For about three years 54 year old Penina Obuya was living an ordinary but fulfilling life fending for her two orphaned grandchildren through her small business. An expert in preparing goatskins which she used to buy from slaughterhouses, treat and transport to Nairobi; everything seemed to be going well for her. On the side, she was running a vegetable kiosk at Mshomoroni village in Kisauni constituency - Mombasa district.

She was staying some meters away from her busy kiosk and everything was going on smoothly until that fateful night when everything came tumbling down and threw her into a life of depending on well-wishers for food and accommodation.

As the clamor to resettle the internally displaced persons seems to be fizzling out, Mrs. Obuya is still trying to come to terms with her new status in life. She represents hundreds of such people who have nowhere to turn for assistance and her only hope is that such cruelty will not be visited on innocent people again.

She was a bit apprehensive when we first broached the idea of her sharing her experience during the mayhem that was sparked off by the 2007 General Elections. Tears of anguish flowed freely as she tried to conceal her emotions before she could recount what she went through.

Even as she agreed to talk about it, there is some information that she was not comfortable sharing and would rather it remains tucked in her heart for fear of exposing her now grown up grandchildren.

But after persuasion from the chairperson of the Coast Women in Development (CWID) Betty Sharon who has been supporting her, she agreed to tell us what happened on that morning incident.

“Of course there was fear in the air as rowdy youths engaged each other in running battles after the announcement of the presidential results. Occasionally, we would hear gun shots as the police tries to bring the situation to normalcy.

“On that fateful night, I closed my business early, took dinner and then went to sleep. At around 4am I was woken up by continuous banging on my door and before long, a group of youths broke into my single roomed house,” she said.

Mrs. Obuya who is a widow said what followed later was traumatic and was not at ease to discuss because according to her, she had so far confided in one person exactly what happened on that early morning encounter.

“The noise woke me up but before I could sit on the bed about ten men stormed in and started ransacking the house while ordering me not to make any noise.. One of them carrying a blunt object hit me on the right leg,” she said pointing at the wounds that have not completely healed about eight months after being attacked.

It was at this time that the worst she had not expected happened to her. One of the men, she said, in a whimper, grabbed her by the neck and pushed her hard on the bed before pushing her on the floor and raped her. “I could not imagine that at my age somebody could do that to me. While writhing from the pain of the now swelling leg up to three men raped me that morning. I only told this to this lady, Sharon and you are the second person who knows about what happened,” she said after taking a deep breath.

But the worse was yet to come when she learnt later that her kiosk where her livelihood and that of her grandchildren depended had not been spared the madness. Although she was still in pain, she struggled to walk to her business premises but found nothing there. It had been burnt down and everything she had left the previous day had gone up in smoke.

“I collapsed and woke up later when one woman brought a pair of sheets and gave me Sh150 which I used to buy a mat. These are only things that I can call my own after everything else was either stolen or burnt down,” she said.

She said she went to a nearby dispensary to be treated her swollen leg but she never mentioned about being sexually assaulted. Asked whether she reported the matter to the police, Mr. Obuya said she did not deem that necessary because she would have been forced

to recount all what happened to her.

“We however took her for counseling and she was tasted for HIV but was found negative. She is yet to go for another test but in the meantime she is taking some painkillers for the recurring wounds on her leg,” said Ms Sharon.

After losing her business and the only source of income, the woman is now being accommodated by good Samaritans together with her grandchildren one of whom is in form two at a local secondary school.

As she told her harrowing story, the lady was caught in another terrifying situation way back in 1982 during the abortive coup when she was in Nairobi.

“During that time, I had just left Pumwani Maternity hospital and was heading home when fighting erupted. But that time, it was the armed forces that were engaging in shootouts and what the soldiers did when they saw us in the crossfire, they shielded us. But this time round things were different because it was civilians who were looting and killing each other while the police kept off,” she said.

Although Mrs. Obuya has agreed to talk about her ordeal, thanks to counseling from other women, there are many other women who are suffering in silence after being violently assaulted during the post-election violence.

Ms Sharon said about 17 cases have passed through their organization but there are many other such cases that the victims have decided to keep to themselves either for fear of stigmatization or reprisals if they reported to the police.

She said such victims of gender based violence needed a lot of counseling and in some cases shelter and something to sustain themselves and their families.

“When the government was identifying victims most of whom were displaced from their homes, other cases were left out and as this lady is putting it, if it was not for the counseling, she would have ended up suffering in silence.

“What the government needs to do now is to carry out another exercise after everything has cooled down to identify the other group that was not classified as IDPS, especially of women who have lost everything and live in penury,” she said.

Mrs. Obuya’s only hope is that somebody or even the government will come out to her rescue. She said what was important for her is some small financial assistance of between Sh20, 000 and sh30, 000 to get started on her business to be able to take care of the children who were left behind when their mother (her daughter) died several years ago.

But going through such an experience at a place she had lived for many years, the widow said security was the responsibility of the people themselves. “Even the police could not do much during the chaos that turned our once peaceful locality into a battlefield,” she said.