the country in 2011.

Kariuki said that the occurrence of MLN in Kenya was a new phenomenon that has necessitated scientists to initiate basic research to understand it and seek urgent measures to manage in the short and long term.

"There is need to step up surveillance and rapid diagnosis so that farmers and seed companies get to learn of the dangers," Dr. Boddupalli added.

He observed that the establishment of the MLN screening facility in 2013 at Naivasha, in Nakuru County, by CIMMYT and Kenya Agriculture and Livestock Research Organization (KALRO) in response to the outbreak in East Africa, was timely and effective.

"This facility was a critical breakthrough in the efforts to manage MLN. So far, more than 40,000 maize accessions have been evaluated and promising lines with levels of resistance to MLN have been selected," he said.

The Director of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) Dr. Joe DeVries said that the organization will ensure that Africa’s farmers continue to get MLN free quality seeds to safeguard their livelihoods and food security.

"We are involved in the MLN mitigation effort and hope to draw on that experience as we collaborate with all stakeholders," Dr. DeVries said, and added that they have years of experience in working with seed companies to produce quality, certified seeds.

The director said that the outbreak would be contained like the maize stock virus was managed in Africa before.

"The strategy will not only look at the MLN disease, but will also address the spread of the disease in regions that are yet to be affected. There is need to step up surveillance and rapid diagnosis so that farmers and seed companies get to learn of the dangers," Dr. Boddupalli added.

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More than 150 participants drawn from sub-Saharan Africa, Europe, The United States of America (USA) and Asia attended the conference to share knowledge on the latest diagnostics and screening methods for the MLN disease, and assess ways of curbing its spread across Africa to help mitigate its effects, particularly large-scale crop losses for smallholder and seed companies.

The recommendations from the conference are expected to be used by seed companies in Africa to produce and exchange MLN-free seed and also how best they can help smallholder farmers to effectively tackle MLN to safeguard their subsistence and livelihoods.

Among other things it will be based on the county’s health strategy pillars that include service delivery, information and technology, medical products, vaccines and technology, health financing, leadership and governance, infrastructure and advocacy.

There will be key health messages targeted at families and the youth to raise awareness issues that have seen the breakdown in the social fabric.

Addressing key health stakeholders from Nyeri in Nairobi at a recent meeting organised by AWLN, Nyeri County Health Executive, Dr Charles Githinji said that among the key issues the strategy must address is to ensure that every sub-county health facility has an ultrasound machine.

He noted that this will help address issues of maternal and newborn mortality because problems will be identified early.

"Said Githinji: "There will be an officer charged with doing ultrasound at each health centre on specific days of the week. The officer will be based at the sub-county level but will be visiting the various health facilities at least once a week to ensure that mother’s lives are saved."

He said this should also get the support of the Members of the County Assembly and the country parliament in order for it to be implemented.

According to Githinji, it’s important that maternal health be given due consideration. He also reiterated the need to provide proper information to eliminate misuse of the emergency pill which many women and girls are treating as a normal contraceptive.

“We must ensure that our women and girls get the right information regarding family planning and contraceptives so that whatever method they decide to use will be from an informed position,” the official said.

According to Joan Koomson, a programme manager at the African Women Development Fund (AWDF), family planning and maternal health remain key priority for AWLN.

“AWLN would like to see parliaments and county assemblies take a lead role in prioritising to place maternal health at the top of their agenda and campaign,” said the manager.

Koomson revealed that they are supporting programmes in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania to ensure that women and girls have access to quality family planning information, services and supplies.

Said the manager: “They need to show us commitment, provide the needed support and sensitise the public on maternal health issues and family planning.”

The strategy will be officially launched on August 24, 2015, when the AWLN members will be holding their annual conference in Nairobi.

African women help put family planning on Nyeri County agenda

By Jane Godia

Nyeri County has been on the news lately for the wrong reasons linked to sexual and Gender Based Violence which remain synonymous with the County, just as much as tea, coffee and the majestic Mount Kenya.

However, despite all these, there are those who have noticed Nyeri County for positive reasons and one of them is the African Women Leader Network.

AWLN is a network of women leaders from all over Africa who are committed to working on critical concerns of women’s rights, reproductive health, social development and justice and have been active critical change agents at national, regional and international levels.

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Kenya set to end cholera in the country

By DUNCAN MBOYAH

Over 100 medics drawn from the National and County Governments have resolved to lead the anti Cholera campaign from the front.

Meeting in Nairobi recently, they agreed to intensify surveillance as well as engage communities where cases of cholera had been reported in the 13 of the 47 Counties in the country which claimed scores of lives since the beginning of the year.

“It is not acceptable to continue reporting new cases and deaths emanating from Cholera. The disease must be kicked out of the country as it is causing unnecessary deaths,” The Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Health, Dr. Khadijah Kassachoon, said at a Nairobi hotel.

The principal called on stakeholders to engage in continuous public awareness during the period to create an informed public in dealing with the disease.

She disclosed that following the outbreak of cholera in 11 counties, 3,234 cases were reported and over 70 people have died.

Dr. Kassachoon told the County health officials to be on alert always and to take preventative measures to prevent the occurrence of the disease.

The World Health Organization (WHO) Kenya Representative Dr. Custodia Mandhate, attributed the outbreak of cholera in Kenya and neighbouring countries to changes in the environment and climate change.

She said that the disease was further confounded by late diagnosis and poor quality management of the epidemics in the countries.

Dr. Mandhate observed that 20,136 cases and 382 deaths had been reported from 14 countries, including Kenya this year.

“Due to weak health systems and reporting challenges, many countries in Africa go under reporting outbreaks of Cholera and other diseases,” she adds.

According to the Kenya Health Preventive and Health Promotion Dr. Jackson Kosoko, the government has entered into an agreement with private companies to help it fight the disease.

“We are talking to the private sector to help us manage the outbreaks that costs the country a lot of money yearly,” the official said.

Since the end of 2014, the country has been experiencing cholera in various counties after a Cholera-free spell in the past three years.

Currently only eight (out of 30 counties where data was available) have a plan for sanitation which Counties and partners can roll out.

Depending on the channels used it is approx. US$ 30,000 to US$ 60,000 to execute the campaign for 3 months in a given county. The more expensive roll out of the campaign includes inter-personal communication in a sub-set of sub-counties.

Given the cholera outbreak, counties will spend much more money controlling the outbreak than they will in putting those preventive measures in place.

Vulnerable Populations in Emergencies

Narok women ‘abandon’ manyattas after seeing the light

By CLIFFORD AKUMU

As the sun rises on sleepy Sauswa village in dry and vast Narok County, Joyce Murungaru is among the women whose day will be dominated by trekking in search of water and firewood for their families.

Murungaru, 28 years, has lived in a manyatta (traditional Maasai hut) for decades, and knows very well what it means when drought strikes in the arid village.

But that lifestyle is about to change thanks to a new technology called green building revolution or eco-manyatta.

This is providing sustainable livelihoods for the pastoralist communities and saving the likes of Murungaru the agony of trekking long distances to fetch firewood, building materials and water on a daily basis.

