

Unfiltered, uninhibited... just the gruesome truth

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# Reject

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## Battle over the Yala Swamp

### Multi million investment turns out to be a case of a deal gone sour

By OLOO JANAK

The Dominion Farms at Yala Swamp on the shores of Lake Victoria in Siaya County of Nyanza Province is turning into a bitter sweet investment tale that has seen the local community turn against what they initially welcomed with open hands.

It all began in 2005, when an American investor, Calvin Burgess, President of Dominion Group of Companies and Chief Executive of Dominion Farms, appeared at the Yala Swamp area dangling what the local community and their leaders believed was carrot that would transform their lives and end poverty.

At inception, Dominion Farms presented a mixture of economic and spiritual transformation to the sleepy and conservative Yala Swamp community, largely the Alego and Yimbo communities.

Former Kisumu Town MP Reverend Ken Nyagudi was for a long time the Kenyan face of the Dominion investment through a religious outfit that drew in thousands of followers who believed they would get instant and long term

benefits from this multi-billion project.

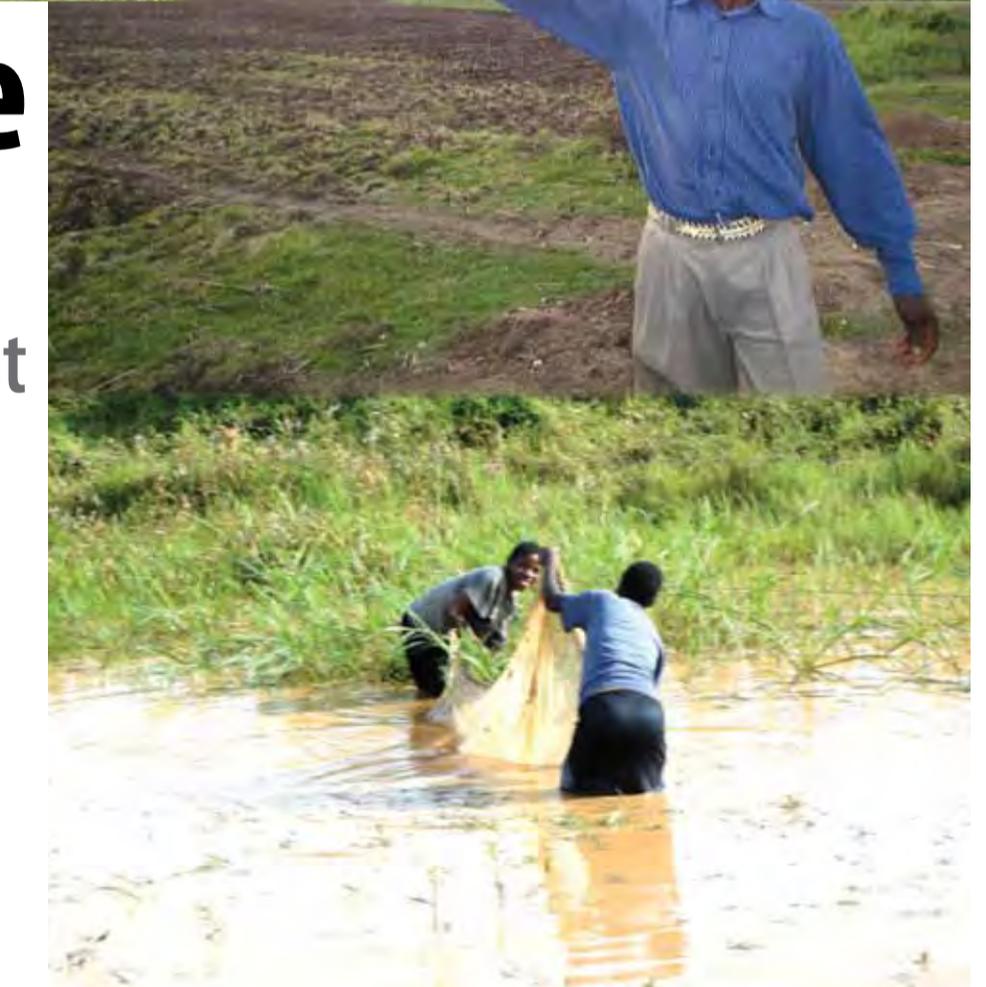
At the Dominion Farm in Yala, a big white cross stands on a small hill in the centre of the rice fields, a testimony to this religious inclination. Villagers say this used to be a sacred place for prayer, now fenced off and made inaccessible to them by the farm management.

### Despair

The high hopes and aspirations of the local communities that were built through church summons and public barazas promising change in their lives appear to have virtually collapsed into despair seven years later.

It has left in its wake, a trail of complaints, disappointments and spawned a conflict between the local people and the Dominion Farms management, sucking in local leaders and government officials.

"They came with promises and we supported the projects hoping it would change our lives but now they have instead turned against us, destroying our very sources of livelihoods," says Fred Okumu, a community leader from Kadenge Village in Alego.



The complaints range from denial of access to community roads linking Alego and Yimbo as well as the surrounding villages, which have been fenced off to denial of access to sources of water or pollution of water sources.

Continued on page 5

**From top: The weir on Yala swamp created by Dominion to control the flow of water into the farms. Women fetch water at the swamp. Fred Okoth, a community leader in Siaya county points to one of the farms. Women fishing at the swamp.** Pictures: Oloo Janak

Read more *Reject* stories online at [www.mediadiversityafrica.org](http://www.mediadiversityafrica.org)

# Reject bags world population award

By OMWA OMBARA

The Reject is one of the winners of The Population Institute's 32nd Annual Global Media Awards for Excellence in Population Reporting in the category of Best Article or Series of Articles for the special issue of the Reject newspaper.

The award will be presented in New York in January 12, 2012.

The award comes close in the wake of another — The Millennium Development Goals Award on Maternal Health won by African Woman and Child Feature Service last week under a special edition The Strength of a Woman: The Untold Stories of Maternal Health and Death.

Among the stories in the 24-page special edition on population are: The politics of population; First intergenerational dia-

logue on sexual and reproductive rights; Yaaku: A people on the brink of extinction; Mourning the death of family planning; School that hosts largest population; Violence in the face of HIV; Village Recoups after generation is wiped out; Economic disempowerment a catalyst for violence; Power of reading brought closer to informal settlement; Power of leading 4000 slum women; Adverse climate change leaves communities vulnerable to conflict; Unbearable burden as women die to give life and The forgotten elderly of Kenya.

Both *The Reject* and *Strength of a Woman* are publications of the African Woman and Child Feature Service produced under the Media Diversity Centre.

The *Strength of a Woman* captures issues of women's rights as well as empowerment and advancement. This particular issue was biased towards Reproductive

Health.

The MDC has a vision to promote the ideals of diversity within and through the media

Its mission is to work towards strengthening the liberty, quality, varied and integrity of mass media in Kenya

AWC enhances its values through its vision of a media that enhances diversity and gender equality for equitable development.

The Reject was initially started as a paper that would highlight issues of communities and the marginalized that are not given visibility in the mainstream media. However, it has grown to establishing its path within developmental journalism.

AWC, as a non-profit media organisation has the mission promotes diversity, gender equity, social justice and development in Africa through engagement with



media, training, research and content development.

AWC Executive Director Rosemary Okello congratulated the team for their commitment and dedication in helping place the organisation's products among the best in the world.

## Citizens seeks accountability



Some of the participants at the Mombasa forum. Picture: Kigondu Ndavano

By KIGONDU NDAVANO

A scenario through which ordinary Kenyans will subject powerful politicians into vetting commensurate with what citizens witnessed during the vetting of the judges could soon come into being.

The vetting will materialise if the enthusiasm with which the desire for transparency in future leadership of the country is being adopted gains root especially in Mombasa County, the first electoral region on the way to pioneering the new move.

After concerted efforts to read, discuss and understand the various sections of the Constitution and the launch of numerous awareness forums in the County, a team of Kenyans drawn from various civil society organisations is already sending strong but firm signals that the time of reckoning for the politicians is near.

Right from those announcing their bid for prospective posts in the new dispensation, to those who have not made their decision as to whether they will contest any seats, all should be ready to face a panel of well prepared and professionally sound people in the vetting teams.

### Accountability

Perhaps it will not be a surprise to find such personalities as Tourism Minister Najib Balala and who is sure to seek a political office come the next general elections — having to answer questions about his private life and businesses and further how he managed the tourism sector, the Constituency Development Fund among other questions.

When Kenyan-based Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Community Aid International (CAI), coordinated an education forum which brought together the members of the Mombasa County Governance Network at the Pride Inn, it emerged that future leaders were likely to face a thoroughly and well informed electorate during their vetting.

Under one of CAI's three themes covering social justice and whose objectives include promotion of democratic reforms, good governance, gender

equality and human rights, representatives from Mombasa Civil Society groups under the Alliance for Citizens Driven Reforms (ACDR) were eager to learn the basic skills on vetting.

Coast Interface Coordinator Joseph Kamau indicated that through awareness forums under the Jadili programme, he has learnt the value of equality among human beings and was keen to ensure fairness in dealing with all issues including leadership and integrity.

### Vetting leaders

Kashero Chinyaka of CAI, while outlining the objective of the Mombasa forum explained that since the formation of Mombasa County Governance Networks, whose interim committee members are Ali Sudi, Lammy Ngite, Reverend David Luhambi, Reverend John Ouma, Sheikh Ali Mohammed Abdillahi, Halima Mohammed and Mary Wambu groups were keen to ensure growth and success.

"We wish to see firm reforms in the Mombasa County, we want to discuss how we shall make the future leaders of the Mombasa County more accountable to the electorate," said Chinyaka.

He noted the networks had realised better leadership was an issue and all were keen to ensure that ways and means to identify trustworthy leaders who would promote development were available.

Chinyaka said vetting of leaders remained paramount although the question still remained how the networks would undertake the vetting.

"We need the means and the skills to vet all prospective leaders; this will ensure promotion of accountability and transparency in the management of resources where we shall be able to finally have leaders and not rulers like has happened in the past," Chinyaka observed.

The Executive Director of the Community Aid International Joseph Kwaka, who addressed the civic society representatives, explained that because the organisations under Jadili (discuss) programme focused partly on good governance, leaders of a network had the democratic rights to move into politics.

## HIV women leading the way in Kenya's fight against the scourge

By DUNCAN MBOYAH

The first case of HIV Aids in Kenya was reported in 1984 and to date women accounts for approximately two-thirds (65 percent) of adults estimated to be living with HIV Aids.

This percentage is higher than the sub-Saharan African region overall which stands at 57 percent.

The HIV prevalence rate among women is estimated to be almost twice that of men but efforts by women living with the epidemic has managed to reduce the percentage through awareness creation.

They have managed to help move HIV Aids from personal circles to social and political agendas because they are sharing their stories and sacrificing their privacy to ensure that other Kenyans stop suffering in silence.

"These women deserve praise for their dedication and time in responding to the crisis that was initially met with a lot of resistance," says Kenya's Gender, Social and Children Development Minister Dr. Naomi Shaban.

The minister called for the development of a social movement that recognises the rights of those infected and prevent new infections among women and girls in the country.

### Feminisation

She however notes that developing a social movement can only succeed once women living with HIV and women rights movement are strengthened to reposition themselves in leadership positions.

The minister called on Kenyans to deal with feminisation of HIV epidemic while recognising the structural and personal impediments that require bold leadership.

"We must ensure that Kenyan leaders are accountable to the realities of women, girls and HIV," she adds.

"The journey of women living with HIV from invisibility to the forefront of campaigns and activism is one of empowerment and pioneering leadership in mobilising and exploring their own marginalisation," says Ms. Maria - Threase Keating, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Country Director.

Threase Keating observes that HIV positive women in the country broke many barriers and understood their own collective strength that can be applied today to further the fight.

She regrets that despite commitments made to gender equality at the international level, women infected and affected by HIV



Dr Alloys Orago, Director NACC

still continue to face persistent challenges in the areas of prevention, treatment, care and support services.

She discloses that the UN values the voices and opinions of women living with HIV and is committed to continuously support and engage them through the UN General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS).

Threase - Keating notes that the UN will continue supporting and strengthening various networks of people living with HIV in the country.

According to the NACC Deputy Director Dr. Sobhie Mulindi regional conferences will be held up to village level to help bring out the work done by women living with HIV in the country with the aim of educating the public on the dangers of HIV.

He says that NACC has developed a code of conduct, gender policy and the Greater Involvement of People Living with HIV and AIDS (GIPA) guidelines that aims at mainstreaming its role to the larger public.

The Director of Kenya Network of Women with Aids (KENWA) Asunta Wagura says that HIV stigma is lowest amongst people with the lowest income and those that reside in informal settlements but worst amongst the middle and the high class.

Asunta who has been HIV positive for the last three decades and has delivered two HIV negative children calls on people who have tested positive to share the information with others so that others may take the lead in protecting themselves.

"At the onset, stigma was the major problem as no one appeared ready to embrace us," Ms. Dorothy Onyango, the Executive of The Executive Director of Women Fighting Aids in Kenya (WOFAK).

Onyango who is one of the early women to get infected by HIV challenges young girls to seek medication and avoid stigma that is meant to scare them yet antiretroviral drugs are available in both public and private hospitals for free unlike three decades ago.

# Mama Uhuru still has her candle flickering

By OGADA MUO

Political activism of pre-independence period and the one of today cannot be compared because the contrast between them is great. The former was inspired by love and patriotism for the country which almost bordered on fanaticism while the latter is a struggle for political power as a means to amass wealth for oneself.

These are the words of freedom fighter Clementina Obong'o Olewe also known as Mama Uhuru when asked about the struggle for *uhuru*.

Mama Uhuru, 80, says those who fought for independence were real patriots fighting for a common cause regardless of their party affiliation. She sees the present-day politicians as those who are blotted with greed for power, selfishness and impunity resulting in the gleaming poor governance and mismanagement of the country's resources.

## Fanatical youth

Although the two prominent political parties Kenya African National Union (Kanu) and Kenya African Democratic Union (Kadu) were fighting a common enemy — the colonial government — the rivalry between them was very severe. Their rivalry dwarfs, by far, the present Orange Democratic Movement and Party of National Unity difference.

"We no longer have fanatic party youth wingers who could shed blood for love of their party. The party youths we have now are merely for hire and can switch loyalty at the sight of money," Mama Uhuru says.

It is sad that those who were struggling in the open, holding meetings to agitate for the release of the Kapenguria prisoners and attainment of independence have never been recognised. This, even as the country has legislated Mashujaa Day, an occasion to honour men and women who have made great sacrifices for this country.

Women were recognised in the liberation struggle and they were given roles to play. For instance, in Western part of the country, it is women who hoisted flags atop hills to mark the country's independence.

Mama Uhuru remembers how on independence day in 1963, together with a team of women political leaders, they went to Kisumu District hoisting the new national flags on top



Clementina Obong'o Olewe (Mama Uhuru) outside her home. Picture: Oloo Janak

of hills from Bunyore, Odhienyo Hill around Maseno through to Koru, Muhoroni, Fort Tengan and Nyabondo Plateau while lowering the Union Jack.

In all this, she recalls some of her happiest moments as a freedom fighter. Obong'o says: "Seeing my party Kanu winning elections to form the first Kenyan government and hoisting of the national flag to declare our country's independence."

Mama Uhuru has been recognised for being an elder among her community who always sought her words of advice. "My moment of pride was when I was collected from my home by former leader of the Luo Council of elders Ker Riaga Ogalo to go and give my opinion on where the body of the Maseno divisional Kanu women leader Mama Sara Bodo would be placed for overnight viewing," explains Mama Uhuru.

She adds: "There had been a stalemate with some people suggesting that the body should

be placed at Ofafa Memorial Hall while others rooting for her Ojola home for the burial wake. My reasoned opinion in favour of her home was supported by the council of elders and it carried the day."

## Sad moment

"My memorable sad moment was when I dodged death by a whisker and saw my colleagues felled by the bullets during the 'Russia' Hospital massacre. The bullets were fired by the late President Jomo Kenyatta's security when chaos broke out during the official opening of the Russian built Nyanza Provincial Hospital in Kisumu."

Mama Uhuru remembers tearfully how a group of Kanu youth wingers who had remained in the party after majority of residents and politicians in the area had joined Jaramogi Oginga's Kenya People's Union (KPU) started to shout the party's slogan (*dume* meaning

bull) near the dais where Kenyatta and other dignitaries were seated. Commotion erupted and hell broke loose with trigger happy security personnel shooting indiscriminately at the fleeing wananchi. Several were shot dead.

## Activism

Clementina Obong'o Olewe aka Mama Uhuru was born in Seme location in Maseno division of central Nyanza district in 1922. She got married to the late Olewe Orina in 1942 with whom she had two sons Morris Orina, now deceased, and John Ombalo an ex-prison warden.

Obong'o is one of the few surviving women political activists in the wide Nyanza region. She joined politics at 32 years at the height of the liberation struggle.

She was elected Kanu women's leader for Kapuonja sub-location from where she contested the locational position for Kisumu location. She defeated 14 other contestants drawn from the sub-locations in the wider Kisumu location. Though uneducated, Mama Obong'o became one of the three prominent women leaders in the then expansive Central Nyanza District.

## Other patriots

The other two representatives were the late Mama Uhuru Magdalina Aboge who was the district women leader for Central Nyanza district and Mama Uhuru Sara Bodo who was the divisional leader for Maseno division.

Mama Obong'o says during the liberation struggle the three of them were frequent visitors at the late Jaramogi's Milimani residence in Kisumu town. Here they would hold meetings and strategise on how to check Kadu insurgence in the area.

During these meetings at Jaramogi's home, Mama Obong'o says they would meet with patriots such as Ombok Thim, Odero Sar, Luke Obok, Okuto Bala, Ondiek Chilo, Nathaniel Onyuto and Ndolo Ayah who was the district youth leader, as well as Okelo Odongo and Okune Ogango who was Jaramogi's secretary.

Mama Obong'o appeals to the Government to consider the plight of the few freedom fighters still living and the families of those who had died. It is sad that those who fought for Uhuru and their families are languishing in poverty.

# Oldest woman civic leader

By JOSEPH MUKUBWA

One of the oldest councilor in the country, Grace Wanyeki who serves at Nyeri Municipal Council has vowed to improve the council and take it to greater heights.

