

No one understands how tough life can get as much as Rose Adhiambo and her family.

Standing outside the small mud-walled, room near Kisian Township along the Kisumu-Busia road that she now calls home, all seems like a bad dream.

The mother of eight is yet to comprehend what has been going on in her life. In one go, her life took a dangerous turn for the worst, and it has sunk even lower with every passing day.

Besides escaping narrowly from the jaws of death, the family lost all their earthly belongings. As if this was not enough, the lastborn died after a short illness and no one knows where the firstborn is to date.

Now, the family is devastated and can barely make ends meet. Food and clothing is hard to come by and they only have a roof over their heads, because of the benevolence of a well-wisher.

It all began with the post-election violence, when she was flushed out of her Naivasha home and lost all that she had painstakingly amassed from a quarry business that she ran with her husband.

Sensing danger, she bundled her children, aged between 24 and one year, into the compound of the nearest prison, where people who were fleeing from troubled parts of the town, like her, were seeking refuge.

In the melee, the firstborn of the family went missing. He is said to be in Narok with some friends.

After three weeks at the camp, Rose managed to secure transport for herself and the seven other children to their native home in Kisumu. Space was limited on the bus, and her husband, Alex Ajul, had to remain behind.

“It was a difficult journey and we passed through a lot of troubles along the way,” she recalls.

Besides the discomfort of traveling in a cramped bus, she also lost some of her prized belongings, most of them donations from humanitarian organizations at the displaced persons' camp. This included clothes, foodstuff and blankets.

And when they finally got to their home, they had no shelter where they could hide from the vagaries of the weather: the family had not constructed a house at the home.

Luckily for them, they were offered a shelter at a filling station by the roadside, a short distance from their ancestral home, where they could put up as they commenced plans to

construct their own house.

But that is as far as their luck went. As they settled down in their new home, misfortune struck again.

Rose and three of her youngest children were struck by a bout of vomiting and diarrhea. So severe was the attack, that the four sought specialized medical attention at the nearby Chulaimbo hospital.

“I left the rest of my children in the house when we were admitted in hospital as their father had not come back from Naivasha,” she explains.

As fate would have it, her last-born, one year old Elvy Atela, succumbed to the disease. He was laid to rest six months ago at their Kajul home, a short distance from their adopted home.

The rest of the children, have fortunately recuperated.

The greatest headache for them now is constructing a house. Their problem is compounded by the absence of grass for thatching houses in their locality.

“We also do not have money for buying iron sheets,” explains her husband, Mr. Ajul.

Now, the family has resigned to fate, hoping that somehow, they will be able to erect a house despite the many odds that they face.

As they wait for their dream to come true, they are forced to make do with the shelter, which is however so small that it only serves as a sleeping area. The shade of a nearby tree serves as the family kitchen.

Even the most basic of necessities like food, are difficult to come by here. So far, the kitchen has been kept busy with the food rations that they received from humanitarian organizations on their way home to help them settle down.

Rose is however worried by their dwindling food reserves, as she does not know from where to source more for her children when they are eventually exhausted.

Food aside, the children’s education also continues to suffer. One of her children, Usher Odhiambo sat his end of primary school examinations last year at Kabati Primary School in Naivasha.

He was set to join secondary school but has not been able to do so due to financial constraints.

According to Rose, he had pegged her hopes on the boy, and was determined to ensure that he became the first member of his family to go beyond primary school.

“I have not been able to educate any of them beyond primary school,” she says.

But what concerns her most is the family’s only daughter, Lenny Otieno. The seven years old is confined to a wheelchair, as she is unable to move her limbs and neck. Neither can she talk.

Things were beginning to look up for the little girl in Naivasha and she had been taken in by an organization called Little Hands, together with her younger brother Newton Odhiambo.

While she was benefiting from physiotherapy in an attempt to gain use of her limbs, her sibling attended nursery school.

Rose says that there had been slight improvement in her condition due to the physiotherapy but all these gains are fast being reversed.

“She was struck by the mysterious disease when she was only a toddler,” her father explains.

She has been in and out of several hospitals, and at a Naivasha hospital was referred to a Nairobi hospital for specialized treatment. They were yet to raise enough money for the medical attention when they left.

This issue has been pushed to the periphery as the family focuses more on picking up their broken pieces.

They are however divided on where they will begin rebuilding their lives. While her husband does not mind going back to Naivasha, for Rose it does not feature anywhere in her options.

“I’d rather concentrate on agriculture back here at home than go back to Naivasha,” she says.

Mr. Ajul believes that his fortune lies in Naivasha and plans to build his life from scratch in the town.

“I have lived in the town since 1978,” he says.

All said and done, the family wishes for the good old days when life was on a normal keel, when they could get food if only from the heavy quarry work, and when they were one happy family living together.

In the meantime, though Rose does not understand a thing about the proposed Truth Justice and Reconciliation Commission, somehow, she believes that the people who did the heinous acts will one day pay for their sins.

She holds that the proposed TJRC should be left to neutral persons, preferably expatriates to run it.

“The people currently in the government fanned the chaos, what kind of justice will we get if they come back to sit in the commission?” poses Rose.

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