“The modern housing design utilises the locally available materials powered by readily available green energy supply from solar and biogas technology” says Lisa Philips, Head of DFID Kenya.

In Maasai culture, women do not own anything, nor are they allowed to inherit anything. They are expected to serve under the authority of men.

According to Phillips, that economic empowerment and job creation initiative for the women and youth is a ‘recipe for a prosperous future among the pastoralist communities’.

“We have to support women to earn a living just like men by making such steps as the one we have started because they have not been earning anything” she notes.

Forest ecosystems play a critical role in stabilising the climate; providing food, water, wood products and vital medicines and supporting much of the world’s bio-diversity.

Building of climate smart communities is paramount in tackling the runaway effects of green house gas emissions.

“Building sustainable villages will strengthen adaptation to climate change” says Alexos Masindo, a director of International Labour Organisation.

According to research by World Resource Institute, 30 per cent of global forest cover has been cleared, while another 20 per cent has been degraded.

Deforestation and land degradation is on the rise, and accounts for around 10 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions, according to the UN’s IPCC Climate science panel.

“Currently I have planted around seventy seedlings thanks to the initiators of this project. I now understand the role of trees in conserving the environment” says Murungaru.

Eco-manyatta has a biogas technology that has made cooking and heating easy through the use of feedstocks from cow dung.

Improvement of agriculture through use of bio-slurry in the fields is another added benefit provided by the biogas technology.

With 20 cattles and around 300 goats, she will have an uninterrupted supply of clean energy.

“I don’t have to cut trees to get firewood again. I did not know that I could get gas from cow dung” says a confident Murungaru.

Solar installation in the eco-manyatta has saved on household costs incurred purchasing kerosene and allowed proper reading lighting especially for school-going children.

Inhalation of gases emitted from lighting firewood, that was experienced in the old manyatta, was linked to the high cases of respiratory and eye diseases amongst the pastoralist communities.

A report in 2014 by the World Health Organisation entitled ‘Household Energy and Health,’ said that household smoke was responsible for 1.6 million deaths and 2.7 per cent of the global burden of diseases.

“My children now have more time to study without problems because they only have to patient- ly wait for the sun to shine” says Murungaru.

Another benefit is water harvesting technique that increases access to clean water, allowing women to redirect time and effort towards other socio-economic productive enterprises.

“I can now harvest clean water that I will use during the dry spell,” says Murungaru.

The eco-manyatta, compared to the traditional hut, is a permanent structure raising the question of how they will comprehend the cultural shock.

Although famed for their nomadic Maasai life, the pastoralist communities are now changing since they have been allocated land.

“Every member of Sauswa-Kiet group ranch has each been allocated 30 acres of land so we don’t move as we used to” says Janet Salash.

The Narok County first lady says that hailstorms have been a challenge to the old manyatta since the polythene paper used for roofing easily gets damaged.

“Any one of these structures after seeing the light” says Murungaru.

“Hailstorms cause it has proper ventilation,” says Salash.

After cross-carrying the vast Narok County conducting maternal health programmes in the community, Narok County first lady saw a problem and hence the idea was born.

She realised that the household who lived in the old manyatta had various diseases associated with smoke, and so she teamed up with other stakeholders to start the green building technology.

“If TV has gone from a simple box to flat screen, then why do we have to live with these manyattas which jeopardise the health of our children? We need to embrace technology and then change and improve” says Sarah Tunai, eco-manyatta ambassador.

Although the innovation is a culture shock, for they have abandoned their nomadic Maasai life for a more green existence in their new permanent house; this revolution has demonstrated the potential of pastoralists.

“It is a unique idea that creates the interaction between culture and modernity for sustainable livelihoods of pastoralist communities” says the Narok County first lady.

The enhancement of the Maasai manyatta at Joyce compound does not interfere with the old design and lifestyle.

“Eco-manyatta cost Sh350, 000 to construct, however, the county government is working with stake- holders and financial players to sub- sidise that price.

“I want other people from the larger Sauswa-Kiet ranch to be empowered economically just like we have seen” says Murungaru.
Vulnerable Populations in Emergencies

Nairobi youth embrace bamboo farming to save forests

By J.M. KWANYA

For decades, carpentry has led the way in the growth of the economy in Kenya. The ever-growing human population has also led to clearance of forests and the settlement hence loss of species growing forests. With the soaring demand of natural resources, the environment faces devastation thus the need for a more eco-friendly alternative to timber.

Environmentalists advise that bamboo is the best alternative to wood. This is not only because of the species’ ability to grow for between 8-10 years but also because it releases carbon into the atmosphere. As Akoko interrupted his working on a chair to welcome us to the workshop, Bosu was busy putting final touches to a client’s product.

Introduction

“I was introduced into bamboo carpentry by Mr. Luis Taylor, a family friend who had a Ghanian family in the bamboo business,” says Felix. “I would have loved to be a professional footballer, I loved football but stopped playing after I got a knee injury while in high school. Akoko tells.

Apart from working on various clients’ orders and selling their crafts at exhibitions, the group conducts training on bamboo usage and tries to create awareness about its benefits.

With the help of Kenya Forestry Research Institute (KEFRI), the group has been their partners long before their outfit started, they have conducted trainings for youth groups in Nairobi and Kisumu.

“Tikicked by KEFRI to attend two-week training on basic skills of bamboo carpentry. We underwent another two weeks training where we were taught on bamboo product finishing,” says Akoko confidently.

From the training, the group set out to spread the bamboo gospel starting out at Haruma and Madaraka schools before moving to the lakeside city of Kisumu and then to Nairobi’s Baba Dogo neighbourhood. The group has never stopped in their resolve to create a bamboo culture in Kenya. They move from town to town, to slums and to village to conduct the trainings on bamboo plantation management and carpentry at a fee.

The group also sells bamboo seedlings which go for about Kshs. 500 each.

By imparting knowledge to fellow youth, our skills on bamboo have also grown immensely,” Akoko says.

Last year Akoko was honoured to be invited to attend two-month training in China under the invitation of the China Bamboo Centre, says his skills on bamboo carpentry are now advanced.

The Centre is arguably the most skilled on bamboo in China and besides closely working with the Kenya Forestry Research Institute, also works with other non-Governmental Organisations.

They are currently working with the Waterstone Resource Farmer Ltd, a firm that has the task of delivering which can be attributed to this include economic, cultural, religious and geographical factors that have resulted in the lack of immunity among children from these deadly diseases and therefore, resulting in frequent outbreaks causing high morbidity and mortality from immunisation against vaccine-preventable diseases.

Currently, help to achieve the universal polio vaccine campaign target the country launched a national immunisation policy in February 2014, and also declared polio, an issue of public health emergency.

Presently the country is focused on implementing the Global Vaccination Action Plan (2011/2020) which puts emphasis on demand for immunisation as a shared responsibility, increased accessibility to vaccines, ensuring equity in immunisation, integration of immunisation services to other health programmes, ensuring sustainability through broadening participation and introduction of new vaccines and immunisation technologies.