Since she was elected two months ago, she has since realized the need to serve the residents diligently of Nyeri despite her age.

"That all is possible and thanks to the new constitution that considers gender sensitivity. I'm working hand in hand with the mayor Edward Muteru. The God fearing councilor who was nominated few months ago vows that she will take the council to greater heights.

## Timely

"The chance given to me by other councilors was timely. I know that for a long time, having such a position was very difficult a clear indication why I was not able to clinch the same seat due to gender insensitivity but now with the new constitution, we can now see the changes," she said.

She may be old in age, but at heart she is still young, able to work with the youth and those younger than her as well as her age mates.

This may be due to her wise counsel and the fact that she is old in the political arena therefore she knows much.

She is the oldest and the longest serving councilor in the Nyeri Municipal Council which has 15 councilors both elected and nominated.

The youngest in the council whom they shall be sharing forums is an age mate of her granddaughter Elizabeth Muthoni aged 27 who is the chairperson of Housing, Education and Social Services.

## Nominated

Having served at the council at sometimes back as a nominated councilor and as an elected one, Wanyeki knows much concerning the council but she has never been considered for a top seat for the last 27 years she has served in the council.

At the age of 76 years, she is now the Deputy Mayor at the municipal council. She is the first woman ever and oldest deputy mayor in the history of this council and also the larger Nyeri County.

Her being elected was however received in different perceptions as people from the public gallery shouting, 'cucu cucu' (grandmother, grandmother) as she was being sworn in.

Her supporters who had camped outside the hall cheered her as she addressed the crowd.

Some doubted her performance in the council while others said that she should leave the seat for the young to contest but has proved otherwise so far.

To her, age is just but a number and so she clinched the seat after she beat her contestant Ndirangu Kabai during the municipal's mayoral elections which were held recently at the Mayor's chamber.

Wanyeki has been the Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organization (MYWO) chair lady in



Nyeri deputy mayor Grace Wanyeki, 76 (second right) with other councilors recently at Town hall immediately after she was elected. Picture: Joseph Mukubwa

the larger Nyeri District and also as a chairperson of Central Province during the former President Moi's regime.

After she was elected, Wanyeki said that her being elected was a blessing from God to crown the work she has done while in the council for 27 years.

She first entered the council in 1974 up to 1997 when she retired. In those years she served as a nominated councilor and only served as an elected councilor for one term from 1974 to 1979.

She was later returned to the council last year July when Murugi nominated her.

Wanyeki who is a prominent Nyeri businesswoman is among the four councilors which the minister has since nominated in the local authority. She operates businesses in transport industry and has also invested much

in the Real Estates.

"I have worked for the public for many years. God has helped me this much. I have also worked for many years with the Family Planning of Kenya and also served in the boards of Land Tribune and HIV/Aids," she added.

## Leadership

Currently she is also the chairperson of Nyeri Town Health Centre.

In 1974, he served for five terms up to 1997 when she retired but last year in July, she was nominated by the minister and returned in the council. She was happy to be elected and promised to serve the people of Nyeri town diligently despite her age.

Mayor Muteru says that the two with his deputy has so far joined hands in improving the garbage collection services in the town.

# Blessing or curse in marshland as partnership falls apart

By MICHAEL OONGO

When the Dominion Group of Farms first set foot in the sprawling Yala Swamp more than six years ago, Jackline Atieno like hundreds of other locals, was exhilarated. What with the goodies that the new investment promised to bring that would improve their standards of living.

Today however, disillusionment and anger pervades the nearly 1,500 hectares of marshy land where the local communities are now up in arms against the alleged activities of the investor.

The locals had hoped that with the realisation of the project whose main objective was to reclaim part of the swamp and turn it into profitable rice paddies, they would get employment and general development brought about by such a massive investment.

"When Dominion came to this area, it came through by invoking the love of God, they would preach to us the virtues of righteousness and the need to do good to mankind... their approach was irresistible to many of us," says Angeline Odhiambo during a recent stakeholders forum held in Bondo town.

## Food security

Odhiambo explains: "When they came, they promised to ensure food security. They also promised to improve infrastructure, build more health centres and schools, besides opening up employment opportunities for our youth. But all we are now seeing is increased poverty and a degraded environment."

Her sentiments were echoed by Angeline Owako from Siaya who says that although the coming of Dominion into the area was seen by many as a blessing to the impoverished area, its activities have only brought more misery to the locals.

"When they arrived here, many people began streaming into our market centres hoping to share in the fortunes brought in by the new investor but they soon exerted strain on our local food supply since most of our farmland had been annexed to the company's catchment areas," explains Owako.

She argues: "Prior to the coming of the investor, we were able to access fresh and clean water from Yala River and were able to use the natural resources from the swamp. Now we are forced to consume contaminated water because of the degraded environment as a result of Dominion's activities."

As a result, they claim, many people in the region are now suffering from various water-borne diseases. They are calling for urgent measures to be taken to rectify the situation through government intervention.

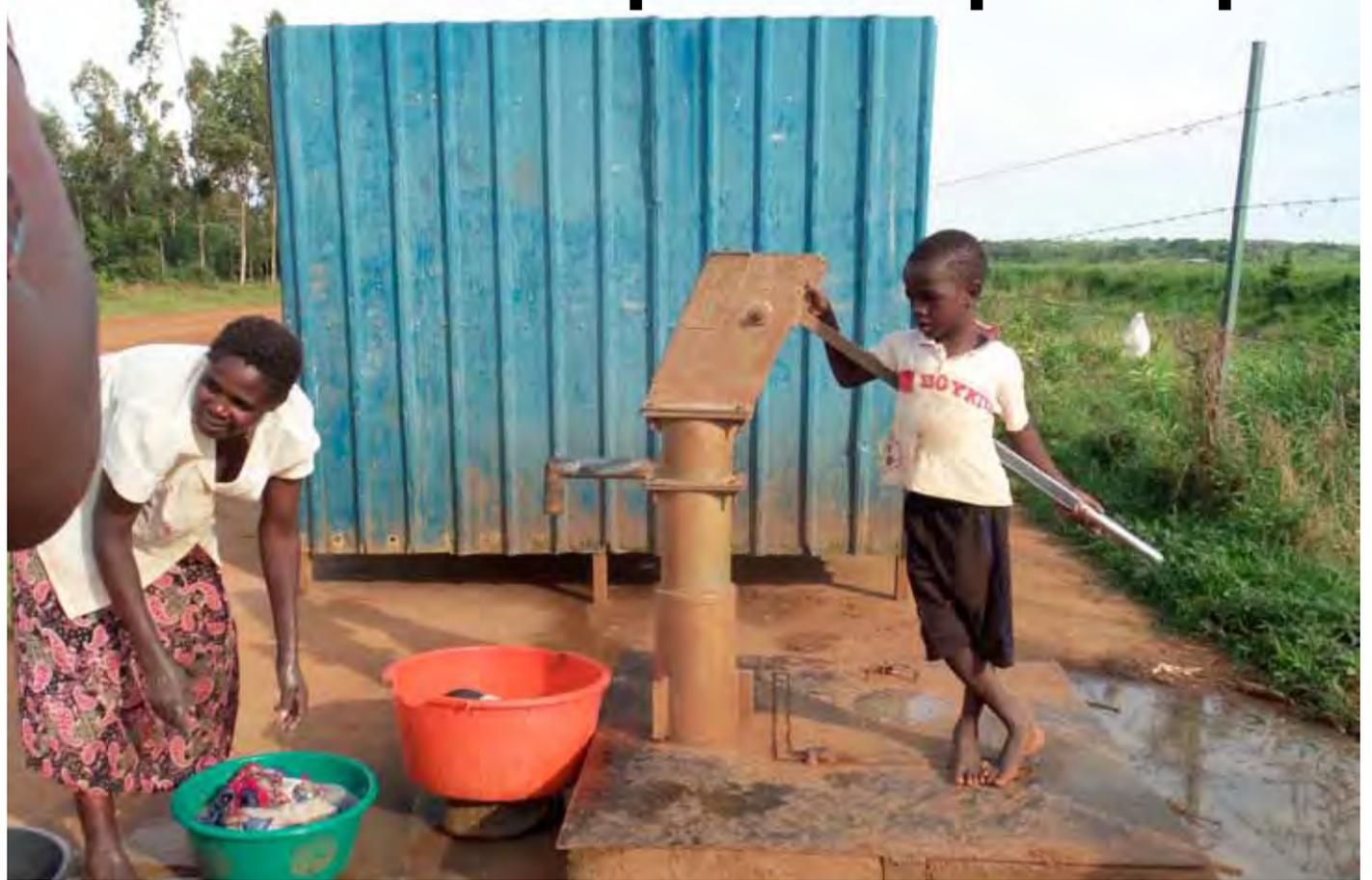
There are claims that the chemicals used by the company to spray its rice fields has contaminated the water and ecosystem in the surrounding area to the extent that domestic animals are not surviving owing to the problem.

This view seems to have been corroborated by a local civil society consortium known as Friends of River Yala Swamp (FOYS). The organisation maintains that a water sample from the area which was taken to the Government chemist for testing yielded a lot of pollutants.

An official of Friends of Yala Swamp Dalmas Owino says as a result of the Dominion activities, most roads in the area have been submerged in flood waters. They say communities in Bondo, Siaya and some parts of Bunyala have been subdued by local politicians against raising objections.

Central to the conflict are claims by the surrounding residents that had initially began its operations under 3,700 hectares of land, has so far encroached the community trust land without proper consultations with the local residents who are now maintaining that their land has been grabbed.

Elisha Odindo from Bondo says the Company caused some them to be evicted from their farms without proper compensation since those affected were only given



KSh45,000 which he claims was not enough to put up a simple semi-permanent house. During the meeting, it emerged that the Siaya and Bondo county councils entered into a lease agreement with the company without fully involving members of the community. This cast doubts on the transparency of the arrangement and hence the negative sentiments.

## Encroached

In the initial agreement, it was said that the Siaya County Council was to lease some 475 hectares while Bondo was to give 450 hectares of the swamp to the Company but now it is claimed that the company has encroached more than 7,000 hectares through unclear means.

The aggrieved members of the community have since gone to court over the issue and vowed not to relent until the problems was properly addressed to their satisfaction.

This encroachment, they claim, has denied them their farmland and is causing an acute food shortage in the affected areas which were once considered as self-sufficient in food production. This despite the fact that the Dominion rice paddies produces over 14 million tonnes annually.

'Prime Harvest' is one of the popular Dominion rice brands and is commonly sold in local outlets and also exported to the United States of America.

Reached for comment, Gem MP Jakoyo Midiwo was emphatic that the local communities have no negotiated interest in Dominion and asked its management to agree to sort out the issues raised by the locals or they be forcefully evicted. Says Midiwo: "We would like Dominion to stay but they should tell us what benefits we stand to get from them because they promised us most things which they have not fulfilled."

The MP claimed that local civic leaders were compromised to remain quiet on the environmental degradations caused by chemicals used in the rice farms. He threatened to



From top: Members of the community use water from these outlets for both domestic use and bathing as well as washing clothes. See bathing cubicle at the background. The rice mills at the Dominion farms. Pictures: Michael Oongo

mobilise the locals to demand removal of the investor if he is not keen on listening to their issues.

"It is true that chemicals used in the rice fields are harmful to the local communities as they have caused death of our cows and goats... We cannot keep chicken," he lamented. Midiwo added that those who were evicted from their land to give way to Dominion were under-compensated and he would like want the issue revisited.

## Cheap politics

However, the Company's Director and general manager Chris Abir dismissed the allegations as mere cheap politics noting that his firm had massively invested in the area and that the local communities had benefited from the investment.

"Ours is a KSh5 billion investment and we don't have problems with the community but with the politicians who are poisoning the lo-

cal's minds against us for reasons known to themselves," said Abir.

On claims of environmental degradations he said: "These claims are not true because we have always been working with relevant government departments to address these issues and there is no way government agencies can betray the public."

Abir said that politicians should help change the negative attitude towards the company noting that it had brought substantial development in the area.

"We have managed to bring electricity to the villages. We have also constructed classrooms in some schools and improved road-networks within our area of operation as well as paying school fees for orphaned children among other social corporate responsibilities," he observed.

Abir argued that members of the community were mistaken in alleging that Dominion had encroached on their land in phase two of the development of project. He argues that of the 3,700 hectares allocated to the company, they had only used 3,000 acres.

The Clerk to Bondo County Council Silas Odhiambo pointed out that the local communities were fully involved in the affairs of the Dominion through the elected councillors.

On the environmental damage complaints he said: "The welfare of the communities was taken care of by the relevant government departments and so far the Company, council and members of the community have had three meetings to discuss the issues."

*"Prior to the coming of the investor, we were able to access fresh and clean water from Yala River and were able to use the natural resources from the swamp. Now we are forced to consume contaminated water because of the degraded environment as a result of Dominion's activities."*

— Angeline Owako

# Community's cries echo over vast Yala Swamp

By OMONDI GWENGI

They danced and made merry to welcome what they thought was a God-send. That was eight years ago when the Parliament gave a nod to a multinational investment company to expand its operations to parts of Bondo, Siaya and Busia.

The move on the area known as the Yala Swamp was expected to create over 1,000 jobs to the local community and introduce commercial farming.

The MPs described the multi-million shillings project as a success story that should be replicated across the country as an example of partnership between the government and private sector.

Thirty-year-old Augustine Oketch recalls how they were paid KSh500 each and ferried to Kisumu to disrupt a meeting that was organised by Action Aid to discuss ways of conserving the swamp.

"We were ferried to Kisumu and paid to disrupt a meeting with the support of a former Kisumu MP," recalls Oketch.

Today, there are more jeers than cheers among those who danced and made merry. It has turned out to be like the case of offering the camel room for his head and then it enters with the whole body including the hump to take up all the available space.

## Nightmare

Today every waking moment is a nightmare to Joyce Owiti, 54, of Odhuro Village, Bondo District.

Having been married in this village 38 years ago, Owiti recalls how she found the locals fishing and farming. "I found when my mother-in-law depended entirely on farming and that is when I started farming," she recalls.

According to Owiti, there was cooperation between the community and Lake Basin Development Authority (LBDA) which was previously

operating in the swamp.

"We worked well with Lake Basin since they were working on the land allocated to them and not trespassing on our portion," says Owiti.

However, this is no longer the activity taking place. The LBDA would move out and in came Dominion. Dominion's initial license issued in 2004 permitted the company to grow rice on 3,700 hectares leased from Siaya and Bondo county councils. However, today things are not the same and the community feels that the company has gone against the agreement.

## Nostalgia

From Ndiwo Village, Bondo District Boniface Abuoga Ogayi, 69, feels that things are not the same. He nostalgically remembers how their stores never ran dry. They lived a good life.

"I don't know what the future generation will feed on, going by the way things stand today," says a worried Ogayi.

He is not alone in his fears. Angeline Okwako, fears for the future of their sons who will have to pay dowry according to the tradition.

"We have lost almost all our cattle. We are left with nothing to give our sons to pay their dowry because the chemicals that our cows feed on in the fields are poisonous," laments Okwako.

During a recent media and community encounter meeting in Bondo, Erastus Odundo, a community representative said that they thought the land in dispute was their forefathers.

"The memorandum of understanding (MoU) which was signed was between the county councils and Dominion Farms Limited. The community was not consulted," says Odundo.

According to Yala Farmers Society assistant secretary, Abraham Magero Otiato, he expects area leaders to explain why the company is carrying out activities on swamp land beyond the leased area of 3,700 hectares.

Otiato poses: "How was the new land ac-

quired?" He adds: "Some of my colleagues decided to move away because they have been threatened with arrests for interfering with the investor's activities."

However, Dominion Farms General Manager and Director Chris Abir says they have only reclaimed 3,000 acres of land so far.

He further argues that Dominion has gone beyond the agreed expectations that they would give a total of 300 acres of reclaimed land to the community, 150 to Bondo and Siaya each. Instead, Abir says they have given the communities 450 and 470 acres respectively.

Abir says that councils are viewed as representing the people, thus, the community was represented through their elected leaders.

## Signed agreement

However, community members are now calling the county councils of Bondo and Siaya to come out and end the tussle between the community and the Dominion Farms.

Part of the MoU signed between the Company and Siaya and Bondo county councils on the of May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2003 reads: "... this document and all related documents shall be confidential as between the parties hereto so far permitted by the laws of the Republic of Kenya and shall not be released to any other person without the first express written consent of others."

The Government of Kenya entered into an MoU with the Dominion Group of Companies through the Lake Basin Development Authority (LBDA) which surrendered its land and some of its equipment while the latter gave funds and skilled workers.

The Cabinet approved the MOU in 2004 which gave the investor 3,000 hectares of the original 6,000 hectares that they had requested for.

The Yala Swamp in Western Kenya is one of the largest swamps of the country. It is located



**Boniface Abuoga Ogayi of Ndiwo Village in Bondo District.**

Picture: Omondi Gwengi

on the North-eastern shore of Lake Victoria and covers an area of approximately 48,000 hectares. The area consists of a complex of swamps and shallow lakes.

The swamp is dominated by papyrus and reeds in the shallows, and grasses in the periphery. Some of the swamp lakes host rare and threatened fish species that have become extinct in Lake Victoria owing to the introduction of Nile perch. Some of these include the last remnants of the cichlid fish population.

The Yala Swamp is also listed as an important bird area because of its richness in water bird species which today are at the brink of extinction due to aerial spraying by the Dominion Farms.

Other threatened or endemic wildlife also occurs, including Sitatunga.

# Multi million investment turning out to be a case of a deal gone sour

Continued from page 1

Women complain that they have had miscarriages due to contaminated water while livestock owners say they have been counting losses as most of their animals have since become sick, thin or died. "This farm has brought division among us, with some of our relatives supporting the investment while others like us are complaining about its negative effects," says Mary Paul, from Bar Olengo Village. She adds: "Families have separated due to the ongoing conflict with the farm management."

Members of the local community complain the farm management has blocked water or diverted some canals causing water to flood their farms and destroy crops, further impoverishing them.

The neighbouring community members have been on a collision path with the Dominion Farms management for a long time and despite many engagement meetings, the disagreements have not been sorted out. There have been demonstrations against the farm managers.

