

Internally Displaced Persons including children, who are living with the HIV/Aids virus, continue to battle with challenges in their attempt to regain some sense of normalcy, ten months after displacement.

Ann Muthoni has not been spared; life has not been the same again since she lost her livelihood.

“Having struggled to overcome the difficulties of living with the HIV virus for about ten years, this seemed like an insurmountable challenge,” says Muthoni in retrospective.

“I have passed many tribulations and eight years ago, I separated from my husband on allegations that I was practicing witchcraft, this was because he had sores and blisters common with HIV positive people.”

Her husband later succumbed to the disease.

For Muthoni, it has been like starting afresh; searching for antiretroviral drugs and fighting stigma among new friends wherever she has attempted to settle.

More importantly for her, the inability to educate her children was too much to bear.

Unable to withstand the strain, the 38-year-old mother of four children succumbed to depression and one side of her body became paralyzed for a few months.

Fortunately, Muthoni and her children have found refuge with close relatives at Kindere, Nyeri South district.

However, it has not been smooth sailing, rising above her depression and accepting the changes in her life have become daily challenges.

Staying strong in the face of stigma and accessing Antiretroviral Drugs (ARVs) have been additional difficulties.

However, Muthoni has learnt that even in her darkest moments, light still shines through; after a lot of struggle and a disrupted medical routine, she was introduced to the Kenya Network of Women with HIV/Aids (Kenwa) offices in Nyeri town.

The offices are about 15 kilometers from her new home, at Kenwa, she was assisted with food, drugs and counseling.

Kenwa then referred her to the Nyeri Provincial General Hospital where she has been receiving drugs and counseling to date without any charges.

However, to lighten her load, her children moved in with relatives in Kiharu division in Murang'a district- 80 kilometers away from Kindere.

Her children have been her joy, her reason to remain strong.

Jane Kiragu, her first born child, is one of the brightest students at Kabare Secondary School. She will be sitting for her KCSE exams later this year.

Her last born child Duncan Kibe, who is 8 years old is in Standard Two. Her four children are all HIV negative.

To help her remain strong regardless of the many challenges, she has joined a group of women

who have been living with HIV and who are very positive about life.

Although Muthoni has been fortunate, others have not “they still go without food and much needed ARV drugs,” she emphasizes.

In addition, Muthoni feels that the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission should address the issues of land, tribalism and equality between the rich and poor in order to avoid such violence in 2012.

She also says that it would be a good gesture for the government to offer victims of violence compensation, in order to start small businesses as they try to resettle.

Muthoni’s story is however one among many.

According to the Kenya Red Cross Society, Nyeri branch, they received about 80 women who were HIV/Aids positive, eight men and four children.

In addition, Kenwa’s Nyeri branch coordinator Francis Muiruri said that over 200 HIV positive people sought assistance from their Nyeri office.

Muthoni’s experience puts a face behind these numbers and like her, we can only hope that tomorrow will bring better tidings.

This story was also published in the Kenya Times, Tuesday October 21st 2008