Among the new vaccines to be introduced by the government this year is the one dose effective polio vaccine which will help boost immunity.

Therefore everyone should ensure that every child is reached during routine polio and vaccination campaigns and completes all the doses while the national and country governments prioritize immunisation.

Nairobi youth embrace bamboo farming to save forests

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Environmentalists advise that bamboo is the best alternative to wood. This is not only because of the species’ ability to grow for between 8-10 years but also because it releases carbon into the atmosphere. As Akoko interrupted his working on a chair to welcome us to the workshop, Bosu was busy putting final touches to a client’s product.

Introduction

“I was introduced into bamboo carpentry by Mr. Luis Taylor, a family friend who had a Ghanian family in the bamboo business,” says Felix. “I would have loved to be a professional footballer, I loved football but stopped playing after I got a knee injury while in high school. Akoko tells.

Apart from working on various clients’ orders and selling their crafts at exhibitions, the group conducts training on bamboo usage and tries to create awareness about its benefits.

With the help of Kenya Forestry Research Institute (KEFRI), the group has been their partners long before their outfit started, they have conducted trainings for youth groups in Nairobi and Kisumu.

“Tikicked by KEFRI to attend two-week training on basic skills of bamboo carpentry. We underwent another two weeks training where we were taught on bamboo product finishing,” says Akoko confidently.

From the training, the group set out to spread the bamboo gospel starting out at Haruma and Madaraka schools before moving to the lakeside city of Kisumu and then to Nairobi’s Baba Dogo neighbourhood. The group has never stopped in their resolve to create a bamboo culture in Kenya. They move from town to town, to slums and to village to conduct the trainings on bamboo plantation management and carpentry at a fee.

The group also sells bamboo seedlings which go for about Kshs. 500 each.

By imparting knowledge to fellow youth, our skills on bamboo have also grown immensely,” Akoko says.

Last year Akoko was honoured to be invited to attend two-month training in China under the invitation of the China Bamboo Centre, says his skills on bamboo carpentry are now advanced.

The Centre is arguably the most skilled on bamboo in China and besides closely working with the Kenya Forestry Research Institute, also works with other non-Governmental Organisations.

They are currently working with the Waterstone Resource Farmer Ltd, a firm that has the task of delivering which can be attributed to this include economic, cultural, religious and geographical factors that have resulted in the lack of immunity among children from these deadly diseases and therefore, resulting in frequent outbreaks causing high morbidity and mortality from immunisation against vaccine-preventable diseases.

Currently, help to achieve the universal polio vaccine campaign target the country launched a national immunisation policy in February 2014, and also declared polio, an issue of public health emergency.

Presently the country is focused on implementing the Global Vaccination Action Plan (2011/2020) which puts emphasis on demand for immunisation as a shared responsibility, increased accessibility to vaccines, ensuring equity in immunisation, integration of immunisation services to other health programmes, ensuring sustainability through broadening participation and introduction of new vaccines and immunisation technologies.

Among the new vaccines to be introduced by the government this year is the one dose effective polio vaccine which will help boost immunity.

Therefore everyone should ensure that every child is reached during routine polio and vaccination campaigns and completes all the doses while the national and country governments prioritize immunisation.

Firewood is a major source of fuel in most homes and schools, especially in the rural areas. This is an open yard used to store firewood at Got Niel Girls in Tinderet constituency in Nandi County.

Photo: George Ngesa

Vaccine preventable diseases are still a threat to children

By PATRICK MUTISYA

Preventable diseases can be dated back to the days of immunisation of children under five years are still posing a challenge to Kenya today.

According to the Head of Directorate of Preventive and Promotive Health, Dr. William Maina, lack of concerted effort by all stakeholders has contributed to the failure of the campaign.

Kenya’s supplementary immunisation campaign target for polio and other antigens is 95 percent and if the target is not met, the process of immunisation is repeated, while the sub-counties in the country are working towards this. This can be attributed to this include economic, cultural, religious and geographical factors that have resulted in the lack of immunity among children from these deadly diseases and therefore, resulting in frequent outbreaks causing high morbidity and mortality from immunisation against vaccine-preventable diseases.

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Nairobians join charity walk to support the ‘forgotten’ boy-child

By ODHIAMBO ORLALE

Hundreds of men, women and children braved the chilling Saturday morning weather to remember the boy-child. The multitude was led by Nairobi County Deputy Mayor, Jonathan Mueke, and Redeemed Church of Kenya’s Bishop JB Masinde for the 11.4km charity walk and awareness campaign.

The theme of the walk was: ‘March 4-The-Boy’, held on the eve of the Fathers Day, organized by Transform Kenya, a faith-based non-profit organisation, which seeks to start a movement that seeks to empower and equip future generation leaders.

Bishop Masinde in his brief speech before praying for the participants, said that time had come to remember the boy-child, saying the emphasis on the girl child by the civil society and by the Government through the media was making some of the boys feel neglected and ignored.

The same views were shared by the Deputy Governor, who was the chief guest, who supported the March-4-the-Boy campaign saying as the Government and NGOs promote the girl-child education and programmes, they must also remember that the boys also need attention and have special needs.

It was a carnival mood at the venue where people of all ages, social backgrounds, who joined the organizers of the boy-child initiative to create awareness and also raise funds to support their programmes.

The historic walk started at the Uhuru Gardens along Langata Road at 7.30am after a 30-minute warm up session backed by upbeat music from powerful stereo system.

There was a brief speech by the founder of the project, Pastor Samuel Mbewi of Marumo Church, Nairobi, followed by prayers by Bishop Masinde and then the Deputy Governor flagged off the huge crowd of excited men, women, boys and girls as they crossed onto Langata Road led by about 20 outriders who included one uniformed police officer.

They walked in a procession along Langata Road past Dam Estate, Sunshine Secondary, Amref Headquarters, Wilson Airport, T-Mall shopping centre then to Nyayo National Stadium before turning back on Uhuru Highway at the Bunyala Road round-about to head back to Uhuru Gardens. Most of them took two hours to complete the walk.

The participants wore branded grey and black T-shirts, emblazoned with the ‘March-4-The-Boy’ message on it; each was bought for Shs1,000 each as part of the fundraising effort.

There was a giant size billboard at the Madaraka Estate round-about promoting the campaign. A number of participants posed there for some photographs before proceeding with the walk.

According to Pastor Mbewi: “The Prayer Movement Trust was started in 2010 from the desire to see Kenya embrace its full potential of prosperity by individuals, leaders initiating positive change in their spaces of influence.”

The outspoken pastor says he had realised that Kenya’s society suffers in many ways because of the absence of responsible leaders in the home, the church and in the market place.

The Boys to Men programme kick started Transform Kenya’s operations towards the achieving of its mission. Helpings to fill the gap for the fatherless, ‘Boys-to-Men’ programme mentors boys to realising the meaning of true masculinity.