Recently, the villagers accused Dominion Farm management of destroying their sugarcane, maize and horticultural crops in a section of land which they say was set aside for their use, part of the 150 acres outlined in agreement. Dominion farm signed an agreement with the Siaya and Bondo County Councils to the effect that they would give the community 150 acres on each county side. They say grazing lands have been reduced and some of their sources of fresh water are now inaccessible.

The communities have allies, especially non-governmental organisations that have stepped in to build the capacity of local communities to engage with the farm managers and government and also look at the issues of conservation of this unique ecosystem. The area is the breeding ground for hundreds of species of fish that populate Lake Victoria.

## Friends of Yala

A network of about seven civil society organisations under the umbrella of "Friends of Yala Swamp (FOYS)" have established a secretariat in Siaya town as part of the effort to engage the communities in advocacy campaigns to demand for

their rights to sustainable utilisation of the land.

During a recent community and media encounter forum organised by the Institute for Law and Environmental Governance (ILEG), which is part of the Friends of Yala Swamp (FOYS) and in partnership with Media Diversity Centre, a project of African Woman and Child Features Service in Bondo township, it was clear members of the community have deep seated grievances that call for urgent intervention.

Coordinator of FOYS, Dalmas Owino Okello says they have faced hostility from the Dominion Farm owners and local government officials who accuse them of inciting the local community against the project.

"We receive threats and are being followed around. At community meetings and even at the office, we get visitors who are clearly out to intimidate us so that we can stop empowering the community in addressing their concerns," he observes.

Okello says they have made efforts to reach out to the Dominion Farm management, the two county councils of Siaya and Bondo as well as government officials to bring about a multi-stakeholder approach to solving the conflict but have met resistance.

Dominion Farms signed a 25-year lease agreement with Siaya County Council to invest in the Yala Swamp area growing rice, maize and other crops and to also improve fishing using modern methods.

According to Dominion, the agreement allowed them to reclaim and use 6,900 hectares of the swamp, 3,700 hectares in phase one and another 3,200 hectares in phase two.

"We have only reclaimed and put 3,000 hectares to use yet the community is now being incited to believe we are encroaching into their land," says Chris Abir, director and general manager at Dominion Farms. He adds: "We allowed the community to use part of what we reclaimed and informed them when we wanted to utilise the section but they have now refused to move out."

He says the local community and some of the politicians do not appreciate the importance of the investment worth KSh5 billion. Abir argues that the investment has transformed the local economy.



**A dirty pool of water outside the Dominion farm's fence where the residents take their livestock to drink water.** Picture: Oloo Jamak

"We have built shallow wells for the community around the farm and are in the process of putting up a water project that will serve more than 1,000 people in the area," he says adding, "We have also employed 1600 people."

## Denying claims

Other benefits, Abir says, include support to Ratuoro Health Centre where they have constructed a laboratory. They also incur an expenditure of KSh1 million annually to pay fees for local children in secondary schools, repair roads and improve food security.

Abir denies claims that the company has compromised some of the local leaders and government officials to turn a blind eye to the grievances of the local community.

"There are some leaders and NGOs who have chosen to make Dominion Farms look like a devil. At some point they incited the community to literally chase and stone me and the Chief Executive, Calvin Burgess in broad daylight!" he told the *Reject* during an interview at the their offices in Ratuoro recently. As far as Dominion is concerned, the community cannot claim lack of participation and involvement since their councillors participated at every stage through the negotiations and final agreement.

"They are represented by the councillors who signed the agreement with us. If the councillors did not do a good job as they claim, that is

not our business. They should engage the two councils which hold the Yala Swamp in trust for them," observes Abir.

The Dominion venture at Yala produces 14 million kilograms of rice, which reportedly accounts for 20 per cent of Kenya's annual rice production. This, they say, has improved food security in Siaya County and nationally.

The community has been involved in frequent demonstrations and has even filed a court case at the High Court in Kisumu, contesting what they claim to be Dominion's expansion into "their land". Until the case is disposed of, community engagements and other fora for consultation have effectively been paralysed.

The community denies claims that they want the project to close down and insist what they demand are the practical benefits that the management promised at inception, a stop to encroachment on their farms. They have taken issue with the poor compensation of the farms bought under the project which was pegged at KSh45,000 per acre.

However, the Dominion aquaculture manager Enos Were says this price was almost double the going price of land at the time.

Were puts the value of land at the time the deal was brokered at KSh23,000 per acre. However, until the current stalemate is dissolved, the area residents will not reap maximum benefits from the swamp.

# Haunted houses remain empty as residents seek land

By ELIZABETH AWUOR

The myth of ghosts popularly known as genies scaring and harassing residents of Mombasa is an old one and not about to die soon.

Most people who were born and bred in Mombasa easily admit that there are genies. However, they are quick to explain that there are good and bad genies. They claim the spirits can turn hostile if misused or offended by human beings.

This phenomenon has led to a number of buildings remaining abandoned with the allegation that they belong to spirits that will not allow human beings stay in them.

The said buildings are scattered all over Mombasa and most of them are located in the city's Old Town. Some have remained unoccupied for more than 20 years.

Jan Mohammed a 67-year-old resident of Kibokoni in Mombasa says that there are supernatural powers in some of the houses and families who attempt to occupy them are either roughed up or has one member killed or turned insane.

## Unbearable

Mohammed says that a white couple once lived in one of the dreaded buildings but had to vacate after evil forces made life unbearable for them.

"The couple could see their books flying from the shelves, their bed moving on its own and they fought almost daily until they opted to vacate the house," claims Mohammed.

Even as Mohammed seems so sure of the existence of supernatural forces in those buildings, 64-year-old Al Amin Mohammed Mazrui thinks otherwise.

According to Mazrui, stories about buildings harbouring genies have been there since he was a small child but he has never come face to face with the phenomenon.

He recalls the 1960s when they were often cautioned against playing near Fort Jesus building which was claimed to harbour a number of genies.

"This is all human imagination, nobody is sure that there are such beings occupying these houses," says Mazrui. He adds: "Those are just stories and if the claims were true then we would not have been living in this town."

Mazrui who also heads a community security council in Kibokoni thinks over the years, the phenomenon of the genies' presence in the



**A house with shops on ground floor but the first floor is unoccupied due to fear that the rooms are haunted. An abandoned house in Kibokoni area in Mombasa's Old Town. Below: Leven house where National Museums of Kenya offices are.**

Pictures: Elizabeth Awuor

Coastal town has been exaggerated.

He says it is natural to have genies around because they are beings just like human and it should be left to a family to decide whether or not they will be associated with them.

Mazrui also supposes that their forefathers used the story as a defence mechanism to help scare away people from settling in the Old Town.

"Most of the old houses have been bought and the new owners who are mostly people of Somali origin are currently renovating them," says Mazrui.

Since Mombasa's Old Town has been gazetted as a historical monument, both the new and old owners of buildings must seek permission from National Museums of Kenya before renovating a house.

They are allowed to renovate the buildings and make changes inside but the houses' must retain the original design on the outside.

According to Mazrui, the town is cosmopolitan and the cost of renting a house in the area

has gone up because many people now find it a convenient place to operate from.

"Security is good here, we are near the main town and can easily access health facilities," says Mazrui of the town where he was born and bred.

The Mombasa National Museums of Kenya's Physical Planning Coordinator Dr Kalandar Khan, shares similar sentiments with Mazrui.

He, like others has heard the stories about genies, knows which houses are said to harbour ghosts but has not come across any supernatural being or experienced any extraordinary force.

He says most of the buildings and family houses have been inherited for many years and claims about genies' presence in some has also existed for many years.

Leven House, the building where Khan's office is located was previously claimed to harbour ghosts before it was renovated. The Mombasa Old Town Conservation Office has been there for seven years. Khan and his colleagues



are yet to attest the presence of ghosts in the house.

Apart from the NMK offices, Leven House also hosts a Swahili dishes restaurant, residential rooms occupied by people who spend their nights in them and have not reported any encounter with the beings.

Leven House was built by freed slaves between 1823 and 1824. It has had several owners including a church missionary society, a British governor and an Asian family among others.

Khan says he only knows of a Swahili culture that requires individuals to slaughter a goat before renovating any building and thinks that it might have been misinterpreted as a ritual to appease the genies.

However, he says the feeling could naturally emanate from the fear one develops once they have been told that the building is haunted.

Other residential areas where stories about spirit-inhabited houses exist include; Kisauni, Migadini and Likoni.

*"This is all human imagination, nobody is sure that there are such beings occupying these houses."*

— Al Amin Mohammed Mazrui

## Lamu Island on the verge of collapse

By SWABRINAH SHABAN

It is an island that many people admire yet have not set foot there. Commonly known as the island of donkey transport, Lamu Island is now on the verge of collapse following encroachment and degradation of water catchment zones by land grabbers.

The Lamu/Sheila sand dunes is one of the most important protected sites within Lamu Island, but now the sand dune regime is under threat from human development activities contrary to the established conservation policy.

## Grabbed

According to a chronology report from Lamu World Heritage and Conservation office, a sector of the gazetted sand dunes have been grabbed with confirmed reports which indicate that there are plans for development of hotels within the confines of the sand dunes.

The Lamu sand dunes which act as water catchment for most of the settlements on the island, especially the historic town of Lamu were officially gazetted in 2002 as a protected site under the Antiquities and Monuments Act Cap 215.

The sites continue to maintain that status under the provisions of the National Museums and Heritage Act 2006.

Early this year National Environment Management Authority (Nema) declared illegal all developments near the water catchment areas

and ordered a stop on any developments.

Nema expressed fears over the fragile ecosystem and banned construction in front of sand dune zones that run from North to South of the Archipelago that covers 958 hectares.

Kenya Marina Forum (KMF) says grabbers have invaded the sand dunes, putting up permanent structures thus threatening the island's natural habitat, eco-system and human life.

"Any interruption to this fragile natural water membrane shall cause irreversible damage to the palatable water aquifers which have sustained continuous human settlement on Lamu Island for the last 700 years," notes Mohammed Athman, chairman KMF.

Athman says for some time, government officers, powerful businessmen and politicians have grabbed massive land on the sand dunes putting the island at a great risk. National Museums of Kenya (NMK) has also joined in the fight to protect historical sites from land grabbers.

These sites include Takwa Milinga, Ras Kitau battery and Sheila Kipungani sand dunes. These are protected areas under the National Museums and Heritage Act 2006.

Recently NMK established an encroachment on the historical sites, demarcating beacons and fences erected within the former detention camp while four of the old Mau Mau wells are now on land that is in private hands.

Lands minister James Orengo recently revoked title deeds for several plots in the area after sand dunes were grabbed.



**Part of the Lamu coastline. Human activity poses a threat to the existence of sand dunes.** Picture: Swabrinah Shaban

NMK was pushing for re-establishment of the site boundaries and erection of fences to prevent encroachment on the protected areas and cancellation of all the illegally acquired land titles.

## Dunes

The Lamu/Sheila sand dune regime is located on the southern end of Lamu Island. They run from Kizingoni in the south-western tip of the Island to Ras Singue in the south-eastern tip just outside the Sheila village.

They extend for 12 kilometres and cover 958 hectares. The sand dunes which rise to a height of approximately 60metres above sea level form a continuous ridge along the Lamu bay. This acts as a protection for Lamu Island against the strong winds from the open sea. This was supposedly manifested during the Tsunami episode of 2006 whose after effects were felt quite substantially along the East African coastline with the exception of the Lamu harbour.

Most beaches are backed by vegetated sand ridges called dunes, built up by dry beach sand blown inland and trapped by plants and other obstructions. As sand accumulates, the dunes become higher and wider.

Plants play a vital role in this process, acting as windbreakers and trapping the deposited sand particles. A characteristic of these plants is their ability to grow through the sand and continually produce new stems and roots as more sand is trapped and the dune grows.

Stable sand dunes play an important part in protecting the coastline. They act as a buffer against wave damage during storms, protecting the land behind from salt water intrusion. This sand barrier allows the development of more complex plant communities in areas protected from salt water inundation, sea spray and strong winds.

The dunes also act as a reservoir of sand, to replenish and maintain the beach in times of erosion.

# Clan loses custody of their ancestral land

By KARIUKI MWANGI

The Kagwanja clan of Meru has for the second time lost custody of their 340 acre ancestral land after the Land Tribunal sitting in Embu dismissed their appeal.

The clan had earlier in the year taken the dispute matter to the Meru District Land Tribunal which ruled that they did not provide sufficient evidence to show that the land belonged to them before being bought by a private developer.

Through their spokesman Captain Kabuti Gitonga Mbau, the clan said they had been living in the land since independence. However, it was later bought and sub-divided by people who chased the clan members away.

## Squatters

Gitonga told the appeal tribunal that they were denied justice at the Meru District Land Tribunal and were appealing to get the land back to the community who are now living as squatters.

The land in contention was also investigated and recorded in the famous Ntung'u Land Report whose implementation could have ensured justice to the members of the clan who now live in utmost poverty.

The Ntung'u Report states in part: "The complainants argue that the adjudication of the area was not carried out in accordance with requirements of the Land Adjudication Act."

It is alleged that the land adjudication officers allocated the land to themselves, their friends and relatives.

Henry Kinyua, the respondent in the case who is alleged to have bought the land told the tribunal that he bought the land in the 1970s and by that time it had no inhabitants.

## Sellers

Kinyua told the Tribunal he bought the land from the principal sellers whom he mentioned as Stephen Mungania and John Merete.

He assured the sellers that they would take responsibility of any case that would arise from the land but nobody came up to complain of it.

"I even fenced off the land in 1978 to provoke anybody who felt the land was his, but nobody came out," noted Kinyua.

He claimed to have bought the land even before the land adjudication started in the area but when it started he was given all the legal documents that prove ownership.

The respondent provided all the legal docu-



Members of the Kagwanja clan outside the land appeal tribunal office in Embu after their appeal application was dismissed. Picture: Kariuki Mwangi

ments to the Tribunal showing that he was the legally recognised owner of the land.

The appeal tribunal, therefore, dismissed the appeal application by members of the Kagwanja clan saying they failed to prove that they were

the rightful owners of the land.

The members of the clan now have 60 days to appeal at the three-bench judge appeal court if they were not satisfied with the ruling of the appellate land tribunal.

## Why 3D television sets are not found in every home

By ELIZABETH AWUOR

News that 3D television sets were retailing in the country sounded tempting but there are factors that have remained barriers between most Kenyans and the new technology.

Despite having the highest entertainment value, many Kenyans do not have 3D TV sets in their living rooms because the prices are unaffordable and 3D content is not readily available. One year after their introduction to the country, Samsung 3D TV models range between KSh150,000 and KSh155,000 while Sony models range between KSh230,000 and KSh400,000 and the LG 47 inches TV set retail at around KSh239,000.

## Elusive dreams

Laden with the burden of having to cope with the escalating prices of basic commodities and the life style of living from hand to mouth, owning a 3D TV remains an elusive dream to a large percentage of the Kenyan population. 3D technology provides a viewer with unique and exciting experience compared to 2D. It does this by creating an illusion of the images popping out of the screen.

Unlike 2D where the viewer remains outside, 3D technology allows the viewer to be part of the movie. This sensational experience is what gives 3D a plus over 2D technology. However, movies in 3D must be viewed using special glasses that will bring out the added dimension in depth form. The glasses that mostly have red and blue lenses work by recreating the way human beings see normally.

Clifford Okumu, a film producer in Mombasa explains that one cannot be able to make out the images if they are not wearing the glasses. He cites a scene in the film *Final Destination* where a snake pops out of the screen preparing to make a bite. This makes the viewer feel like the snake is approaching him or her. He says if a viewer closes one eye, the vision becomes blurred.

Mike Mwazanze, a movie enthusiast has been enjoying the tantalising experience of 3D technology in cinemas. He says he often feels like part of the action and not just someone seated on the couch watching a movie.



Pammy Billu a sales Executive at Shankar Electronics Mombasa shop points at a Samsung 3D TV set. Picture: Elizabeth Awuor

"Whoever came up with 3D technology did a noble thing, it is the best movie watching experience and those who have not tried it are missing out on something great," Mwazanze reiterates. A survey by *the Reject* in electronic shops where 3D TV sets are selling reveals that most buyers are turned away by the high prices but are attracted so much by their high entertainment value. A sales executive at Shankar Electronics in Mombasa says potential customers are put away by the fact that they will be forced to put on glasses when watching 3D TV.

Pammy Billu who works at the Samsung models section says people who wear spectacles are also disadvantaged because they cannot wear the 3D glasses with their normal spectacles. "A buyer might be compelled to buy more than one pair of glasses if he or she intends to watch the TV with friends and other family members," explains Billu.

## Kenyan market

According to Billu, a pair of 3D goggles go for KSh11,000 and the current glasses are dark, a fact that some consumers have complained about. However, she says, there are new models of 3D glasses that are clear but have not reached the Kenyan market yet. Content to be viewed in 3D is not readily available for Kenyans and film producers have to create more content to fit this new technology.

However, although 3D technology is surrounded by many challenges, those who can afford the television sets are buying them. "The clarity of 3D TV sets attracts many buyers who think it is worth the money and they make sales every month," says Billu.

## Insecurity threatens county take off

By HUSSEIN DIDO

Endless conflicts and insecurity perpetrated by rising cases of banditry and cattle rustling could be a major impediment towards inception of devolved system of government in the pastoralists region.

The counties might fail to meet development targets and continue to lag behind even after promulgation of the Constitution due to high levels of insecurity and banditry in the area. Minister for Northern Kenya and other Arid Lands Development Mohammed Elmi warned leaders from the region that the counties may not get funding from the central government unless they found lasting solutions to peaceful coexistence and stability in the region.

Elmi singled out 22 districts in the arid regions that were bedevilled with cattle rustling and clan divisions that contributed to divisive politics in the counties. He said they may not take off once the devolved structure of governance becomes operational.

## Benefits

He was flanked by MPs Mohamud Ali (Moyale) Hussein Sasura (Saku) Abdul Bahari Ali (Isiolo South) and Chachu Ganya (North Horr) urged the leaders to form a formidable united front that would enhance their political bargaining power and enable communities from the region to benefit from the national government after the next elections.

During the occasion, members of parliament from Isiolo, Marsabit and Samburu counties resolved to address insecurity in northern Kenya in readiness for the devolved county system ahead of the 2012 general elections.

This comes amid fears by the Ministry of Northern Kenya and Arid Lands Development that most counties in the arid districts may not take off due to insecurity.

Five MPs from the region raised concern that insecurity was a major impediment to development and that measures should be put in place to ensure that the counties will not drag behind during the take off.

Elmi called on community leaders and other stakeholders to sensitise the communities on how they can co-exist and embrace the new changes that come with

devolved system of governance.

"This region has the ingredients for stable counties if opportunities are harnessed by the leaders elected to manage the resources," observed Elmi.

## Peace building

Insecurity and climate change are the major issues which affect all the four counties in northern Kenya. Restoration of lasting peace among neighbouring pastoralists communities is noted as an entry point for preparation for county establishment in the region and it must improve. Local leaders have been charged with the responsibility of facilitating peace building in the region.

The leaders present at the gathering unanimously agreed to preach peace in the region to eradicate cattle rustling and highway banditry that have been dogging the region for a long time.

They agreed to eradicate retrogressive traditional practices which condone cattle rustling and glorify raids reiterating that these should be shunned and criminalised at local level.

The forum on devolved system of government organised by Pastoralists Shed Initiative in northern Kenya brought together aspirants, opinion leaders and politicians from upper Eastern, Laikipia and Samburu axis to identify opportunities for the counties' prosperity and deliberate on challenges which will hamper their taking off.

## No infrastructure

In Isiolo the committee unanimously agreed to give preferential treatment to minority groups in the county since they have been locked out of leadership due to their numerical disadvantage. Ali, who is also Assistant Minister for Special Programmes, said it is a new dawn for the region as the county governor will be responsible for security. He noted the need for co-existing among communities in the region.

The legislator noted that lack of infrastructural development in the region will derail development in spite of the huge potential that exists. "Marsabit is rich but we need improved infrastructure to link the region with the rest of the country," observed Ali. He added: "To eradicate insecurity in the area an anti-stock theft unit should be established in all hotspots."

# Teenage fathers also need support

By TAFADZWA SEKESO

My son turned “free!” — his word — not mine in August, this year. As I reflect on that Saturday afternoon three years ago when he came into the world at 3.15 pm, weighing 2.9 kilograms and measuring 49 centimetres long, I marvel at the challenges, joys and fears that have characterised my life in this new role. You see, I stopped being only a man that day, I became a father.

In time and through reliance on human and written resources, I have become better at embracing all my roles and responsibilities as a father. I can only imagine how much tougher the challenge of fatherhood is for a teenage father. Research titled *Teenage Tata, Voices of Young Fathers in South Africa* (Human Sciences Research Council, 2009), indicates that teenage fathers often do not get a lot of support as families, communities and organisations focus on the needs of teenage mothers.

## Stability

My partner and I had our son when we were in our late 20s, somewhat financially stable and with a supportive network of friends and family. Although we were ready to be parents, I soon found myself experiencing a roller coaster of emotions, and increasingly weighed under by new expectations regarding the baby.

While my partner dealt with hormonal fluctuations, I tried to deal with my own fears and challenges. Although as relevant as my partner's, my fears were very different. My partner had a lot of support: from her mother, sisters, friends, other women with children and the medical providers paid to listen and help.

The pregnancy “show” revolves around the mother. Fathers, left on the fringes, are expected to simultaneously support their partners and

cope with their own feelings, even when they do not know how.

During the course of the pregnancy, I went into “provision mode” with my main worry being whether I would be able to provide for my child. After the baby, clothes, furniture and diapers had been bought. I turned to worrying about whether I would be able to afford a “good school”.

Expectant fathers can feel left out of the pregnancy as they do not actually carry the baby, do not experience hormonal changes and cannot do much to eradicate heartburn and morning sickness. “Provider” seems to be the only role that fathers fit into perfectly. But a teenage father with no job, no source of income and little family support is at a disadvantage.

## Campaigns

The SADC Gender Protocol Barometer (2011) notes that many of the campaigns and interventions in southern African countries which promote men's involvement in sexual and reproductive health are less focused on encouraging men's involvement in family planning and in supporting their partners during care.

The campaigns focus more on prevention of HIV and sexually transmitted infections. The assumption is that contraceptive use and prevention of pregnancy is solely a woman's role, taking responsibility for an unplanned pregnancy away from men. Pregnancy, child delivery and child care thus become, by extension, also a woman's responsibility.

According to the Human Sciences Research Council, many teenage fathers are aware of the magnitude of the responsibility of parenting. They would like to play a role in raising their child. In the research *Teenage Tata, Voices of Young Fathers in South Africa* young fathers

between the ages of 14 and 20 years explained that just like young mothers, they need two main things.

## Growth

They need support to improve their educational and economic circumstances so that they can fulfil their caregiver and provider roles. They also need family support and parenting information that can help them to support their partners and children.

I have grown a lot emotionally since my son's birth. I experienced every emotion; among them anticipation, fear, pride, frustration and confusion. My ability, or not, to meet the societal and cultural expectations of fatherhood determined these emotions.

No one taught me how to be a parent, I have had to make up a lot of the rules as I went along and looked for support and information where I could find it. My partner provided some of the resources I needed, as did friends with children who have gone through the same things. A lot of my information came from the Internet.

All I know is that I want a good life for my son, and I will take advice where I can find it. There are increasingly more resources for men on fatherhood. These resources also aim to encourage young men to question some of the patriarchal beliefs that discourage nurturing and engagement.



**A father spends time with his son. Expectant fathers can at times feel left out of the pregnancy as they do not experience the hormonal and body changes.**

Picture: Courtesy AWC Features

*The writer is a Zimbabwean knowledge management and communications consultant based in South Africa. This article is part of the Gender Links Opinion and Commentary Service, bringing you fresh views on everyday news.*

## Parents, teachers accused of killing children's dreams

By WANGARI MWANGI

Parents and teachers have been accused of demoralising children as they struggle to realise their dreams.

According to Kiragu Magochi, director of education policy, partnership and East Africa Community Affairs parents and teachers are responsible for killing future dreams of their children.

Speaking at Murang'a High School during the Kiharu Education Day, Magochi said teachers tend to scare away the girl child from pursuing science subjects by telling them these can only be pursued by boys.

“This has been a big challenge for the girl child's education because of the mentality created that they should only tackle the ‘easy’ subjects,” noted Magochi.

He added: “Science teachers are the most notorious in discouraging students, killing their morale in pursuing their future careers.”

He said this trend has to stop if education standards have to be balanced for both girls and boys.

Magochi also pointed out that parents are no longer taking interest in their children's education matters and fail in helping them realise their dreams.

He noted that parents rarely find time in their ‘busy’ schedule to be with their children adding that the widening gap has brought a lot of misunderstanding between the two.

As a result, the parents become dictators and don't give their children time to express themselves to give ideas of what they would like to become in future.

“Parents should be at the forefront in nurturing their children's dreams by guiding them and knowing what they would like to become,” he said.

Magochi said parents who failed to achieve their desired careers tend to fight back the failure through their children by forcing them to become what they would have wanted to become.

## Ida launches efforts to retain girls in school

By ODHIAMBO ODHIAMBO

Parents in Nyanza have been challenged to take the education of the girl-child seriously.

Ida Odinga, wife to Prime Minister Raila Odinga, said it was disheartening to see girls dropping out of school to be married off early or engaged in child labour along the beaches of Lake Victoria, gold mines and tobacco farms.

She asked political and religious leaders to advocate for girl-education and child rights with renewed vigour.

Speaking in Nyatike District during a girl-child education forum, Ida said some schools in the area should be con-

verted to girl schools only. She encouraged management of the institutions to set up adequate boarding and learning facilities.

“I will supply girls in Nyatike with sanitary towels enough to last one year and water tanks to make water available in the schools,” she said.

“I am also asking Nyatike MP Edick Anyanga to establish Nyatike Girl Child Education Trust Fund to support bright girls from needy families. Cases of teachers and chiefs eloping with school girls must also stop in this region,” said Ida.

Some parents said their girls were dropping out of school due to poverty

and hunger in the area. This prompted Ida to call for the start of school based feeding programmes as part of efforts to retain girls in schools.

Managing director of the Kenya Literature Bureau Eve Obara asked courts to expedite cases related to child abuse and hand stiffer penalties to offenders to act as deterrents.

Anyanga asked provincial administration to take stern action against parents who denied their children right to education.

He said: “More teachers should be recruited urgently to address staff shortage being experienced in most schools across the country.”

## Programme to support environmental conservation

By KARIUKI MWANGI

Pact Kenya in collaboration with the government of Sweden and the department of international development (DFID) has launched a four-year programme geared towards supporting non-state actors in conserving and improving the environment.

Pact Kenya chief executive officer Titus Syengo said the aim of the programme is to improve the participation of the public particularly the poor and the marginalised in sustainable utilisation of natural resources as a major contribution to the realisation of the Vision 2030.

Syengo pointed out that some critical challenges the country faces in sustainable management of natural resources require an active participation of all the actors reiterating that non-state actors will be link

to the grassroots.

Speaking in Embu, he said non-state actors such as community and faith-based organisations will build integrated interventions to address the challenges facing land, water, agriculture and other environmental conservation sectors.

“The programme will support advocacies for enabling policies such as irrigation, dry land farming, seed production and credits for small scale farmers to enable them deal with the challenges of food security and productivity,” observed Syengo.

The programme will also support initiatives that are aimed at strengthening farmers' associations and marketing co-operatives which link producers, marketers and processors as well as in the diversification of livelihoods beyond climate sensitive sectors.

Syengo pointed out that the programme will also support initiatives that are geared towards expanding knowledge and access to information by farmers so that they can learn the best farming practices and technologies which will improve food security.

“We plan to invest more on policies that will mitigate climate change, mostly by promoting demonstrative values of green and renewable energy technologies so that farmers can seek alternatives other than forests and environment destruction,” he said.

Through the programme, Pact Kenya will offer grants ranging from KSh7.5 million to KSh25 million to the various non-state actors which will provide substantive ongoing projects on environmental conservation and climate change mitigation.

# President's former school marks 50 years

By JOSEPH MUKUBWA

President Mwai Kibaki's former school in Othaya has marked 50 years since its establishment.

Karima Boys High School marks a joyous occasion since it first admitted students on February 14, 1960. The school celebrated its 50th anniversary recently during a prize giving day held at the school.

While the fete could just be any normal Golden Jubilee, Karima school was privileged to have had among its students some of the prominent Kenyans. However, the most important person in its school records is President Mwai Kibaki.

The President is an alumni of the school having been a student between 1941-1943. By then it was called Karima Mission School, a pre-independence school that had served its mandate well in offering elementary education under the Consolata Missionaries.

Kibaki was among the first students who were admitted in the school which then stood for high performance standards as instructed by predominantly the missionary staff.

"With the start of the secondary school, the same high standards were upheld with the founding priests led by Reverend Roman Guadagnini, setting high expectations on their young charges," says Kamau Chomba, the school's principal. He adds: "The missionaries insisted on instilling in them strength and awareness cognitively, socially, physically, spiritually and emotionally with a sense of social responsibility and community service."

President Kibaki was in the school in 1941 where he was admitted in Standard One and he went up to Standard Three in 1943 before heading to Mathari Mission School for Standard Four.

## High standards

During that time, the high standards of achievement set by the missionaries were attained for most of the life of the school through 1960s and 1970s. This made it a school of choice, and consequently placed a very high demand for places.

The starting of a second stream was inevitable and in 1975 with the assistance of the then newly elected MP for Othaya, Mwai Kibaki, two classrooms were constructed between him and his friends. A third stream was started in 1980 as desired for chances in the school increased.

A small group of 33 teenage boys would grow and form the foundation of what would eventually become the most celebrated school after the dream that never died.

Although faced with many challenges, the school would lose neither its roots nor its zeal to deepen and share the knowledge. It did not also lose the warmth of pride.

The colourful occasion to mark 50 years was graced by Nyeri archbishop Reverend Peter Kairo and President Kibaki's eldest son Jimmy, who is the patron of the school. A mass was also held at the school compound.

The school requested Jimmy Kibaki to serve the patron, a request he gladly accepted. The school has worked closely with the President's son and is particularly grateful for his support and contribution towards the 50th anniversary celebrations and fund raising he conducted in



From top: Students of Karima Boys High School in Othaya entertain guests during the 50th anniversary celebrations. Othaya DO1 Helen Chege awards one of the best students during the occasion. Students reading the publication that marked their anniversary. Pictures: Joseph Mukubwa

aid of the science laboratory in October 2009.

The theme of the anniversary was '50 years of academic achievement forming the foundation of the future school of choice.'

## Patron

Jimmy lauded the good work which has been done by the stakeholders that has made the school excel in the academic performances.

"Since being honoured with the request to join as a patron by the Board of Governors in November 2008, I have come to know more about the school and appreciate the vision of the founders," said Jimmy. He added: "It is humbling to see the output of the school from the very basic facilities that were developed as a primary school from 1937."

Jimmy noted: "With little or no modification, the same facilities have seen a respectable institution develop with slightly less than 5,000 students passing through in the 50 years under review." He said that as patron, he is convinced the future of the school lies on the continued provision of quality education.

He acknowledged President Kibaki's efforts in development of schools in the constituency with Karima Boys being one where he has helped in development more than the rest.

The President has contributed to Karima Boy's in many ways; in 1975 he personally paid for construction of two classrooms; in 1987, he was the chief guest for a harambee to build a dormitory named after him.

In 1988, the President facilitated a grant for a science laboratory by the British Government and in 1999 he was the chief guest for a harambee to buy the school truck.

Jimmy lauded the good work of the Catholic Church and urged it to continue sponsoring the school.



The Principal Kamau Chomba said the culture of performance is instilled in over 98 per cent of the students. This is well shown by the extremely encouraging results in the KCSE in the last several years.

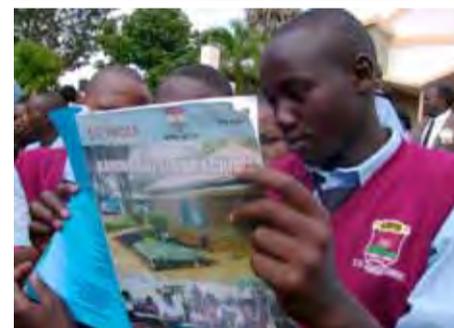
Last year, the school recorded the highest even Mean Score at 8.0352 that also was above the target set by the Board of Governors at 8.0.

Even more encouraging was the fact that the school ranked 181 among all schools nationally, at Position 100 among the provincial schools countrywide and the best school in Nyeri South district.

## Growth

Jimmy observed: "The 50 years that have passed have seen the school grow to a respectable institution that is attracting interest from far and wide. Within the next 50 years, the school must be seen to fulfil its vision."

Others who have contributed immensely towards the school and were also present during the occasion are board member Priscilla Nyokabi who is Executive Director Kituo cha Sheria, Othaya District Officer Helen Chege and Othaya Constituency Development Fund (CDF)



chairman Karanja Mwangi. Together with Nyeri South DC David Koskei, they have also contributed towards the development of the school.

"Since its inception in 1960, Karima Boys has had its infrastructure expanded with a view of coping with the growing student population and demand for quality learning," said James Theuri, chairman Board of Governors. He added: "Over the years, the school has also expanded and today it admits students from all over the country having been upgraded to provincial status in 2007."

The school boasts of being one of the best in central region.

## NEMA to sue churches, mosques over noise

BY ERIC MUTAI

National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) has threatened to take places of worship in Eastern Province to court for producing noises above permissible levels.

Area residents have been asked to hand over written complaints against places of worship producing more noise than allowed by the environment watchdog.

NEMA Eastern Province director Stephen Njoka called on residents to make written reports saying this will enable the environment watchdog collect enough evidence to pros-

ecute offenders. "We may not always be there to measure the noise levels but we are gathering written evidence from residents. Soon we are going to be taking some of these places of worship to court as we can't keep warning them forever," he said.

According to Njoka, mosques in upper and lower eastern and churches have not heeded to the call to reduce their sound to permissible levels.

"We have two churches in Embu town which are notorious for producing too much sound yet they do not have big congregations. If they want to preach to those outside

the church they should use the media," said Njoka.

He said residents have filed complaints expressing their displeasure. He called on them to give more written reports to NEMA for consolidation of cases against offenders.

The residents complained that places of worship have been making too much noise in the wee morning hours and during lunch hours.

Those that spoke to the *Reject* said their sleep has been interfered with and this has affected their performance at work.

"The music played in the evening is so much that my children are unable to do their

homework leaving them at the mercy of teachers most of whom do not understand," said Mary Muthanje, a resident Embu town.

According to NEMA, the generated noise should not exceed 45 decibels and it is only allowed between 8am to 8pm.

Njoka said that they should not amplify their sound near hospitals or learning institutions.

According to the environment watchdog, the churches have been generating noise in excess of the permissible levels in contravention of the Environment Management and Coordinating (Noise and Excessive Pollution Control) Regulations of 2008.

# Tuk Tuk, a necessary but evil multi-million shilling business

By KIGONDU NDAVANO

It is an industry with a monthly turnover of more than KSh26.2 million steadily employing at least 500 young people as drivers all who together take home at least KSh4.5 million in wages every month.

About 500 Malindi business people have to date invested more than KSh240 million in the sector which earns them at least KSh15 million a month while spending up to KSh6.7 million for fuel to run the industry.

The easiest mode of transport one can get on the roads and streets of tourist resort Malindi in Kilifi County, right from the central business district to the outskirts is that of a Tuk Tuk.

Malindi has the highest number of Tuk Tuk taxis in Kenya and it was the town which propelled Car and General Company to start an independent entity "Piaggio Kenya" to specifically deal in sale and after sale services of the Tuk Tuks.

The Tuk Tuks have been baptised various names varying from international football teams, footballers to basic sayings. You can ride on 'Baby Boy' before finding yourself inside 'Migingo' and may be finally landing on 'unsatisfied hunter'.

Given that Malindi attracts a huge number of Italian tourists and investors names such as Andiamo (let's go), Amore (lover), Fratello (brother) and Italia Due (Second Italy) are easily seen on the taxis.

## Mode of transport

If a would be Tuk Tuk passenger stops on a Malindi roadside anticipating to catch some transport, he or she will most likely be confronted by at least three Tuk Tuks with the drivers all keen to win over the customer.