Two years later, in early 2012, Pastor Mbewi started a programme for men dubbed Man Enough to cater to the older generation of men, 21 years of age and above. This program guides the men to know how to take charge of their lives as men living in the pressures of today’s society. It also equips them on how they should boldly face their responsibilities as fathers, sons, brothers and husbands. With the growth of the organisation and a clear shaping of the vision of Kenya’s transformation, other programs have also been birthed.

Lead to Serve, is a leadership programme that aims to equip teenagers (out leaders of tomorrow), church leaders and leaders in the corporate & political spaces on how to lead in service.

Says Pastor Mbewi: “We are devoted to the ministry of calling men into authentic masculinity, preparing boys to be real men, developing servant leaders and mobilizing the church for community transformation. We believe that with the family unit transformed, the whole society is changed. The family unit is the foundation of every society. Men with understanding true masculinity and embracing their responsibility as leaders in the home, the family unit will be healthy and as a result, communities in the society will be transformed.”

“They run Boys to Men, Man Enough, Lead to Serve and Connect programmes which all fall under the critical components of society: the family, church and market place.”

“The Prayer Movement Trust was started in 2010 from the desire to see Kenya embrace its full potential of prosperity by individuals, leaders initiating positive change in their spaces of influence.”

African Development Bank launches youth agricultural project

By DUNCAN MBBOYAH

A special project aimed at attracting young graduates to venture into agriculture and agribusiness in Kenya has been launched.

The project, named Makuwe Youth Agripreneurs (MYA) is part of the continental program that targets over 780,000 university graduates that is initiated by the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) and the African Development Bank (ADB).

IITA Director General Dr. Nteranya Sanginga says: “The project is to help young graduates start creating jobs through mechanisation of agriculture at early stage instead of relying on employment” said at the International Centre for Insect Physiology and Ecology (ICPE).

The project is based at the Kibwezi, in Makueni County, and is expected to bring together young graduates from the region who will receive training on modern farming methods, processing of and value addition to agricultural produce, and entrepreneurship.

The project is part of a larger initiative initiated three years ago in Nigeria. It has so far been launched in Uganda, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Zambia and Tanzania and is expected to spread to 20 countries by the end of this year.

The director also observed that the project will help solve the twin challenges of youth unemployment in Africa and the need to increase agricultural production to supply food for a rapidly increasing population in an environment of climate change and a reduction of available farmland.

Dr. Sanginga said that the project started with 25 youths in Nigeria and has since then attracted over 500,000 university graduates from different disciplines.

“The distribution of food and products are today more suited for the youth than the elderly,” he said.

He revealed that ADB has already given a grant of USD 16 million to help transform agriculture on the continent.

IITA also plans to build a facility in Eastern Kenya to help manage aflatoxin in cereals. Aflatoxin had killed many people in the past in the region.

“The youth’s mindset is already changing and they are networking with entrepreneurs in moving Africa away from perennial hunger,” says Dr. Sanginga.

On his part, Prof. Geoffrey Kilonzo from the University of Nairobi hailed the project adding that it is an opportunity to help empower Africa’s young people into developing the continent through agriculture.

He asked the youth to take agriculture courses saying agricultural sector was capable of saving the continent from hunger and poverty.

“The idea is visionary as it stands to solve unemployment and food security in Africa,” agriculture and technology consultant Dr. Mphoko Bokanga said.

Bokanga urged African leaders to begin investing in young people to enable them take agriculture seriously.

He noted that through mechanisation, the youth were capable of utilising Africa’s arable land that is the biggest in the world yet underutilised due to lack of inputs and financing.

One of the fathers carrying his son on his shoulders during the historic boy-child charitable walk, in Nairobi, on the eve of Father’s Day to remember the ‘forgotten’ boy-child.
Experts say rising population might affect economic forecast

By Joyce Chimbi

Economic experts are confident that it is only a matter of time before Kenya achieves a double digit economic growth rate up from the current 5.7 percent.

But experts on population now say that the country must look into new and more innovative ways to raise revenue in order to support the rising population.

This confidence - that the country is on the right track - stems from early October last year when Kenya jumped into the middle income bracketing after a re-basing of the economy which revealed that the country has an average national income of $1,160.

Mark Kirimi, an economic analyst says that the World Bank classifies a country as middle income "if its gross national income per capita (a nation’s Gross Domestic Product plus net income received from overseas) surpasses $1,036."

The re-basing revealed that Kenya is much wealthier than previously recorded and is now the ninth largest economy in Africa up from the 12th position, he says.

According to him, the country has been showing a strong economic performance and inflation has been within the Central Bank of Kenya’s target of between 2.5 percent to 7 percent.

However, the expert explains that to continue on that winning economic streak, there are many hurdles that must be overcome.

“Sectors that contributed to the economy achieving a remarkable economic growth are facing significant challenges,” says the economist.

He cites the agricultural sector, which is still the backbone of the economy, according to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, saying its contribution to the GDP is now estimated at 25.4 percent up from 24.1 percent.

Yet many small-scale farmers who contribute at least 75 percent of the total agricultural output and 70 percent of the marketed agricultural produce continue to face a myriad of challenges.

Climate change, extensive sub-division of agricultural land as well as the conversion of agricultural land into residential areas is just a few of the threats facing the agricultural sector.

Similar concerns are raised by Isaac Maiyo, of Schemers, an agricultural community based organisation in Uasin Gishu County: “Most farmers are not coping well with climate change."

Maiyo refers to a series of failed maize seasons in the few parts of the Rift Valley, the country’s breadbasket in the recent past as an example.

And that is not all, says the official: “When land is sub-divided into very small units, it becomes very difficult to employ technology, for example if a farmer needs to use a tractor, how will it turn?”

Maiyo further says that with sub-division comes extensive fencing, further eating into the land.

Besides, the government is yet to raise an estimated one trillion Kenyan shillings - an equivalent of the 2013/2014 national budget-which is meant to finance a five-year climate change adaptation and mitigation plan.

But agriculture is not the only sector under siege. Javas Bigambo from Interthoughts Consulting, a think-tank, says that the current spate of insecurity “may puncture the otherwise steady economic growth.”

Bigambo says that while the re-basing that took the country to a higher economic bracket speaks to the solid growth of the country's economy: “this growth is hinged on a number of key pillars and security is one of them.”

The consultant says that if the Government fails to step up counter terrorism responses as well as deterrence mechanisms and rebuild confidence among Kenyans and beyond, one of the casualties will be the tourism sector.

“When the tourism sector is hit, a major tributary of the country's economy is significantly affected,” Bigambo says.

So far since some western powers issued travel advisories to their nationals to keep off Kenya on security grounds, millions of Kenyans who directly and indirectly draw their livelihoods from the tourism sector have been adversely affected through loss of jobs, business and other opportunities.

“We have seen hotels being closed, people in the industry losing jobs as well as a reduced foreign exchange earnings,” Bigambo recalls.

Government statistics are already showing that the sector has been hit hard.

Kirimi says that in the second quarter of the year, the tourism sector slowed down economic expansion to 5.8 percent down from 7.2 percent in a similar period last year.

While there were 1.09 million international visitors in the country, it was an 11.3 percent drop from those who visited the country in 2012.