The now popular and readily available Tuk Tuks come in all colours and names but once one jumps into one, they are assured of reaching their destination in time and safely because from record, Tuk Tuk accidents are rare.

The Tuk Tuks have been modified and some sleek ones which are smaller in size and powered by petrol making them offer a comfortable ride. However, the diesel powered ones are noisy and ran down permanently billowing thick smoke.

The noise inside and outside the popular Malindi three-wheelers becomes deafening, making a conversation over the now popular mode of transportation almost impossible.

"Conversations over the cell phone can easily turn into a shouting match between callers and receivers who use the Tuk Tuks," says Juan Kadzo who moved recently to the resort town from Nairobi.

However, despite these challenges they remain the most preferred and perhaps the best means of movement.

## Noise levels

When the three wheelers started operations in Malindi some six years ago, callers to Malindi town residents from others parts of the country realised that their listeners were raising their voices unusually over the phone.

"At one time some residents of Malindi even demanded that the National Environmental Management Authority (NEMA) ban the Tuk Tuks from operating in some parts of the tourist resort because of the levels of noise they produced from their engines," notes Godfrey Karume, a Malindi environmentalist.

Karume, however, explains that after several meetings between NEMA officials and the offended residents, it was concluded that after all, the Tuk Tuks were a necessary evil due to advantages they provided in easing transport.

The noise and pollution notwithstanding, Malindi perhaps remains one of the towns with the safest and most reliable mode of transport.

Ann Stella Belli, an Italian who owns a holiday villa at Casuarina Beach appreciates the reliable service provided by the Tuk Tuk noting that for the years she has been coming to Malindi for her holiday, Tuk Tuks remain her best choice of transport.

"I use the Tuk Tuk to go to the town and in the supermarket to do shopping and I find them reliable and affordable," explains Belli.

Pioneer investors in Tuk Tuk business Ibrahim Sharrif and About Sutry who at one time had at least 20 taxis between them before they abandoned business all together blamed their decision to leave the industry to a crowded field which ended up reducing profits.

Sharrif who has since shifted into long distance cargo trailers insists: "Initially the Tuk Tuk taxi business was interesting and profitable but then so many people bought the three-wheelers creating a big competition which led to reduced profits in our fleet of more than 30 taxis."

Another investor James Gitau who had two Tuk Tuk taxis says he abandoned the business and sold his two old taxis after he started making losses. Gitau says he was also spending large amounts of money in maintenance fees at a time when turnover remained low.

While many have abandoned the Tuk Tuk business, others have joined and Malindi has at least ten new Tuk Tuk taxis entering the market every month. This is according to records from the licensing department at the Malindi Municipal Council which charges KSh3,500 for an annual business licence.

## Meeting

Recently when the Tuk Tuk drivers briefly withdrew their services as they held a three hour meeting at the old Sinbird Hotel grounds to discuss new fares, several parts of Malindi enjoyed rare lull of comfort and a pleasant relief from the noise.

"The town was so quiet, making me wonder what was happening until I realised that there were no Tuk Tuk on the roads," says Hassan Bien, a Malindi resident.

Barely six years after they were launched in Malindi, the Indian Piaggio three-wheelers now produced in Italy where they have been renamed APE or 'bee' due to their bee like noise they make. They have dominated the short distance transport of passengers in this tourist resort almost totally.

"The first investor in Tuk Tuks in Malindi acquired two such taxis and started operating what he referred to as door to door transport at a cost of KSh50 per trip but within the next two months, the tourist resort had more than 20 such taxis," says Mohammed Salim, the interim chairman of the soon to be registered Malindi Tuk Tuk Drivers Association.

Explaining the background of the Tuk Tuk business, Salim says that with a Tuk Tuk then costing KSh380,000, the peoples' interest in the business grew rapidly with an investment of more than KSh7.6 million in less than two months.

According to Salim, the minimum income from the 20 Tuk Tuks stood at KSh3,000 per taxi per day meaning the total earnings for the investors per month was KSh1.8 million.

Meanwhile the Tuk Tuk drivers would take home at least KSh500 per day as daily fee, giving an income of KSh300,000 per month for all the 20 drivers.

"Initially the price of diesel to run a Tuk Tuk for a whole day cost some KSh350 meaning that petrol stations gained a turnover of up



From top: a tuk tuk on transit in Malindi town. Mohammed Salim, the interim chairman of the soon to be registered Malindi Tuk Tuk Drivers Association addresses Tuk Tuk drivers with his interim Secretary James Njenga. A driver inside his tuk tuk. Tuk tuks in town.

Pictures: Kigondu Ndavano



to KSh210,000 a month," explains Salim.

He observes that in the wake of growing number of Tuk Tuks, the drivers felt that time had come to form an organisation to ensure smooth and better management of the services.

"The new prices of fuel have affected our business and income like it has done with many other Kenyans generally and we would like to increase our prices in an organised and reasonable way," notes Alfred Mdzomba, interim vice chairman of the Association.

Mdzomba explains: "With drivers being mainly the youth, we would like to come up with ways and means to ensure discipline, fair fares as well as respect for passengers and traffic rules."

The Tuk Tuk drivers would like to use the new organisation to fight for some of their rights and especially where it involves working up to 20 hours every day without compensation.

According to Mdzomba, the organisation in its formative stages has already organised two

training forums for the drivers under the traffic police boss in Malindi Chief Inspector Gabriel Mullei who has been training them on laws.

However, despite everything, Tuk Tuk remains one of the most steady and reliable sources of employment for the youth in Malindi. If left to operate without set down rules and regulations, incidents of indiscipline may encroach into the business and give it a bad reputation.

Mdzomba insists Tuk Tuk drivers still remain some of the best tour guides for newcomers and tourists in Malindi.

"Most strangers in Malindi arrive in the tourist resort without much information about their destinations and comfortably trust the taxi drivers who ferry them to their destinations," he observes.

The interim secretary of the Malindi Tuk Tuk Drivers Association James Njenga says that an industry in whose Malindi business people have invested more than KSh240 million should not be taken for granted.

# Cancer is a deadly disease yet curable

By HENRY OWINO

Cancer is the name given for diseases in which the body's cells become abnormal and divide without control. Cancer is one of the non-communicable diseases that are claiming many yet it can be prevented from spreading and treated if detected in early.

According to Dr John Kamau, assistant Chief Therapy Radiographer at Kenyatta National Hospital, there are over 100 different types of cancer, and each is classified by the type of cell that is initially affected. Cancer cells may invade nearby tissues and spread through the bloodstream and lymphatic system to other parts of the body.

Speaking during cancer public awareness and educational week held in Nairobi and Naivasha, Kamau said the disease is characterised by out of control cell growth in the body.

The four most commonly known cancers are breast, colon, lung and prostate. Others types include ovarian, skin, bone, stomach (gastric), bladder, lung, leukaemia (blood), melanoma, non-Hodgkin lymphoma, endometrial, pancreatic, kidney (renal cell) and thyroid. The list is long.

The colon and rectal (combined) cancer is the leading killer of all types of cancers in the world followed by breast cancer.

## Early detection

"Early diagnosis of cancer can help a great deal in managing and treating the disease before it matures and spread to other parts of the body," explained Kamau.

However, he said definitive diagnosis of cancer requires the microscopic examination of a biopsy specimen. Most cancers can be treated, with the most important modalities being chemotherapy, radiotherapy and surgery.

"The prognosis in cancer cases can be greatly influenced by the type and location of the cancer and the extent of disease," he noted.

The doctor pointed that chemotherapy is usually done by prescribing some drugs to the patient to prevent the cells from likely to cause cancer mutating and this is done in the early stages through regular medical check up.

On the other hand radiotherapy is done to

the patient to suppress any cell cancer to avoid spreading to other parts of the body by mutating to cause of the disease. Radiotherapy thereby helps in reducing chances of cancer spreading to other parts of the body.

Surgery is carried out when the patient delayed in seeking treatment and only goes to the hospital when he/she cannot stand the pain caused by cancer which has fully grown, matured and may spread to other parts of the body. It is always the last option to save the patient which can be amputation.

Kamau explained: "Cancer harms the body when damaged cells divide uncontrollably to form lumps or masses of tissue called tumours except in the case of leukaemia where cancer prohibits normal blood function by abnormal cell division in the blood stream." He added: "Tumours can grow and interfere with the digestive, nervous, and circulatory systems and they can release hormones that alter body function."

Tumours that stay in one spot and demonstrate limited growth are generally considered benign. The presence of cancer can be suspected on the basis of clinical signs and symptoms or findings after.

The presence of cancer can be suspected on the basis of clinical signs and symptoms, or findings after medical imaging. It is, therefore, important for any person regardless of health conditions and status to occasionally to visit a health centre for medical check up.

## Types of cancer

While cancer can affect people of all ages, and a few types of cancer are more common in children than in adults, the overall risk of developing cancer generally increases with age, at least up to 80-85 years. In 2007, cancer caused about 13 percent of all human deaths worldwide, about 7.9 million. Rates are rising as more people live to an old age and as mass lifestyle changes occur in the developing world.

According to Antony Mamati, Radiation Therapist at Kenyatta National Hospital researchers have divided the causes of cancer into two groups: those with an environmental cause and those with a hereditary genetic cause.

Mamati said cancer is primarily an environmental disease, though genetics influence the



Kenyatta National Hospital Assistant Chief Therapy Radiographer Dr. John Kamau (left) stresses a point. Next to him is Antony Mamati. Picture: Henry Owino

risk of some cancers. Common environmental factors leading to cancer include tobacco use, poor diet and obesity, infection, radiation, lack of physical activity, and environmental pollutants most of which are either lifestyle or infectious agents and genes.

He reiterated: "Environmental factors can cause or enhance abnormalities in the genetic material of cells." He added that cell reproduction is an extremely complex process that is normally tightly regulated by several classes of genes, including oncogenes and tumour suppressor genes.

"Remember that hereditary or acquired abnormalities in these regulatory genes can also lead to the development of cancer. A small percentage of cancers, approximately five to ten percent are entirely hereditary," Mamati explained.

The leading and the most common types of cancer in men and women worldwide are those affecting the skin, lungs and breasts. Different types of lymphoma and leukaemia develop in adults but occur more often in children.

According to Roselyne Opindi, Senior Nurse Officer in Cancer Treatment Centre Department at Kenyatta National Hospital experts still do not know yet the world's single most common type of cancer because it depends with where and how one lives.

Opindi confirmed that there are cancers that are common in one or two countries but are regarded as rare types in other countries. She said in Kenya lung cancer is the leading killer of all cancers according to the ordinary type of tumour it develops and in most countries affects both men and women especially the chain smokers.

"Tobacco use is, therefore, the number one cause of lung cancer and so, the single most effective prevention step is to quit smoking," advised Opindi.

She said breast cancer is frequently affects women while prostate cancer affects men. It is mostly caused by a combination of factors such as genetic makeup, hormones and obesity.

Prostate cancer affects men above 60 years and, therefore, human aging is a major risk factor. Lifestyle can also be blamed for what causes prostate problems in men. Opindi urged women to go for mammography in health centres at least after every six months for diagnosis of breast cancer.

Colorectal is another one of the common types of cancer in both men and women. It is the second most common cause of death due to the disease. Death rate is especially high among those who prefer a diet with high saturated fats.

# Draft bill a giant step towards fighting against killer disease

By PAM INOTI

Cancer is no longer viewed as the disease that affects the old and the rich, but its victims come from people of all ages and the social-economic aspects. The disease is claiming our mothers, sisters, and daughters and seems to be on the increase in Kenya.

In the last few weeks alone, the disease has claimed two phenomenon Kenyan women; Nobel Peace Laureate Professor Wangari Maathai and Dr Margaret Ogola, a renowned humanitarian and acclaimed author. So many other women continue to succumb to the disease every day, only that they are less known, but they remain unsung heroines.

A study carried out by the Kenya Medical Research Institute (KEMRI) indicates that cancer is the third cause of death, after infectious and cardiovascular diseases.

Similarly, a report released out by Parliament's Department of Research ranks cancer as the third most common disease causing death in the country.

Owing to a lack of surveillance programmes, the exact incidence of cancer cases in Kenya is unknown, but it has been estimated at approximately 82,000 cases are reported annually.

According to the vice-chairman of Kenya Cancer Association, David Mukami, although 18,000 deaths of cancer are reported in the country annually, based on the Ministry of Health's statistics, these figures do not include

cases in the rural areas.

While breast and cervical cancer were the mainly the diseases that everyone was aware of, today cases of ovarian, colon and lung cancer among women in Kenya are increasing at an alarming rate.

The high increase in cancer lifestyle has been attributed to unhealthy habits that range from poor feeding, sedentary lifestyle and consumption of tobacco products to hazardous environmental conditions.

## Cervical cancer

Medical scientists have also posited that biologically, HIV infection increases women's risk of human papillomavirus (HPV) infection, cervical neoplasia and invasive cervical cancer.

Although diagnosis and treatment of the disease is improving in the developed world, that is not the case in developing countries, Kenya included. There are inadequate resources in both staff and equipments, high costs of treatment and most importantly, late diagnostic stage where chances of managing the disease are minimal.

In 2009, faced with an increase in the number of cervical cancer cases, Kenya adopted a simple, cheap yet effective visual inspection method of detection that was launched at the Nyanza Provincial Hospital. The test is ideal for low resource settings, the test is offering reprieve to thousands of women who die annually from the disease. The detection tests

for lesions that if left alone may lead to cancer. The test is carried out using table vinegar that costs about a dollar, and can test up to 10 women.

According to the 2011 Global Medicine report, 70 percent of cancer cases are preventable through adopting a healthy lifestyle. This includes reduced consumption of red meat, sweet and fatty foods, consuming a lot of vegetables in our diets, active lifestyle and avoiding exposure to tobacco products.

However, with more cases of women being diagnosed at a younger age, cancer has been linked to an increase in the number of young women smoking and alcohol abuse.

Minister for Medical Services, Professor Anyang Nyong'o, a cancer survivor, has been instrumental in bringing attention to Kenya's need for improved healthcare. The Minister went public with his recent battle with prostate cancer and has helped raise awareness of the disease.

Nyong'o has on numerous occasions called on women to take simple measures that can greatly help in reducing catching the disease. He has advocated for women to be vaccinated against infectious diseases that are associated with cancers such as human papilloma virus, which causes cervical cancer and hepatitis B, which causes cancer of the liver.

Parliament has drafted a Cancer Bill that aims to increase access to treatment in the country. Noting that Kenyatta National Hospi-

tal, located in Nairobi, is the only Government centre equipped in handling the disease, the legislation if passed, will help decentralise cancer treatment so that Kenyans throughout the country can access proper care at district and provincial hospitals.

The Cancer Bill will also provide funding for measures to improve cancer treatment technology as well as train more oncologists. According to the 2011 Kenyatta National Hospital's Cancer Unit's Report there are only five clinical oncologists and about eight oncologists in the country.

During the launch of the Africa Cancer Foundation in July, 2011, Kenyans were moved to tears when nine year old girl, Rose Nasimiyu moved the crowd to tears as she recounted her brave fight against cancer. Doctors have emphasised on early diagnosis that could save thousands of lives each year.

## Pap smear

While a having a routine pap-smear test may help detect cervical cancer, it is out of reach for ordinary Kenyans with meagre income, emphasising the social-economic aspects of the disease. Other tests that could detect ovarian cancer include pelvic/rectal exam, CA-125 and a trans-vaginal ultrasound. However, these are expensive tests to carry out in Kenya.

Currently, the country does not have a cancer registry and surveillance to help manage the cancer statistics.

# Mike Karabu: Called to serve the orphans

By MWARANDU TSUMA

Mike Karabu may be an ordinary folk, but his extraordinary love of mankind demonstrated by benevolent and charitable actions has touched the hearts and souls of vulnerable children in the larger Malindi. His philanthropy has given hope and optimism to many orphans whose lives would otherwise have gone to waste.

Karabu, who left a lucrative career in the banking industry, is today the owner and coordinator of Wavizi Community Initiative, in Majengo within Malindi town where together with project officer Nancy Kadzo, they deal with orphan care and support.

"I decided to help orphans because I felt the society has neglected them for a long time, especially those who reside in the countryside," says Karabu. He adds: "Only a few of those in town get support while their counterparts in rural areas continue living in misery and pain."

Although two faith-based charitable organisations from the United States — Christian Relief Fund and LAMUSA — now support the organisation, nine years ago Karabu started the initiative single-handedly.

Before Karabu met the donors, he was introduced to an ailing widow who had three young children at Kaembeni, in the remote parts of Ma-

lindi district.

The woman died soon afterwards and the children were left with a paternal aunt who took them to an undisclosed destination.

"When I enquired from their paternal uncles about their whereabouts so as to help, they became hostile towards me and at one time threatened me with death," Karabu says. "Neighbours too did not know where the kids had been taken to. When I think of the poor kids, I weep for them in my heart."

## Motivation

He says this with a touch of limitless sorrow on his face. It is this incident that motivated him to seek funding to cater for more orphans, especially those whose parents succumb to HIV/Aids related illnesses.

In fact, he says, some of them are HIV positive but are now healthy due to their care and support.

Karabu says that each child has a bank account where they deposit KSh1,000 every month from the donor's monthly funding which translates to KSh12,000 per year.

"With this money, we are able to pay for their secondary school fees as we wait for more funds from," he says.

Currently, the institution has 44 students in secondary school, 13 of whom joined this year. Two are set to join Pwani University College in Kilifi

later in the year. They have a total of 236 orphans under their care.

Asked how they ensure they are dealing with genuine needy cases and not pretenders or orphans who have well-to-do guardians, Karabu says they visit schools which keep records of destitute orphans and can easily identify them in a group from their tattered uniforms and malnourished bodies. In addition, they verify information from chiefs' offices.

Apart from education, the initiative also provides them with meals from food kiosks near their respective schools. They also liaise with health centres where they are treated when ill.

However, in extremely needy cases, they seek more funding. For instance in 2006, they spent KSh500,000 for a boy who had to undergo surgery for cancer at Kenyatta National Hospital in Nairobi and another KSh200,000 for a girl who had to be operated on at the same referral facility after swallowing a poisonous chemical by mistake.

"Although the two have not fully recovered, we thank God they are doing very well," observes Karabu.

Due to the pathetic and deplorable lifestyles of many of the orphans, Wavizi Community Initiative has also built two-bed roomed permanent houses and toilets for four families at KSh350,000 each.

"This was because they lived in

hovels like children of a bygone age," he notes.

Through donors, the initiative also donates relief food worth KSh5,000 to each family during school holidays and gives them money for shopping during the festive seasons.

Karabu who studied Community Development has no intention of starting an orphanage because in his view, such children can lose their assets to unscrupulous relatives.

"Moreover, being at home they have the best opportunity to learn and maintain their culture and native language as well as know their relatives better," he argues.

Nearly all of the children return home in the evenings except for a few secondary school borders who only go home during the holidays.

## Insincerity

How does he feel about insincere people who start similar projects with the sole aim of enriching themselves?

"Mistreating orphans is an iniquity that exceeds the extremes. It is grossly unfair to drive an expensive car and live in a multi-million mansion while the orphans you purport to help walk around in rags and sleep in dilapidated huts. At Wavizi, we are there to help, not to gain."

The serious bottleneck that impedes them to absorb more children is lack of funding. Currently, 15 or-



*"I decided to help orphans because I felt the society has neglected them for a long time, especially those who reside in the countryside,"*

— Mike Karabu

phans are still on the waiting list.

However, the greatest success and satisfaction so far is that they have managed to give a ray of hope to God's creation through the provision of education and health care among other necessities.

# Slum home offers safe haven for vulnerable children

By ANN WANGUI

It is a bright mid morning and an excited six-year old Joseph Matano is singing a song. "Twinkle, twinkle little star" ... he goes on with passion, lifting his soft tiny hands in a gesture.

Oblivious of the situation facing this place he calls home, Matano wants to be a pilot when he grows up so he can fly up with the stars.

His playmate, nicknamed Mash rushes and brings a wooden seat — the teacher's chair — they call it, as they welcome me to Msamaria Mwema Children's Home.

Finding the road to the orphanage situated at the heart of the sprawling Kiambui slums, in Majengo area of Nairobi's Kamukunji Constituency was not an easy task.

To get here, one wafts through poorly ventilated shanties, jumps over stinking garbage and raw sewer flowing through the open drainage as children in tattered clothes play in small open grounds.

## Infrastructure

We come across staggering drunk men spewing out incorrigible words along the tiny foot paths as women light their *jikos* in preparation to cook for their families.

Finally with our guide panting and drenched in sweat, we arrive at a small old sagging wooden gate which leads us to the school which also serves as a children's home.

Once inside the compound, we see through the tiny classroom with wooden desks, torn papers and dirty books scattered on the desks and dusty earth floor.

With the rusty corrugated iron sheets on the roof caving in and the sun's rays lighting the classrooms like a rainbow, I shudder to imagine the discomfort the innocent children bubbling with life have had to endure.

Opposite the classroom, smoke emanates from the roof of a *mabati* structure as the aroma of an overcooked *ugali* wafts through hitting us full swing in a clear statement that that is the institution's kitchen.

"It is almost lunch time," says Agnes Nyambura, director of the institution, her smile warm and welcoming.

Dressed in a red blouse with the sleeves

rolled up and a black skirt, Nyambura's eyes tear through mine as if begging me to understand her turmoil.

So what inspires this woman?

"I started the programme six years ago after a battle with a long illness," she says with a sigh.

Being a single parent, her three children now aged seven, nine and ten were forced to beg from neighbours because she could not afford to fend for them at the time.

"It was very depressing for me, especially after my extended family neglected us," Nyambura states.

Six long months later, she recovered from the illness and after a lot of soul-searching she decided to engage in a project that would help vulnerable children in the society.

It was when walking along the streets of Nairobi that she noticed a street child begging for money from passers-by. This further stimulated her that it was time she played a role in bringing to an end the suffering facing neglected children.

"I approached the child, spoke with her and convinced her to come with me," Nyambura explains. She adds: "At home, I fed, washed and the clothed her. The rest is history."

Two months later, she took in two more children from the streets despite the fact that she was not financially stable.

Within six months, the number of children in her two bed-roomed house had grown to 25.

Nyambura runs a mobile phone hardware business at the Kiambui slums from which she earns an average income of Sh4,000 a month.

Just keeping the children at home was not enough. Nyambura came to the realisation that they needed formal education.

"With the proceeds from my business, I employed two teachers and we converted the sitting room into a classroom," she says.

## Donation

After several months, her undertaking attracted members of a local church who came to her rescue with donations. She was later introduced to Conie Cheren, an American social worker who brought a mission team that fund-raised for the institution.

"The team donated \$15,000 which enabled me to purchase a plot and construct the struc-



Children in class at the Msamaria Mwema orphanage in Kiambu. They now have a place to call home. Picture: Ann Wangui

tures," says Nyambura. She adds: I also decided to include a Voluntary Counselling and Testing (VCT) centre which is also open to the public."

With the support from well-wishers, Nyambura has over the last seven years run the institution which now has over 40 children.

Our interview was interrupted by the ringing of a bell by young Njeri Mwangi, an orphan at the institution, as excited children streamed out of their classrooms making a beeline for the kitchen.

At the kitchen, the children form a line with the youngest at the front and the oldest at the end. They are all clutching squeaky-clean plates with a teacher on duty supervising as a cook serves them with *ugali* and *ndengu* (green grams) mixed with vegetables.

After ringing the bell, Njeri runs up to the director, shakes our hands and breaks out reciting a poem before rushing to join the others for lunch.

"She is a bright child who was abandoned by her mother and we took her in. She is hyperactive child," says Nyambura.

Njeri who aspires to be a doctor offers to show us where she sleeps. The bed is neatly laid with clothes at a shelf standing in the corner of the room she sleeps with the others.

Like all the other children at the home, she refers to Nyambura as 'mum' as they know no other mother to call their own.

Nyambura adds most of the children are infected with HIV and are on drugs. She says the institution has lost 20 children to HIV and Aids related complications since it was opened.

"It is depressing for the children when one of them succumbs to disease. It has prompted me to enlist the services of a counsellor to talk to them," she says.

Nyambura has had to grapple with the fact in a few years the children will be of age and will want join secondary school.

"I am appealing to well-wishers as well as local and international donor agencies to come on board and assist in planning and facilitating the children's transition to secondary school as that is beyond our scope at the moment," says Nyambura.

# Where youth converge with sages over a game for knowledge transfer

By NICHOLAS ODHIAMBO

Debate on whether the young generation should fully embrace the African culture has been a thorn in the flesh for many.

It is from this understanding that elders from Nyilima Village, Rarieda District, Siaya County have to ensure youth learn some practices which had been abandoned.

The elders have built an abila (hut) in the heart of the village where they meet the youth and teach them ways of Luo culture.

When the youths are in the abila, the traditional game, ajua, is played as the older persons pass on their wise words of advice.

Ajua is a gambling game that is popular among the Luo. However, it is also played in other communities such as Luhya, Turkana and Samburu.

The game has been named after the seeds used as game counters (ajua seeds) and is purely for men.

Nyilima Community Abila has not only attracted local people, but even vernacular radio stations have also been thronging the place.

## Attraction

The journalists visit the place to interview the elders on issues of the Luo culture, which they air in their programmes on culture.

Most people believed that playing ajua was an old man's activity and no young man would have the courage to play it. Nevertheless, for Nyilima community at the Abila, the old mingle with the young to play the game.

Boniface Otieno is among youths playing the game. He says that during the game, elders take time out to educate the youth on traditional practices and what is expected of them.

He says playing ajua is a true portrayal of Luo culture. The game has united youth from many villages in the district, who in turn have shown spectacular respect to the elderly in the region.

"This has been a noble idea. We get a lot of training at the place and the older persons have been wisdom passers to us," observes Otieno.

Issues affecting families are also discussed during this time. It is during the game that the older persons try to teach the younger ones on how to go about family matters including how to take care of their children and wives.

"We have learnt a lot. Issues of respect and love for the family and elderly form part of the discussions," remarks Otieno.

Aesthetics of the game is achieved through manipulation of language, which is used to give terminologies to showcase the beauty of Dholuo as a language of expression.

There are some expressions that are used when playing ajua. These expressions such as *nindo e bam* (lying on the thighs), *chuothon* (spearing with the cock), *turo tielo* (breaking the leg or to impregnate) and *soko wang* (poking the eyes) are sarcastic and show prolific literary use of Dholuo as a language.

## Expressions

"These are expressions that have given us opportunity to value our language and believe it is even greater than many others," says John Otieno, another youth.

The youths also use this space to share their problems. The problems the youth bring to the old people (jodongo) range from domestic to taking care of their orphaned children or elderly parents. However, there are times when the elderly assemble the youth to discuss issues affecting the villages particularly in matters of conflict and disrespect.

Otieno Obara, 70, says they have benefited a lot from the abila since the youth in the village now understand the true culture of the community and respect to the elderly.

"We have benefitted richly from this plan and we have hopes more youths will cherish this," notes Obara.

He says: "What we want is to ensure we



**Youth enjoy ajua under the abila (hut) in Nyilima village, Siaya County. The elders built the hut as a meeting place for the youth to teach them the Luo culture.**

Pictures: Nick Odhiambo

teach our youth the way we were taught as young people. It is time we used our culture to help the youth."

Obara says that at the abila, young men who try to go against the culture are mocked and counselled.

"We do not allow idlers and lazy bones. We advise our young children to change and become good people to prosper in life," he remarks.

Piece Initiative Programme has also been started at the abila in the ajua game.

Ajua tournaments are organised with people from different villages. Plans are un-



**"We have benefitted richly from this plan and we have hopes more youths will cherish this."**

— Otieno Obara



derway to ensure communities around are involved in such events.

According to John Ogutu, chairman of Nyilima Community Abila, they will arrange tournaments with clubs from Western and Rift Valley provinces to cement cordial relationship with communities in the two provinces.

"It is not carrying gun that brings peace. Our ancestors were always peaceful and this is how they used to bring peace. It is this culture that we want to embrace," he notes.

Ogutu says since ajua is like gambling, there is financial benefit to some extent. This makes the youth not only to occupy themselves with the game but also to gain financially when playing.

## Gambling

They bet at least five shillings in every round of game. This gives up to about KSh200 in a day, which to the youth is a good return.

Andrew Owuor admits: "There is serious financial gain in this game. What I get when I win is enough to purchase a tin of maize."

The abila started in 1999 and currently has more than 30 youth attending the meetings every day from 3 pm to 6.30 pm.

Next to the abila is a traditional granary known as dero. This is a symbol of prosperity for the community's culture.

The project's initiator, John Hongo says a granary in Luo culture is a symbol of prosperity and wealth in terms of food. This is what it takes when it comes to showing thriving culture.

"Dero symbolises a culture that will never perish easily to the western culture. This is why we have this granary here," he says.

Area Chief Eric Okal says the abila has helped youth in the area to understand community's culture.

"The culture is embraced here. Most of the youth go for advice at a place where the elders are ready to welcome and help them," observes Okal.

# Campus students find ways of fighting inflation

By HENRY KAHARA

Campus Students are looking for solutions to deal with the high cost of living. With the current rate of inflation, it is clear that everybody is feeling a pinch when fishing money out of their pocket to purchase anything.

Many have demanded salary increase from their boss and negotiations are on the table whether to or not. Students in institutions higher of learning are suffering considering that it is a long time since the Higher Education Loan Board (HELB) was increased, if it has ever been, and that their loans are being taxed.

The students at the university are settling for part time jobs so as to be in a position to fend for themselves without much struggles.

Boniface Momanyi, a fourth year Bachelor of Education student at the University of Nairobi is one such man. "They started deducting the money when I was in third year. At first, I thought it is the bank but later I found out that every student was complaining," he says adding that they later learnt that Kenya Revenue Authority has said they will not escape tax payment.

Above that Momanyi says that the inflation rate has continued messing up with their budget and nobody is speaking on their behalf.

This has forced many students to look for alternatives to deal with the issue. "Students are now looking for the various ways to sustain themselves in campus for HELB money is not enough," he observes.

Momanyi who is an orphan says he would get KSh60,000 per year which was the total amount of the HELB loan and the bursary.

"Every semester I would get KSh17,000 during my first year, and this was a lot of money. Today it does me very little," he explains.

## Side hustle

A student at Nairobi University's Kikuyu campus, Momanyi says most of his classmates have been forced by circumstances to look for a way forward. They have gotten jobs as teachers in the high schools surrounding their college.

"I have been given a contract by the Board of Governors in the school where I teach," says Momanyi who declines to disclose the name.

He makes sure his lessons do not conflict with his classes in campus. "For instance, I may be teaching Chemistry on Monday morning for two hours, after that I go back to campus for my studies," he says.

Momanyi says that his salary and tuition fee which he conducts during his free hours gets him more than KSh20,000. He says this is a good amount for it keeps him going.

Like Momanyi, Priscah Njeri, a Bachelor of Arts and Communication student at the same campus says that life is harder for non-residents.

Njeri says some of them are now even carrying packed. "Life is hard these days, we prefer to carry our own lunch because we cannot afford eating in hotels every day," notes Njeri.

Antony Muiriri, an Economics student in the same campus says gone are the days when students would learn in the campus for free. "Today you must have someone who is helping you but you can't say that you are just a student without saying where you are getting your money," he says.

Muiriri was admitted at the University in 2004 but declined the admission as he could not afford to pay fees at the time.

"At that time neither me nor my parents could afford the college fees. I declined the admission and opted for the National Youth Service. I later got a job with the ministry. Only then did I decide join university," he says.

# Whether as food, or money or used in rituals, the coconut tree remains a blessing

By KIGONDU NDAVANO

More than 500,000 coconut crop farmers at the Coast could soon start reaping the benefits of better management of the crop estimated to be worth more than KSh13 billion annually.

This follows the initiation of the Coconut Development Authority after some years of teething crisis.

Experts from the authority have had several meetings with farmers and despite the few resources allocated to it, it has been able to participate in various national agricultural displays including the Agricultural Society of Kenya show.

Coconut is one of the most important tree crops at the Coast offering some of the most important raw products at household level from food flavouring to roofing houses.

Socially, the refreshing palm wine from the tree is generally and widely imbibed as a source of joy and entertainment by the elders and public.

Above all, the wine has for ages been used as the first traditional and customary gift a man must first offer prospective in-laws of the girl he is interested in marrying.

However, the coconut tree could offer more. Agriculture permanent secretary Dr Romano Kiome recently announced that the coconut industry in Kenya had an annual worth of KSh13 billion yet only a quarter of this is currently being exploited.

## Mnazi

Despite the huge potential, among the Mikindani, the tree has its basic benefits and is used in nearly all traditional and customary occasions where blessing rituals are performed. Such rituals are performed many times in a day. It is a gulp of *mnazi*, drawn into the mouth by an elder that is then sprinkled to the participants or on the ground.

Elders are cautious that despite a high level of alcohol found in the coconut palm wine, which is at times intoxicating, the drink is respected for bringing people, especially elders, together to discuss important social, family and community issues.

"Palm wine was never drunk by the young people in undesignated selling points as happens in modern times. It was always the drink of elders and taken with respect as well as control but not excessively," explains Katana Kalulu, a Kaya elder.

Rural communities have unknowingly associated with the coconut tree by use of brooms from this tree.

The Coast region's tourism sector perhaps enjoys the highest amount of resources from the coconut tree in that the coconut fronds — locally known as *makuti* — remain the main roofing material for more than 80 per cent of the hotels, villas, private houses and restaurants.

From the South to the North Coast, hotels along the Indian Ocean shorelines are roofed with *makuti* creating an attractive site. Across tourist towns of Mtwapa, Kilifi, Watamu, Malindi and Mamburi hundreds of women are found with large consignments of *makuti* for sale.

## Makuti

Although there are people who have suggested that *makuti* roofing be banned, those who benefit from the leaves have not encouraged the idea.

Mary Kadzo, a Makuti dealer at the Malindi Tourist road is opposed to the plan to ban *makuti* noting that such a decision would render hundreds of women traders jobless. It would also devastate families benefitting from its sale.

"We have always depended on *makuti* sales for our livelihoods. We pay taxes to the local council and readily provide roofing material to investors in tourism," says Kadzo. She adds: "This makes us partners in tourism through the sale of *makuti*."

The coconut is the golden tree crop of the Coast and its presence anywhere even in a picture of an illustration connotes the Coast.



**From top: An official of the New Galana Farmers Cooperative Union Joseph Karisa sorts out the heap of coconuts received from farmers in Malindi. Contractors load coconut fronds (makuti) in a hand cart for transport to a construction site. Coconut trees in Malindi. Malindi MP Gedion Mung'aro, former Miss World Kenya Cecilia Mwangi and reigning Miss World Kenya Natasha Metto sample madafu on arrival at a hotel in the area. Pictures: Kigundu Ndavano**



Women and mothers at the Coast use the coconut oil for skin and scalp. It is also used in treating headaches in children.

The tree of so much social and economic value has for years been taken for granted by the Government. This is despite numerous calls by farmers and leaders that the Government recognises the coconut as an important crop.

In the recent past, that recognition came when the Government formed the Coconut Development Authority (CDA), an entity which is already setting groundwork to ensure better and profitable management of the coconut crop.

## Coconut board

While presiding over the formation of the CDA, Kiome challenged experts of the new authority to work hard to assist coconut farmers fully exploit the tree. Kiome noted that the country had the potential to save on the large amount of foreign exchange spent in importing palm oil and related products annually.

"The new board would regulate the industry and offer advice to the Government for planning purposes," he said.

Among the first assignments of the board is the formulation of a strategic plan that would organise how the farmers will grow more trees and attract investors.

"A Government survey has indicated that there are 7.4 million coconut trees covering 200,000 hectares with products from the coconut valued at KSh3.2 billion," observed Kiome.

With other studies having revealed that the coconut tree could produce an estimated 100 varieties of products for local and international markets, the new board has its assignments set. Wine constitutes 60 per cent, nuts 24 per cent, *makuti* (for roofing) 12 per cent, brooms 24 per cent and coco wood 0.3 per cent.

Presently, Kenya imports 95 per cent of its annual requirements of edible and industrial oils amounting to approximately 400,000 metric tonnes at KSh14 billion. About 120,000 metric tonnes or 30 per cent of that is used in soap manufacturing.