Kirimi says that new comers into the economic growth may lose to insecurity.

“The manufacturing sector has performed very well in the year 2009 to 2013, with an 11.3 percent contribution to the GDP up from 9.5 percent,” he says.

As the country becomes more insecure, so does investor confidence.

Kirimi says that while the extractive industry is still young, “it holds great promises especially with a series of new natural resources discoveries.”

Investor confidence is key towards its take off and also towards ensuring that it maintains a steady growth, the expert says.

He further explains that the financial services sector has been growing exponentially and Kenya has been targeted as the regional financial hub.

But even as challenges abound, Kirimi says that the country “will remain on the right economic track only if, the necessary interventions are put in place.

Top: Kenyans march in a procession to mark one of the many causes championed by various organisations and activists. Experts on population now say that the country must look into new and more innovative ways to raise revenue in order to support the rising population of 40 million. Bottom: Men and women walking to work along Mbagathi Way to Industrial Area, in Nairobi. The Government is grappling with the high unemployment rate in the country that puts a strain on the economy and social services. Photo: AWC Correspondent.
Researchers happy with Kenya’s top ranking in access to justice

By DUNCAN MBOYAH

A new research tool to evaluate the progress of countries in giving their citizens’ rights to access information, access to justice and rights for public participation has ranked highly.

The World Resources Institute (WRI) and the Institute for Law and Environmental Governance (ILEG), have ranked Kenya in position 36th globally and 4th in Africa.

The two organizations under the auspices of the Access Initiative launched the Environmental Democracy Index (EDI) assessment results for Kenya, in Nairobi, last month.

The data that was gathered showed that Kenya scored higher than the Africa regional average and ranked 36th globally and 4th in Africa, behind South Africa, Cameroon, and Zimbabwe.

“The EDI is a landmark achievement in the efforts to demonstrate the link between governance and sustainable development,” the Institute for Law and Environmental Governance (ILEG) Executive Director Benson Ochieng said at the launch.

He said that the research tool is set to be of importance to the Government and civil society in Kenya to understand gaps in the current laws and practice on environmental governance.

“It will help to address and push for reforms in relation to public participation in furthering environmental democracy, as envisaged under Kenya’s new Constitution,” the director says.

Ochieng noted that the EDI will become an important tool to measure progress that has been made in many countries in Africa as far as involving the citizenry in important policy decision-making for sustainable development.

According to Carole Excell, the Director of the Access Initiative, based at the World Resources Institute, EDI highlights the need to continue to be innovative in this region in developing strong rights to information, participation and transparency.

She said that EDI is the first publicly available online platform to track countries’ progress in enacting national laws to promote transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement in environmental decision-making.

“The index evaluates environmental democracy in 70 countries, including 75 legal and 24 practice indicators, based on recognized international standards,” Excell added.

The EDI draws on national laws and practices that were assessed and scored by more than 140 lawyers and experts around the world.

The index was created for civil society, governments, academics, and the private sector to allow them to assess how well their country protects access rights in matters related to the environment.

These rights have been recognised by the United Nations as fundamental to sustainable development. Kenya also scored very well on access to justice and was the top ranking country in Africa, ranking fifth globally.

EDI gives citizens a credible, independent source to understand what rights they have to participate in decisions about their environment.

Governments will be able to benchmark their progress against an international standard, while learning about model laws and practices from around the world.

Stakeholders have the opportunity to view and download data, make comparisons, and rank countries’ performance at any level of detail.

By DUNCAN MBOYAH

Kenya has made tremendous progress in patent applications since the year 1994, the first time when a patent was granted in the country.

Previously, patent applications in Kenya have a negligible contribution to the growth of worldwide patent applications as it accounted for approximately 0.011 percent of the patent applications worldwide in 2012.

But a lot has changed especially during the period 1990 – 2013, where a total of 2,388 patents were filed in Kenya and 633 patents representing 26.5 percent of the total applications were granted.

Intellectual property rights are seen as important in economic development because they provide a mechanism of turning knowledge from a public good to a private good that can be traded and subjected to market forces and also help to make freely available technical information since full disclosure is a requirement for granting the protection.

However, the awareness about application for and use of intellectual property is characteristically low in developing countries.

Kenyan patents are handled by the Kenya Industrial Property Office (KIPO), a body that was formed in 1994.

“The long-term trend shows that there has been a continuous growth in the number of patent applications filed in Kenya, with exception of 1994, 1997, 1999, 2000, 2006 and 2013 in which there were decline in patent applications from the previous years,” the Director of Scinnovent Centre, a policy and development think tank in Kenya, Dr. Maurice Bolo said during the launch of the study in Nairobi.

He said that even though there were indications of a decline of 6.9 percent from the number of patents applications filed in 2012, it shows that Kenya is on the right track.

He observed that this low rate in terms of patents granted formed the basis for the determination of the duration taken for a patent to warrant grant.

In 2007, for the first time, the patent applications in Kenya exceeded the 100 mark, a trend which has been maintained since.

This trend is consistent with the worldwide patent applications trend, which also experienced a continuous growth between 1995 and 2012 with exception of a slight decrease in 2002 and a more pronounced decrease in 2009, which was associated with the global financial crisis.

“Our analysis reveal that majority of the patents (21.96 percent) took duration of between 25 months and 36 months (2 years to 3 years) to be granted, while the longest patent application took 183 months to be granted, Dr. Bollo said.

By Kenyan law, patents filed through the national route take a minimum statutory period of 18 months. In cases where it has taken less time, these were applications filed before the Industrial Property Act (2001) came into force; hence the 18 months period was not applicable then.

During the period under review, companies filed 1,375 patents, out of which 496 were granted representing 37.4 percent of the total patents granted.

The government filed 8 applications and was granted 2 patents which is 0.3 percent of the total patents granted.

At the same time, public research institutes filed 69 applications and were granted 25 patents, which represent 3.9 percent of the total patents granted. Universities and other learning institutions filed 69 patents, and were granted 10 patents, which is 1.6 percent of the total patents granted.

Individual inventors filed 581 applications and got 60 patents granted, representing 9.5 percent of the total patents granted in this period.

“A total of 278 patent applications were filed by various forms of partnerships, 40 of these were granted representing 6.3 percent of total patents,” Dr. Bollo said.

However, he noted that out of the 633 patents granted, 73.6 percent were Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT) while only 26.4 percent were national patents.

Dr. Bollo revealed that from the study, only 42 of the 396 utility models filed were granted, while 714 of the 1,392 industrial designs filed were granted.

But some utility models were rejected due to failure to meet the protection set criteria for an invention, failure to submit the required fees and lack of response to the patent cor-respondences.

According to the Kenya’s Access Initiative, the number of applications for various types of patents have increased.

However, patent applications are still low as a general trend in Africa compared to Europe and Asia.

Kenya has an institutional framework and infrastructure to continue granting patents.

Kenya has enacted the Industrial Property Act (2001) which provides for patent registration fee, patent renewal fee, and a patent application fee.

The Act also allows for the registration of utility models and plant variety rights.