Estimates indicate that the country would save about KSh5 billion annually if vegetable oils for soap manufacturing could be produced locally through increased processing of coconut oil.

Further benefits could be accrued after the presidential decree on palm oil and repeal of traditional liquor Act (section 22) and its gazette. The value of palm wine reached KSh2 billion, which is two thirds the present value of the coconut industry.

Managing Director of the Coconut Development Authority Jonathan Sulubu said the industry which currently fetches a paltry KSh3.2 million per year will be revamped to add value to its by-products.

He told the *Reject* that the CDA had already started initiating programmes to streamline marketing of the coconut crop which includes

brooms, palm-wine (*mnazi*), shells which are used to manufacture ash trays and sugar dishes to give maximum profits to the farmer.

"We shall also introduce good agronomic practices and efficient crop husbandry to ensure that the coconut tree produces maximum yields for the over 500,000 farmers in Coast Province," he said.

Sulubu noted that the coconut tree which fetches KSh300 once it gets senile could fetch as much as KSh15,000 from the sale of its timber and its products like stools, window panes and doors.

"We have already developed an action plan to spearhead growth and promotion of the coconut tree. This will give farmers maximum yields from the sale of the crop and its by-products while regulating the harvesting of coconut products," said Sulubu. He added: "This ensures that it will get its rightful place like other industries in the country's economy."

The Authority's strategic plan which spans between 2008 and 2012 spells out strategies which will add value to the yields and enhance the quality of the products produced by the tree.

According to Sulubu, the authority was already working with farmers after introducing agronomic practices and efficient crop husbandry set to ensure that the coconut tree produces maximum yields.

"We shall ensure that processing of the various by-products of this crop is streamlined to ensure that players and traders' role in running the industry is regulated in an effort to ensure that the products reach users in a desirable state," explained Sulubu.

He noted that the board plans to put in place export mechanisms to market the crop abroad in an effort to diversify farming of this tree.

**"A Government survey has indicated that there are 7.4 million coconut trees covering 200,000 hectares with products from the coconut valued at KSh3.2 billion."**

— Dr Romano Kiome

# Land issue in slums remains a thorny issue

By HENRY KAHARA

The slums are known for informal settlement and nobody would ever associate them with land problems.

However land remains a thorny issue in the slums, and according to the residents they are the most affected. To make the situation worse, the slums are composed of diverse communities and therefore making it hard to separate issues from tribalism.

Jane Njoki Uhuru, a resident of the sprawling Mathare slum sees herself as one of the biggest victims.

Njoki who bought three plots of land in Mathare area, can only get access to two. Not that the third one is unproductive but the area leader has barred her from utilising it.

"I was given this land by the project and I even have the card which they gave me but whenever I attempt to construct here, the area leader incites young men to come and destroy my house," says Njoki, a mother of three.

She says her latest building was demolished in August. According to Njoki, the house cost her more than KSh500,000 but she even didn't get any benefit from it because it was demolished before she could recover her money.

"I built the house and barely two months later they came at night around 11 pm and destroyed it," says Njoki. When she went to check what was going on the young men threw stones at her.

## No action

Although Njoki has already reported the matter to the area chief and at Muthaiga Police Station, nothing has been done as the area leader has defied the orders.

"I have reported this to the chief, and he has written to the leader and summoned him to his office but he has defied," notes Njoki.

She says that the last time he was summoned, the leaders threatened to evict her from that area when Muthaiga OCS called him.

Njoki, whose land is located near Mathare River, plot number H093, had it earlier located near Baraka Hospital plot number G078 but it was transferred by the project owners (Germans) due to bad politics of the area to where it is today.

"Before my plot was near the hospital but bad politics made the project owners to transfer me to this area, even I never wanted it for the environment is not conducive for transacting business," she says.

Njoki claims the area leader has been telling her to give up the piece of land so she can be allowed to build houses without interference.

"The area leader and his two friends want me to pay them or to give them a piece of land



Jane Njoki Uhuru who has been crying to the Government to give her security after building a house in her own plot in Mathare slums. Picture: Henry Kahara

so they can allow me to construct rental houses here," says Njoki who supplies firewood in the area. She adds: "I will not as this is my property."

According to Njoki, this is jealousy and tribalism which was evident during the last general election when some tribes were evicted from the area. She claims to have been spared because her husband comes from the same tribe with the area leader.

"My husband is a friend to these men but he is polygamous. At the moment he is in the village with another wife and I have asked him to

*"I was given this land by the project and I even have the card which they gave me but whenever I attempt to construct here, the area leader incites young men to come and destroy my house."*

— Jane Njoki Uhuru

come so that we can resolve the issue together but he claims he is busy harvesting and preparing land for planting," says Njoki.

This problem has not only affected her. Other people in the area are also complaining that some people built business houses commonly known as vibanda outside their neighbours' houses without permission and are blocking them.

"We have a problem here and it can only be solved by the Government. People are not supposed to be threatening others for no reason when we are all Kenyans," observes Njoki who claims to have been born and brought up in this area.

## Germans

"I was born in 1969 in this area we were eight children. My mum used to tend this land before the projects began," says Njoki.

She adds: "The Germans are the one who built these houses and their main reason was to help the less privileged so they used to pay a small amount."

The whole of Njoki's family lives here.

The Germans who constructed the houses stopped collecting rent in mid-2007. However, Njoki is quick to note that there are people whose names are indicated in their books and they are the ones who have the cards.

"The Germans gave us cards so even the law is aware that the people who have the permits for the houses are those with the cards," says Njoki.

# Evictions threat leaves villagers worried

By EDNA MOKAYA

Residents of Mikinduni village, Mkunumbi Location, Lamu District now want the Government to protect them against being evicted from their land.

The villagers claim they have lived on this land for many years. Many of the residents here are farmers and businessmen. However, the threat of eviction has now left them wondering where to turn to if the Government does not come to their aid.

According to the farmer's chairman Naftali Munyoki Mwendwa, they have been brutally assaulted on two occasions. They have been forcefully and unlawfully evicted from an unalienated government land located at Mikinduni village.

He says that they have also been threatened with another eviction unless the orders sought by those claiming to own the land are granted.

"We have been evicted and on May 26, 2011 we were issued with an oral notice to vacate by the local administration or be forcefully evicted and suffer further irreparable damage and loss unless we vacate the land," he said.

Mwendwa who has stayed in the land since 2000 says when he started living in the area, he found other people were already there.

"In September last year, a tycoon who claims to own the land came to the village in two vehicles accompanied with the District Officer Witu Division, Mwaura Wanjohi, the Administration Police inspector, two Administration Police officers and three Kenya Police reservists. They burnt some of the houses and destroyed crops," says Mwendwa.

However, the District officer says nothing of that sort happened, claiming he comes from a different district.

## Fear

Francis Kimani Mwangi, another distraught resident who has stayed in the village for six years says the rich tycoons have now incited Ormas to graze on their crops.

According to Mwangi, they are living in fear and spend sleepless nights watching over their women and children to protect them from being injured by the Ormas who he claimed have raped some women in the area.

"There are some of us who have been charged with forcible entry in Lamu Courts," says Mwangi.

He adds: "This is unfair because cases of houses being burnt and rape have not been dealt with."

Evictions of this kind are currently common in many parts of the Coast Province, leaving more and more people landless and homeless.

Sharia Nyange an advocate with Kituo cha Sheria says that to curb this problem, Members of Parliament must enact an act of Parliament on evictions and resettlement.

Nyange said that the Government should take quick action to ensure that these people be they squatters or landless are resettled.

"The biggest problem now is that the country doesn't have eviction and resettlement guidelines. As a matter of urgency, the Ministry of Land must enact laws to guard against evictions and provide a proper guideline on how an eviction should be done," noted Nyange.

He said since the law might take a long time to be implemented, the Ministry of Land should immediately adopt United Nations international conventions on evictions and resettlement.

Sharia condemned the use of force when evicting people from any land. "Anyone without a court order should not evict people," he said.

# How the Kikuyu community has handled land issues

By HENRY KAHARA

They say that whoever abandons his culture is a slave. Culture varies from one community to the other. Among the Kikuyu community, there is a culture they follow when dealing with land issues.

According to Joseph Ndung'u Kuraya, the Kikuyu community placed a lot of value on land and for this reason men would guard their land with all they had. It is when a man was old enough and his children have grown up when he used to give them a piece of land as inheritance.

According to Kuraya, land was not supposed to be sold or given out without a reason. There had to have a good reason for doing so.

"That is the reason why the community found it worthy to shed blood because of the land," observes Kuraya.

## Displacement

The community could not have allowed colonial masters to displace them from their land because this was their source of livelihood.

"That is the reason why when we gained independence, we had to be taken back to our home from the camps and we were placed according to our clans," observes Kuraya.

Every clan had to be given land which was equal to that which it possessed before the white man came into the country.

Contrary to what many say that the Mau Mau fighters did not get their right portion, Kuraya insists that everybody had to get the share he possessed before. However, he is quick to note that the land was being divided by the educated people of the time.

"Most of the surveyors were the children of the people who supported the white men so they knew where there was good land that was not possessed by anybody and kept it for themselves," notes Kuraya.

These people also purchased land for their relatives and those who had money, thereby leaving the less fortunate out.

According to Kuraya, a Kikuyu man was the owner of everything at home and therefore he is the one who would give land to his sons and daughters.

He says that most of the time the man would give his people land as inheritance but sometimes he would favour those who looked after him when he was old or sick.

Women who got children and never got married were treated like sons. "If your daughter never got married you had to give her land,

you treated her like your son," he says, adding that some people (men) who never married left their land to the people who treated them well in their old age, and mostly these were relatives.

Kuraya gives an example of himself. His father's brother who had only daughters left him his land because he (Kuraya) took care of him during his old age.

"When his daughters got married, I am the one who was left to look after him for his wife had died before him," explains Kuraya.

## Constitution

Contrary to Kikuyu culture where land was owned by individuals, the new Constitution in Chapter Five Article 61 (1) states that all land in Kenya belongs to the people of Kenya collectively as a nation, as communities and as individuals.

The Constitution also states that today women whether married or not are in a position to inherit their father's land the same way as their brothers.

According to Kuraya, previously in the Kikuyu community if a man never sired any sons to inherit him, he would either leave his land to a person he was willing to but it was not obvious that his daughters were the ones to inherit him.

# Farmers accuse tobacco companies of leading them to abject poverty

By BEN ONYANGO

Tobacco farming was introduced into East Africa in the 1560s by Portuguese traders before it spread to other parts of Africa.

In Kenya, tobacco cultivation started in early 1990s whereby its use has increased. It is estimated that over seven billion cigarette sticks are smoked annually.

Sometime ago, farmers in Migori County ventured into tobacco farming with an aim of getting rich from the motivation of its demand.

However, it was not as rosy as it looked. They now regret after realising that they are in constant poverty because of increased tobacco outputs. This has forced the farmers to sell their produce to the companies at lower prices.

Tobacco farming in Uriri District of Migori County has generated intense heat arising from a significant threat to food security and a catalyst to increased poverty among the local communities growing the crop.

Caleb Twenya, a veteran farmer from Uriri District says he ventured into tobacco farming 28 years ago hoping it would change his life. However, because the farming is done under a contract system where tobacco companies give them credit in the form of seeds, pesticides, transport, fertiliser and others facilities, this forces the farmer to sell his or her produce to that specific company at a price set by the company. This action leaves them with no alternative option of where else to sell.

## Poor returns

Before payment, the company deducts what was loaned to the farmer. Whatever remains is insufficient to provide for food or cater for education of the children needs forcing them live below the poverty line and remain in debt.

"Many prominent farmers from this region have died poor as compared to others who ventured into small business. They are driving big cars compared to us who dedicated all our time and land to tobacco farming," explained Twenya.

He added: "Tobacco companies centre their arguments on employment and trade benefits of tobacco for developing countries and the losses that these economies would

incur if consumption were to be discouraged."

It is for this reason that Uriri District Commissioner George Chelagat has called on the area residents to consider switching to more environmentally friendly cash crops instead of relying tobacco.

Tobacco has been grown in abundance in Uriri since 1968 but the farmers continue languish in poverty. The crops are said to be causing environmental degradation as well as pollution on rivers and mass destruction of indigenous trees.

## Exploitation

Chelagat regretted that poor farmers from Migori County were being exploited and only paid peanuts after harrowing and gruelling work in procuring tobacco grades.

Despite the fact that the tobacco manu-



Farmers picking tobacco leaves. Picture: Courtesy

facturing companies are minting millions of shillings, the poverty index in the area has remained steadily the highest.

"Since I came to Uriri, I have not come across any primary or nursery schools nor health centres and dispensaries put up by tobacco companies as an appreciation yet the farmers continue to wallow in abject poverty," said Chelagat.

Tobacco is a sensitive plant prone to many diseases and pests hence farmers use a lot of fertiliser to increase foliage weight and quality so as to maximise yield and returns.

Twenya noted that huge amounts of herbicides and pesticides are used in its production

because the application of the chemicals used covers the period from nursery to when the crop is harvested.

Speaking in Migori town at an agricultural stakeholders meeting, angry farmers said the chemicals they have been using have leached into the soil and eventually found their way into rivers, streams and food which they pollute. The end result is destruction of biodiversity.

The process of curing gives tobacco its characteristic taste, aroma and colour. It involves cutting down of trees to provide fuel which has led to severe deforestation apart from being very costly in terms of wood fuel prices.

The crop has never been environmental friendly because pesticides and other chemicals used in tobacco farms pollute the immediate environ before being washed into the river to poison animals and human life.

The farmers said tobacco has made many crops like maize not to do well on soil where it has grown because it drains all the necessary nutrients from the soil making it impoverished to sustain other crops.

Speaking at the same forum, Rongo District Public Health Officer Samson Olilo said tobacco farming is one of the leading causes of preventable deaths in the county because it contains over 4,000 chemicals some of which are dangerous.

"Tobacco smoking is casually associated with increased risk of chronic obstructive cancer of the lung and of the upper aero digestion," explained Olilo.

Tobacco farmers have been accused repeatedly by locals, leaders and professionals within Migori County for being responsible for land degradation and deforestation.

Over 400 farmers have begun an afforestation programme to compensate for the wood burning in tobacco curing through the support by BAT which is giving seedlings that the farmers ask for.

Oyani BAT branch manager Charles Mwangi said with the support of their partners in the British American Tobacco Biodiversity Partnership, farmers have further developed long term plans and objectives in afforestation and wood use.

# War declared on ghost coffee farmers

By BEN OROKO

Faced with the challenge of ghost coffee farmers and inflated weight of cherry coffee delivered to primary producer coffee co-operative societies, small-holder coffee growers in the Kisii County have declared war on the vice which has been eating into the genuine farmers' coffee sales. This action has led to poor net coffee payments.

The move has prompted small-holder coffee growers contracted to Nyamonya Farmers Co-operative Society and her affiliates in Bobasi Constituency in the Kisii County to declare war against factory record keepers and some farmers engaging in the vice of trading in 'ghost' kilograms of cherry coffee delivered to factories.

Farmers who spoke to *The Reject* disclosed that, some record keepers colluded with some growers who have no coffee to buy 'ghost' coffee kilograms from them at an agreed fee, a development they claimed had negatively impacted on their earnings. The fake kilograms of coffee strained the genuine farmers' net sales and payments.

The affected farmers from Nyamonya village and its affiliates have since passed a resolution through a General Meeting, endorsing disciplinary action against the factory clerks and growers found engaging in the vice.

They expressed fears that such a negative move would lead to the collapse of the primary producer coffee co-operative societies in the area, since majority of the farmers may withdraw from delivering their coffee produce to the co-operatives due to poor payments.

"Ghost coffee kilograms sold to some growers by the corrupt factory clerks contributes to poor coffee payments since they eat into the genuine coffee earnings when determining rates of payments against the net coffee sales," said Moffat Moindi, one of the local coffee growers. Moindi regretted that if farmers and other stakeholders do not fight the syndicate, the scenario paints a gloomy picture on the future of the sub-sector.

"It is no secret that 'ghost' coffee kilograms reflected in the factory gross for kilograms of coffee delivered to the co-operative societies has been a serious challenge to the management when processing payments," observed Moindi.

## Poor terms and conditions

However, he admits that poor wages and salaries for the factory workers is partly contributing to the vice. He challenged co-operative societies' management to revise wages and salaries upwards, to motivate workers to shun corrupt activities.

According Agnes Moraa, a coffee grower contracted to Nyamonya Main Co-operative Society exposing factory workers to adverse working conditions tempts to them device ways of making extra cash to sustain their livelihood.

Moraa noted that terms and conditions of work for factory workers dictated the way they execute their duties either to the advantage or disadvantage of the co-operative society members.

"There are cases where factory guards smuggle ready coffee beans from the factory drying beds to sell to middle-men in the black coffee market to earn a living after exhausting their meagre wages and salaries," observed Moraa. She added: "When such wages and salaries are delayed, they will have no option but to engage in vices such as smuggling farmers' coffee beans to sell to brokers."

Oanda Maronga, one of the farmers contracted to Motonto Farmers Co-operative Society, an affiliate of Nyamonya Farmers Co-operative Society endorsed the farmers resolution that any factory worker found selling 'ghost' coffee weight will be prosecuted and the grower involved de-registered from the co-operative society.

The Co-operative Society's chairman Julius Maganga confirmed that the committee had commissioned a coffee tree census to determine genuine coffee growers as part of the efforts to fight the vice.

# Initiative seeks to save Mt Kenya melting to death

By ERIC MUTAI

Stakeholders and the communities living on the slopes of Mt Kenya are working to revert the melting of glaciers on top of the mountain and restore the water catchment tower.

Africa Point has partnered with East Africa Wildlife Society's Tupande Pamoja Initiative to donate seedlings to be planted on the slopes of the mountain.

Scientific reports indicate that glaciers on top of Mt Kenya, which is Africa's second largest mountain after Mt Kilimanjaro in Tanzania are melting at an alarming rate due to global warming and deforestation

Africa Point is raising awareness through the social sites Facebook and Twitter and hope to plant at least 100,000 trees in the next two years.