According to Dr. Bollo, the government has a lot of work ahead to improve the patent system, including effective enforcement of the laws.

He also recommended that the government should provide more public awareness and create an environment that is conducive to innovation and entrepreneurship.

He further recommended that the government should establish a national patent office to handle the growing number of applications and ensure efficient and effective management of the patent system.

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Farming Technology gives hope of bumper yields in Western Kenya

By FRED DEYA

Western Kenya based Kenya Agricultural and Rural Development Research Organization (KALRO), Seed companies and Community Based Organizations are committed to improve and harness adoption of modern methods of crop production to raise crop yield for food security.

Seven Counties in the region have formed caucus of 27 farmer groups working on various field demonstration plots where smallholder farmers access, learn and hone crop production skills.

According to Mr. Wycliffe Wasawa, Research Assistant at Western Region Agricultural Technology Evaluation (We RATE) confirmed that their organization is committed to bring other research organizations on board; both local and international in order to realize the research agenda in western Kenya.

Wasawa was speaking to journalists and a number of local farmers during this year's Agricultural Society of Kenya (ASK) western region agricultural show.

“Over 250000 households in western Kenya have adopted the modern crop production. Some of the crops doing well in the region include Soya beans and hybrid maize.”

“Tendo Tego maize variety is one of the grain varieties which have taken 80 percent of households in the region have already adopted and honed crop growing techniques”, added Western Region Agricultural Expert.

“Drought Tego maize variety is one of the grain varieties which have taken a number of cycles on trial in western Kenya. Drought Tego, type 1101 is mostly adopted by farmers due to its drought tolerant and diseases resistant. The project have different confined trial areas in Kenya; Kitobo, Machakos and Kakamega.”

For instant, ROP officer has urged farmers to adopt modern farming technology and set indigenous farming in order to improve crop productivity for a food-secured region.

Boost for Kitui hospital as County boss teams up with state university

By BONIFACE MULU

Medical services at the Kitui County Hospital are expected to go a notch higher with the support of a public university.

The Kitui County government and the South Eastern Kenya University have signed a memorandum of understanding in order to have the university’s medical sciences students an internship programme at the Kitui Hospital.

The collaboration was signed at the Kitui County Governor’s office by the County Health and Sanitation Minister, Ruth Keki Mwanzia, and the South Eastern Kenya University Vice Chancellor, Prof Geoffrey Mulwani, and was witnessed by Governor Julius Malombe, his government officials and the SEKU staff.

The VC said that they will start courses on nursing and clinical services at the university by end of this year.

“We will start the public health and nursing courses followed by pharmacy and medical laboratory sciences later. The Nursing Council of Kenya has been waiting for this MOU to allow us to proceed with the programme,” the don added and expressed confidence that the programme would upgrade health care services to the county.

Success

“Our cooperation will provide our people with quality health care,” Mulwani said as he thanked the Governor for the success of the programme’s success.

He disclosed that the World Bank had given the university a whopping Shs350 million shilings for them to also establish the school of civil engineering at the university.

On his part, the Governor said that the cooperation will help his County Government to achieve its goals in the health sector.

“Kitui is a county with healthy residents that embrace preventive health and have access to affordable and equitable health care services,” the governor said.

Malombe said that the cooperation was also resonating well with the county vision of being a prosperous county with vibrant rural and urban economies whose people enjoy high quality of life.

“This collaboration on training health personnel and improving health is a fitting reminder of Mahatma Gandhi’s belief that health is wealth and not pieces of gold and silver,” the Governor said.

“It is for this reason that the county had prioritised health as one of the drivers of the County’s economic agenda,” Malombe said.

Malombe said that in order to promote equity in accessing health facilities for people in all areas of the county, the county government plans to operationalise additional 90 hospitals in the region at an average of 22 hospitals per year over the next four financial years.

He said that after operationalising the 99 health facilities across the county, the population living within 5km. radius of a health facility in the county will increase to 97 per cent in all the county’s 16 administrative districts and 40 wards.

The Governor said that the highest allocation, which is 25 per cent of the local budget, goes to the health and sanitation ministry as compared to the county’s other nine ministries.

“Consequently, the Kitui County government will in future focus more on promotive and preventive health care to confront the current challenge posed by communicable and non-communicable diseases resulting into double burden of diseases,” Malombe said.

“My government assures the SEKU leadership of our commitment to our obligations as stated in the MOU or additional obligations which might arise from time to time and agreed upon by both parties.
Vulnerable Populations in Emergencies

Media initiative to strengthen voices of journalists launched

By Antonia Musunga and Odhiambo Orlale

Over 10 media organisations have come together to strengthen the voices of journalists promote advocacy within the media industry.

These organisations which work within the media landscape in Kenya came together during the third media round table forum at Monarch Hotel, in Nairobi, to create a framework for coordination so as to formulate an advocacy strategy for the rights of journalists in the country.

The six who were represented were Kenya Correspondents Association (KCA), Development through Media (DTEM), Association of Media Women in Kenya (AMWIK), Media Policy Research Centre (MPRC), Kenya Union of Journalists (KUJ) and Africa Woman's Forum (AWF), and PANOS - ESA.

Other media organisations that were invited but were unable to sent their apologies were: Media for Environment, Science and Agriculture (MESHA), Kenya Parliamentary Journalists Association (KPJA) and Kenya Sports Journalists Association (KSJAP).

In his address, KCA chairman, Oleo Juma Taile, stressed the need for urgent action for the betterment of journalists' work.
A school that gives hope to the hopeless in Kenya’s ‘biggest slam’

By Enos Koko

S
ongs of praise are heard from a distance as we approached Drug Fighters and Counseling for Young Nation School. These are children who are happy after being given a second chance in life. Their faces are full of hope just as their school’s theme which states that “let’s break our boundaries”. Their happiness and moral is so persuasive such that any visitor will think that they are from a well-off family.

Drug Fighters and Counseling for young generation (DFC) school is a unique primary school founded by Ms. Musau. A woman of humble beginning, she didn’t have a chance to study well while she was a young girl. Her parents could not afford to pay her school fees. Hopeless and destitute, she engaged into a sexual relation that led to an early pregnancy at the age of 16 years.

Her parents neglected her completely leading to her becoming very lonely. At this age she looked for someone who could listen to her but in vain. It is for this reason that she started her school in order to give the neglected, a second chance in life.

“I didn’t have a chance to be listened to, all people saw in me was an image of a bad girl, explained Musau during the interview.”

She therefore started admitting, orphans and drug addicts. Her school is segmented in such a way that it has both boarding and day scholars.

“I started taking in children who needed to be listened to like rape victims, drug addicts and orphans,” says Musau.

Drug fighters and counseling for young generation school, started 12 years ago and currently has a population of 360 pupils with majority of them being rape victims.

It has 18 staff members who are determined to change lives of their pupils in different ways. She has employed, teachers and also guiding and counseling teachers to offer guidance to the teachers.

Due to its segmented nature drug fighters and counseling for young generation school abbreviated as (DFC) offers boarding services to those pupils who are neglected by their parents and also those whose lives are in danger.

“We offer boarding services to those pupils who are insecure with their parents and those that are sexually molested by their closest family members,” says a jovial Musau.

Since Kibera slum is characterized by several immoral cases like rape, drugs and even crime most parents who are unable to control their children finds it important to take their children at DFC centre.

“I have several cases of children who are rescued from being robbers and thieves,” says Musau.

The shelter has been registering its pupils for standard eight national exams and most of them usually pass and are also sponsored to High Schools.

“We have been performing well considering the fact that these students are treated as special ones,” says Ken Wanjala, the schools Headmaster.

In the last year’s national examinations, the school managed to a mean score of 276 up from 274 points in 2014 national exams.

According to the details we gathered from the parents, we found out that the school sponsors every pupil in high school. This is of great importance especially to those parents who cannot afford to pay for their children’s school fees in high school as Amina Owende happily explains.

“Most of us don’t have a fixed job, it’s obvious that we are unable to pay for school fees in secondary school,” says Owende.

Musau admits that she is surrounded by a community which does not value education especially to those pupils who have been rescued from being criminals.

“Sometimes they think that I am hiding thieves in this school and they often knock at my gate saying that my children have stolen from the neighbourhood,” Musau says.

Due to the nature of hard life, especially in slums, most parents try so much to take their children to schools of such standards and moreover those schools which offer services for free like tuition and lunch.

According to Musau, she usually finds it hard trying to explain to some parents why she requires a certain number of children.

“When a parent misses a chance for her child to be admitted here, he sometimes abuses me saying that I am using this school to get rich,” says Musau.

Due to the growing demand of pupils who want to be admitted at that school, Musau has plans of partitioning her school and builds more schools with their own specialization.

“I am building a children’s home in Meru which will be specializing in offering services to needy children as well as planning to enlarge the size of the school so that it can serve many pupils,” says Musau.

She has a target of helping more than 10,000 children before the year of 2030 and she therefore urges the governmental and wellwishers to come in plenty and help her achieve her target.

“If we support each other, many children will fulfill their dreams of getting an education and having a bright future and good have professions,” says Musau.

She advises parents to be close and open to their children since some children usually engage in immoral things because they lack parental guidance.

Narok town to host this year’s World Population Day

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Narok town is expected to host this year’s World Population Day on a watercourse as a solution to the perennial disaster.

In Narok, Ali was in his room at 5pm. In April on the fatal day when the town came crumbling down and life came to a standstill as raging river of dirty water laden with waste swept along the town’s only bridge the connects the town.

Another victim was 35-year-old Joseph Kamau whose business of selling CDs and second hand clothes was destroyed making him a pauper overnight.

“My source of income was crippled by the floods. I had a loan from Equity Bank that I don’t know how I will service. My customers also fled without paying me,” Kamau said standing outside a new business premises where he is trying to come to terms.

Narok County authorities 15 lives were lost during the April 27 flash floods and loss of business was devastating and estimated to be in the million shillings of shillings.

On his art, the chairman of Narok Central Business Association, Dr. David Sankok, says the disaster, regardless of the impact of climate change triggered by destruction of the environment in upper areas, was as a result of collapsed dykes built at a cost Sh. 2 million.

“We have been hit hard. The loss was a result of collapsed buildings, damage and loss of merchandise. The affected have lost their source of livelihood and regular income,” the official says.

Some experts have suggested the town be relocated. Some compare the town to a ‘cesspit’ because of the amount of garbage and soil from the hills that suffocated the town sitting on a watercourse as a solution to the perennial disaster.

Dr. Sankok says the disaster was a lesson for Governor Samuel ole Tu- nai, to come up with long-term strategy of solving the problem.

“The town’s future must be handled seriously. A master plan about its future is needed as a matter of urgency. Even if it means re-locating the town. ‘Time is ripe for a new town to be built away from the river course,’ says the official.

Even New Delhi, the capital city of India, emerged after the ‘Old Delhi’ failed to serve its purpose.

Former Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Information and Communications, Dr. Bitange Ndemo, says in one of his columns in the dailies “These disasters would be non-existent if we developed a habit of anticipating disasters. At the very least, it is an embarrassment to not just the Narok leadership, but to the entire country. We have simply failed to protect the lives of our people,” says the former PS.

“At minimum, the law’s protecting riparian land, historical data on flash floods in the area as well as the advent of urbanisation should have been used to bar people from settling in the lowlands that are likely to face floods in the event of rains,” says Ndemo.

Dr Ndemo advocates for a more sustainable policy that will permanently discourage people from settling and felling trees in hilly places.

The former PS believes that when the leadership settles for ‘The New Narok’ construction must be guided by a national building code that fully adheres to proper construction regulation.
Kitui County residents to ‘kiss goodbye’ to drought

By Boniface Mulu

The perennial drought in most parts of Kitui County will soon be history, thanks to a multi-million shillings water project launched recently.

Kitui County government with its partners has an ambitious plan to rehabilitate Matinga Dam in Kivani Location, Kitui West District of Kitui County at a cost of 750 million shillings.

According to Jacob Mwandikwa, the Chief Officer of the County Agriculture, Water and Irrigation Ministry, the dam in the arid and semi-arid area was last de-silted in 1979, some 24 years after it was constructed by the colonial government, in 1955.

It has an area of 154 acres and has a capacity to hold more than three million cubic metres of water annually.

The official was addressing hundreds of guests during this year’s World Environment Day celebrations held at the Matinga Dam where George Mulatya, the County Environment, Energy and Minerals Investments Development Minister, represented Kitui Governor, Julius Malombe, as the chief guest.

The event was organised by Kitui County government in partnership with the Anglican Development Services Eastern, National Environment Management Authority, Kitui Development Centre, World Vision, Wildlife Clubs of Kenya, Mutungu’s Environmental Resource Management Alliance, Kenya Forestry Research Institute, Kenya Forest Service and Water Resources Management Authority.

Said Mwandikwa: “The dam and its associated Mutungu’s hilltops and Kithyoko riverine ecosystem is an important, productive and unexploited ecosystem in Kitui County and extends from the Mutungu’s hills and borders the famous Yatta Plateau in Matinga area.”

The Mutungu’s hills are the main water catchment in the area and the size of the ecosystem is more than 5,000 square kilometers catering for 221,126 residents.

He said that the Matinga Dam area is a shared resource between three wards namely Mutungu and Kauwi in Kitui West District and Ngutani in Mwingi West District of Kitui County.

In his speech, read for him by Mulatya, the Governor disclosed that they (the county government) had used more than six million shillings in helping the residents plant more trees in the area to attract rain.

“We partner with the UNDP, Christian-Aid and the Anglican Development Services Eastern among others regarding the climate change adaptation measures in our county,” Malombe said.

The Governor asked the residents to plant trees including bamboo that can help them attract rain and to conserve the environment in the county.

The National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) Kitui County Officer, Boniface Mutinda, said that the World Environment Day has over the years grown to be a broad global platform for the public outreach that is widely celebrated by stakeholders in more than 100 countries in the world.

“In many countries, this annual event is used to enhance political attention and action towards improving the environment. It is best described as the people’s day of doing something for the environment,” the Mutinda said.

According to the officer, the annual event is the biggest most celebrated activity for the environment through which the global community celebrates the positive achievements for the environment and seeks further political goodwill from the government at the national and county levels.

Mutinda said NEMAs mission is to facilitate good governance in the protection, restoration, conservation, development and management of the environment, water and natural resources for the equitable and sustainable development.

The environmentalist urged Kitui residents to embrace good environmental practices like agro-forestry, sustainable land use, sustainable sand harvesting and charcoal production and to also invest the renewable sources of energy like solar, wind and biogas.

In his speech, the KEFRI Kitui Regional Research Centre Director, Dr. James Ndufa, urged the public to help change the environment to be good and lamented about the cutting of trees by charcoal dealers without any plans for replantation.

The forester said: “KEFRI has identified the degradation of hills in the region through charcoal burning as a major environmental problem that must be addressed urgently and seriously.”

The Anglican Development Services Eastern programmes Officer, Lydia Muithya, said that they (the NGO) are working in 10 of the 40 wards in Kitui County on environmental conservation.

Muithya then appreciated efforts by the Kitui County government in supporting the non-governmental organisations that are operating in the area, saying environmental conservation measures is a collective responsibility.
For pregnant women in Mageta island on Lake Victoria, the trip to the labour ward is no laughing matter. This is because most of them are forced to board a motor boat and seek medical services on the mainland at Usenge beach, some 20km away because the only health centre there is understaffed and overstretched.

A case in point is of Monica Atieno who was met at the beach at 6am on the Island in Siaya County waiting to board the homemade vessel to cross from the former detention camp to the main land.

Atieno is a mother of five, and took a dangerous journey across the waters of Lake Victoria just to deliver her fifth born child at Mageta Health Center, run by the Government, and lives over 10,000 residents on the island.

“I was referred to Bondo Sub-County hospital because I had a delivery complication. I was given an appointment to be at the hospital at 9am to be examined by a doctor,” Atieno told Reject.

According to Atieno, she boarded the 6am, boat from Mageta Island to Usenge beach but unfortunately, she delivered in the boat just as they were approaching Usenge beach.

She was help by the women who were aboard the boat to successfully deliver my now two year-old baby girl,” says Atieno adding that she was taken back to the island where she was examined and allowed to go home.

Atieno is among the many women in Mageta who despite the government’s free maternity care, have to contend with long distances and inadequate medical facilities to access health services.

Another victim is Grace Apiyo, 25, who delivered her son at home in the early hours of the morning.

She was help by the women who were aboard the boat to successfully deliver my now two year-old baby girl,” says Atieno adding that she was taken back to the island where she was examined and allowed to go home.

Apiyo appealed to the County government to recruit more nurses and support staff to help in delivering babies some of whose mothers cross from neighbouring Uganda for the maternity services.

A year ago, the United States Government donated a motorboat ambulance to Siaya County Government in a bid to help the residents access health care easily.

In his speech, during the handing over of the ambulance by US Ambassador to Kenya, Robert Godec, to Siaya Governor, Cornel Rasanga, the envoy said that the specialized boats would also be used to facilitate the care and treatment of those with HIV and AIDS in the remote parts of the fish island.

That is why when he handed over the ambulances to Siaya, Busia and Homa bay counties there was a collective sigh of relief from would-be benefactors of their services. But more than a year later, the Mageta, Njedza and Otambo islands in Siaya County continue to report cases of maternal deaths.

“We sighed in relief when the US Government only donated to us a boat and we’re making necessary arrangements to ensure that it’s fully equipped to help in medical referral cases in the hard to reach areas,” said Dr Owila.

According to the 2015/2016 financial year budget, the county’s health sector request the highest allocation of Sh1.75 billion, including Sh1.5 billion for recurrent expenditure and Sh192 million for development projects.

“We have also allocated Sh15 million for providing stipend on deliveries in the county’s public health facilities. This is aimed at promoting safe deliveries,” said the executive officer.
Machakos lady shines in agro-business and urge youth to emulate her

By MARY MWENDWA

For the past two years, Pauline Ndalu has proved that business is not for the faint hearted. Ndalu’s driving force has been that when the going gets tough, the tough get going by being part of the solution and not of the problem of high unemployment among the youth in the country.

Instead of lamenting about the high unemployment in the country, especially among the youth, the 21-year-old lady has made her Pauline’s Vegetable Green Grocer a household name through hard work and good public relations.

She is now commonly referred to as Mama Mifugo (woman who sells vegetables) in the streets of Machakos town in Machakos County.

Her long journey of perseverance and determination is a symbol of hope to many fellow youth who are struggling with unemployment phenomenon.

She has also been recognized internationally and will be representing Kenyan youth at an international agri-business forum in South Africa in October 2015.

Her future plans are to help other orphans realise their potential and own farms that will help train youth on agro-businesses in order to be successful and employ fellow youth.

She has visited many agriculture forums and trainings and is a member of Eoskus Group which linked her to the Machakos County government where she got seed money of Ksh50,000 and also enjoys trainings from them.

Brought up by a single parent and orphaned at a very early age in Kyulu village, Makueni County, Ndalu recalls tearfully how she was abused in the hands of her guardians.

“I grew up in abject poverty and as an orphan who depended on relatives I really suffered. I was mistreated and even they refused to take me to high school until a well wisher came to my rescue. Whenever I think of what I went through I get the motivation to work harder and prove to the whole world that my background will not determine my success,” she says confidently.

“I started this business back in 2013, I sell vegetables and fruits within Machakos County. I love this job very much, and I know many young people who fear doing such kind of work because they think it is not lucrative. Initially when I started this work I used to hide away from my former teachers at Kyuluhi High School, but now I am confident,” she says.

“I have rented a two acre piece of land where normally I plant my vegetables, kales and spinach and sell at wholesale, a full sack goes for Shs 3,000 and when I divide in bunches I sell at Shs 10. I have many customers within, supermarkets and schools and when I divide in bunches I sell at Shs 10. I have many customers within, supermarkets and schools around here Machakos County,” says Ndalu.

She makes a profit worth Shs15,000 per month and owes gratitude to Youth Empowerment Institute (CAP YEI), a non-government organisation that trains youth on basic employment and entrepreneurship targeting youth between 18-25 years of age.

“CAP YEI has been very helpful to me, they made me realise my potential as a young person, I am now self employed and I don’t have to sit and lament about the government’s failure to provide me with a job,” she says.

She takes advantage of opportunities at Scott University where she buys vegetables from them and sells to the public. She also gets training from Machakos County government agriculture department and they helped her by donating 50,000 ksh as seed money for her business.

“A happy Pauline Ndalu outside her shop in Machakos town in Machakos County, where she is making heads turn. Her driving force has been the saying: “when the going gets tough, the tough get going.” Photos: AWC Correspondent

Ndalu’s driving force has been the saying: “CAP YEI has been very helpful to me, they made me realise my potential as a young person.”

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