It said on its blog that it will donate a seedling for every tweet or like on Facebook to the East Africa's Wildlife Society's 'Tupande Pamoja' initiative. "To become a partner and help raise awareness of this initiative, please display the 'Save Mount Kenya' Campaign banner on your website or blog and we will

plant 20 trees on behalf of your website or blog," it says.

The Tupande Pamoja Initiative is a joint venture between the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the East Africa Wildlife Society (EAWS), Kenya Forests Working Group (KFWG), Nature Kenya (NK) and Kenya Forest Service (KFS).

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) is also helping plant three million seedlings as part of the rehabilitation process.

About 200,000 seedlings have been planted to help stabilise slopes along 150 kilometres of the river bank with nearly 900 local schools enlisted to encourage conservation ethics among young people.

IFAD president Dr Kanayo F. Nwanze during a tour of the Mt Kenya Forest at Irangi in Embu North District said it is collective responsibility to ensure that degradation does not happen again in the forest.

More than 1,600 acres of degraded forest have been rehabilitated since 2005 at Magacha as communities around the forest are responding by forming water users' associations along

the main rivers flowing from the mountain.

Nwanze said conservation efforts will reduce conflict between people and wild animals in an area with great eco-tourism potential.

According to the Mt Kenya East Pilot Project (Mkepp) natural resources manager Paul Njuguna, logging without replacement left the forest degraded but this has been rehabilitated through community involvement.

The Magacha Forest was logged off in the 1960s and 1970s and converted into farm lands. However, rehabilitation has taken place covering 16,000 hectares.

Njuguna said that tree replanting was not done after the conversion thereby degrading the area. The Government suspended the *shamba* system in 1986 and finally banned it in 2003 though it is now being piloted again through the Plantation Establishment and Livelihood Improvement Scheme (PELIS).

The project co-financed with a grant from the Global Environment Facility works with community groups to boost their skills to formulate and implement plans to sustainably manage land and water resources.

# Infant mortality remains high in Eastern Province

By DAVID KIARIE

Children who are born in Machakos and Meru North districts of Eastern Province have higher chances of surviving as compared to those born in other areas in the province.

This is according to a recently launched survey that was commissioned by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics and supported by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) III puts the infant mortality rates, the death of children before they attain one year, in Machakos District at 27 per cent while that of Meru North district is 28 per cent.

Kitui has the highest infant mortality rate at 63 per cent followed by Makueni and Tharaka districts both at 45 per cent.

At the provincial level, the infant mortality rate was 40 deaths per 1,000 live births while the under five mortality rate was 54 deaths per 1,000 live births.

The survey also shows Kitui as having the highest mortality rate of children under the age of five years at 86 per cent followed by Tharaka at 67 per cent and Mwingi which rates at 64 per cent as compared to Meru North's 35 per cent and Machakos at 38 per cent.

A total of 15,600 households were sampled in Eastern province with 1,200 households being sampled in each of the 13 districts which made up the province when the survey was conducted between April and August 2008.

## Survey

The province had a population of 6,966,123 residents and 1,312,002 households when the survey was commissioned.

The survey findings which were broken into districts probed into education, child rights, orphanhood and vulnerability, nutrition, reproductive health, water and sanitation, marriage, domestic violence, female genital mutilation, HIV/Aids, breastfeeding, supplementary feeding, child immunisation, child mortality and access to health services among other issues.

Speaking during the launch of the survey in Embu town, Director of Production Statistics with the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, Dr James Gatungu said the survey was largely based on the need to monitor progress towards targets emanating from the Millennium Development Goals, adopted by UN member states in September 2002 and the Plan of Action of A World Fit For Children adopted by

189 member states at the United Nations special session on children in May 2002.

Gatungu said the survey was conducted as part of the third round of multiple indicator cluster survey carried out in over 50 countries in 2005 and 2006.

"The data collected from this survey is comprehensive enough to generate information which will enable policy makers, planners, researchers and programme managers to make evidence based choices," explained Gatungu. He added this would help in monitoring the well being of women and children in Eastern Province.

## Complications

Mwingi, Kitui and Makueni also led in the number of children who are stunted with the rates of 38.7, 37.9 and 34.1 per cent respectively. The lowest rates were recorded in Meru Central at 14 per cent and Isiolo at 15.3 per cent.

Marsabit and Mwingi districts have the highest numbers of underweight children at 28.5 per cent and 28.2 per cent as compared to 7.9 per cent in Meru Central and 10.4 per cent in Embu District.

Moyale and Meru North districts recorded the highest percentage of timely initiation of breastfeeding at 82.3 per cent and 80.2 per cent respectively. The survey indicates that women in Embu and Machakos were late in initiating breastfeeding for their babies with only 45.5 per cent of them starting at the right time.

Planning and Social Specialist with UNICEF Bonee Wasike said national data collection is vital for proper planning and ensuring that equitable national development is realised as embodied in the new Constitution.

"One of the ways to enhance national development is by undertaking national surveys and data collection such as population census, the Kenya demographic health survey and the multiple indicators cluster survey," noted Wasike.

Wasike said efforts to monitor progress in relation to human rights or the Millennium Development Goals depended on evidence-based statistics.

"This data provides the Government, development partners and civil society with the necessary information to influence, implement and ensure that social policies and programmes benefit particularly those who are excluded from decision making on issues that ultimately affect their lives," observed Wasike.

He regretted that only 32 per cent of children between three and six years access or attend early



Mothers with their children at a local hospital waiting bay. Access to maternal health care is still a challenge in many rural areas. Picture: Reject correspondent

childhood education and only 21 per cent of secondary school-age are going to school.

Wasike said the country's moderate economic growth has not proportionately been translated into equitable and improved living standards for the entire Kenyan population.

## Breast feeding

Mbeere and Marsabit districts had the highest number of women who breastfed their babies exclusively for five months at 44.1 and 37 per cent respectively with the lowest rates being recorded in Meru at 12.7 per cent and 12.8 per cent in Makueni.

Meru North also recorded the highest percentage of continuous breastfeeding of children between the ages of 20 to 25 months at the rate of 66.3 per cent followed by Marsabit at 65.3 per cent. Isiolo and Moyale had the lowest percentage in that category at 37.9 and 45.9 respectively.

The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey also shows Moyale not only had the highest total fertility rate at 72 per cent but also recorded the lowest percentage in contraceptive prevalence rate at eight per cent. Embu had the highest contraceptive prevalence rate at 75 per cent.

In Marsabit, the survey revealed that only 21 per cent of deliveries are made at health facilities with many women opting or being forced to deliver at home. Moyale was the second last in performance in that category with 24 per cent of women delivering in health institutions. Embu recorded the highest institutional deliveries with 84 per cent followed by Meru Central and Meru South which tied at 81 per cent.

Embu District also led in having skilled at-

tendants during delivery at 88 per cent followed by Meru Central at 84 per cent. Marsabit also recorded the lowest percentage of skilled attendants during delivery at 25 per cent followed by Kitui at 39 per cent.

Meru Central recorded one per cent in approval of female genital cut followed by Meru North at three per cent. Meru South and Machakos had four per cent each. Marsabit had the highest approval rate at 75 per cent followed by Moyale at 60 per cent.

Women in the province believe that husbands are justified in beating their wives when they go out without informing the husbands, neglect children, argue with the husband, burns food or refuse to have sex.

## Child protection

In the child protection category, Embu recorded 80 per cent in birth registration followed by Meru North and Meru Central at 77 per cent each. Isiolo recorded the lowest in birth registration at 19 per cent followed by Machakos at 36 per cent.

Moyale led in child marriages with 60 per cent of children being married before attaining 18 years followed by Isiolo at 48 per cent. Meru South had the least percentage at 12 while Embu recorded 15 per cent.

About 86 per cent of parents and caretakers of children in the province believe in psychological or physical punishment of children.

In the HIV/Aids category, Embu and Mbeere districts led by 48 per cent on comprehensive knowledge about prevention of HIV infections among young people. Tharaka and Marsabit had the lowest percentage at 21 and 22 respectively.

# Medics seek partnership on interpretation of the 'right to health' article

By HENRY OWINO

The high maternal mortality rate in Kenya is worrying despite efforts by health professionals to offering the best services at various hospitals and health centres in the country.

It is from this trend that the Kenya Medical Association (KMA) is now calling on the Commission for the Implementation of the Constitution (CIC) mandated to oversee the implementation process and interpretation among others to seek legal advice from medical doctors fraternity as they interpret Article 26 (4) of the Constitution on abortion.

It is estimated that over 2600 women die yearly due to unsafe abortion carried out by unprofessional medics in the back streets. These abortions are done illegally without genuine reasons though some might be genuine but crude methods are applied leading to complications.

The Kenya Medical Association (KMA) in collaboration with Kenya Obstetrical and Gynaecological society (KOGs) and other professional associations held a two-day conference to discuss the state of maternal mortality and safe abortions.

The conference brought together several stakeholders; health care providers, international experts, lawyers, religious organization leaders, political leaders, university scholars, non-gov-

ernmental organizations among others.

The chairman of the KMA, Dr Boaz Otieno-Nyunya, said the conference was being held to pursue the way forward on how the alarming death rates among Kenya women could be reduced. He added that most deaths occur during pregnancy or after delivery.

Nyunya said most maternal deaths are due to haemorrhage, infections, high blood pressure during pregnancy, obstructed labour and unsafe abortions.

Despite the Constitution giving Kenyans the right to quality healthcare including reproductive health, many of them still die from diseases and conditions that are preventable.

## Family planning

"During this conference we will focus on abortion related maternal deaths because unsafe abortion kills more than 2,600 Kenyan women each year," said Nyunya. He posed: "So why does abortion kill so many women?"

Nyunya pointed out that lack of adequate knowledge, inadequate supply of family planning services, poor quality of reproductive health services, restrictive abortion laws, especially the penal code and lack of adequate policies or laws that address women's reproductive health comprehensively are some of the major challenges facing health sector.

He said Vision 2030 and the Millennium

Development Goals (MDGs), especially Four and Five that seek to reduce child mortality and improve maternal health respectively will not be achieved unless enabling policies and development are implemented.

The recent Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (KDHS) indicated that maternal mortality ratio in Kenya stands at 488 deaths per 100,000 live births. These figures pose a challenge towards the attainment of MDG Five by 2015 and Vision 2030.

Approximately 21,000 women are admitted every year in public hospitals for treatment of complications from incomplete, unsafe, spontaneous or induced abortion.

Unsafe abortion is a major public health crisis in Kenya, accounting for 35 percent of Kenya's maternal deaths. World Health Organisation defines abortion as a procedure for terminating an unwanted pregnancy either by persons lacking the necessary skills or in an environment lacking minimal medical standards or both.

However, medics says the definition fails to capture the full range of painful, dangerous and often lethal methods used when women are unable to safely terminate a pregnancy, including inserting catheters, crochets or knitting needles, sticks pipes, coils, wires and pens that harm many leading to deaths.

A study conducted in Nairobi's informal settlements found that more than 50 per cent of

abortion fatality cases do not seek care even in the event of a complication after abortion.

However, these statistics might be underestimated since the World Health Organisation notes that more than any other aspect of sexual and reproductive ill-health, abortion suffers gross underreporting.

These high rates of morbidity and mortality from unsafe abortion are due to restrictive laws that include criminalisation of abortion.

## Partnership

The KMA now would like to work with like-minded individuals and organizations to ensure that the Constitution is interpreted in a manner that promotes its purpose, values and principles and that it occupies its rightful place in informing health related policies and legislations as well as ensuring its objectives.

The Constitution of Kenya recognises reproductive health as a key component of the right to health and specifically states in Article 43(1) (a) that: "Every person has the right to highest standard of health, which includes the right to health care services, including reproductive health care. Article 26(4) of the constitution also permits abortion, "if in the opinion of a trained health professional, there is need for emergency treatment, or the life or health of the mother is in danger, or if permitted by any other written law".

# Self-help groups team up to fight poverty

By OCHIENG JUMA

Poverty remains a challenge for many communities in the country. It is only through self reliance and bottom-up approach that Kenyans can ensure food security among other factors to help alleviate poverty.

This is why 250 residents of Mwala District affiliated to 21 self-help groups have teamed up to fight poverty.

They have come together under a community based organisation called Wamunyu On Time (WOTE) that runs a micro-finance project to support its members investment interests.

Individual members are able to exploit the credit facility to meet pressing family obligations. Such needs include school fees, medical care and other basic requirements. The loan scheme is funded through the table banking concept, locally known as chama.

"This involves administration of three credit facilities, namely normal or development, upesi and urgent," explains Benjamin Katuma, the organisation's chairman.

Other proceeds are generated through selling of shares to the affiliate groups and individual members.

## Investment

Currently each share goes for KSh200, which guarantees the members annual dividends.

"Educating our children, adding values to our self help groups, sourcing for training opportunities for our members and the community on key life issues form the organisation's core values," noted Katuma.

The organisation also pursues joint investments in trust funds, stock market and other ventures as agreed by the members. Interest rates and commissions charged on the loans attract earnings to the kitty as well.

A registration fee of KSh3,500 is charged to self-help groups intending to be affiliated with the organisation. This forms another source of income. Registration of the current 21 groups earned the organisation KSh73,500 when it was formed.

Each group must acquire passbooks sold at KSh100.

"We resolved to pool resources to advance our economic well being," explains Katuma.

He was speaking with the Reject after presiding over the organisation's annual general meeting held at Wamunyu Baptist Church compound. He said WOTE was formed to serve as the umbrella for the affiliate self-help groups.

The organisation oversees disbursement of loans to the members through the Com-



Members of Mbukililye Ngukilye Women Self Help Group tend to their watermelon farm along Mutendea River in Kitui Central District. Picture: Ken Ndambu

munity Micro Credit Scheme (COMICRES). The credit is offered at affordable interest rates agreed unanimously by the members.

Normal or development loan as the name suggests, is strictly for investment purpose and is borrowed at an interest of five per cent monthly.

To get an application form each member pays KSh100. The credit ceiling is four times each member's shares. Two per cent of the amount caters for insurance cover.

Upesi loan is disbursed instantly as the name suggest. Its interest is charged at ten percent monthly. Calculation is pegged on members' shares. Urgent loan attracts an interest of 10 percent weekly. Maximum ceiling is KSh1,000.

Personal needs dictate what kind of credit facilities members go for. "They are free to apply for money for school fees, medical care and purchase of property or other investments of their choice so long as they pay-back," explained Katuma.

He added: "The credit facilities provide members with an opportunity of securing capital to venture into viable income generating activities."

Katuma noted that some members have been advanced money to pursue livestock and poultry rearing. In the event of drought, the organisation advises the livestock keepers to sell them out to avert losses.

Applicants for development loans are discouraged from pumping the money into non-viable activities with no meaningful income.

"Members are guided to ensure the funds are invested prudently to ensure the loans are repaid smoothly to empower more people in the society and uplift their standards of livelihood," explained Katuma.

The organisation supports training for members on financial management to ensure proper utilisation of resources.

"We promote primary health care and environmental conservation among our members in addition to fostering tree planting," he observed.

## Concept

The community based organisation operates from the Wamunyu Baptist Church. The organisation is planning to buy land and build an administration office.

The initiative was introduced to the groups by Pastor Sammy Mbiti who heads the Baptist church. "I learnt of the concept when serving as a board member of the Australian World Aid and sold it to local residents," explains Mbiti who is the organisation's patron.

Katuma commended the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Development for educating the groups on project sustainability and bookkeeping.

# CSO threatened

By WAIKWA MAINA

Civil Society Organisations must start reorganising and strategising on how to claim their space after introduction of the County governments.

During a consultative meeting in Nyeri, leaders from various non-governmental organisations, community based organisations, societies and associations expressed concern that some governors and their county assemblies may impose draconian laws to hinder the CSOs from playing their watchdog roles and community participation in running of respective county governments.

Dialogue Africa Foundation official Jacob Etiang said organisations registered by District Social Development Office may be abolished on grounds that they are illegal structures since the new Constitution has no provision for district structures.

"District Social Development Officers will go with the districts. This means dishonest governors may use this as a reason to ban such organisations especially if they are aggressive and critical in monitoring the county government operations. Such organisations should register as trusts or societies to be protected by the national government," said Etiang.

## No funding

Expressing concerns, Nyeri Residents Association chairman Baragu Mutahi said county governments may not receive any funding before Parliament passes laws on funding and county structures which the legislative arm is required to make not later than three years after the date of elections.

How will the county government run without funds? It is most likely that the governor and his assembly will introduce taxes that maybe exploitative to the community and investors without community participation. CSOs must be very vigilant and prepare for the task well ahead as they have the responsibility to watch out for extremes.

During the forum, the participants resolved to form a county network which will be the umbrella body for the CSOs and an interim committee elected to map the way forward.

Etiang said that his organisation is holding similar forums in all counties and such networks are already operational in parts of Nyanza and Western provinces.

Mutahi said that the interim committee will develop strategy for participation, mobilisation, community education, information sharing and cooperation.

"Such a forum is critical in helping us claim our space and fit in the county government. We can't wait to be caught unprepared," noted Mutahi.

# Community challenged poverty alleviation

By BEN ONYANGO

People living in Luo Nyanza have been urged to form cooperative societies to help alleviate poverty in the region.

Speaking in Uriri District during the launch of Luo Nyanza Development Cooperative Society, Migori county project coordinator Consolata Aluoch Muga said there was continuous rise in poverty levels among the Luo due to lack of unity despite their being education.

"The formation of microcredit programmes have successfully contributed to alleviating people from poverty in many countries around the world," observed Muga.

She noted that in Central Province and Kiisii region within Nyanza Province it was cooperatives that contributed to poverty reduction by generating income and employment. This has also enabled children attend school, families receive medical care and individuals get

opportunities to make the best decisions for themselves.

"I believe that cooperatives can contribute a great deal to poverty alleviation as well as empower youth and women by raising standards of living," said Muga.

She observed that cooperatives play a central role in the strategies for promoting youth employment and combating child labour.

"The interventions will also reach out to informal young workers through cooperatives as a continuation of Luo Nyanza development efforts," observed Muga.

## Interventions

The interventions to reduce poverty include capacity building, training on organising and creating decent employment opportunities for informal workers and establishing mechanisms for micro credit services through cooperatives.

Cooperative societies play a significant role in economic development especially in rural areas where there is a huge absence of large financial institutions. This scenario does not attract private investments to harness local skills and resources that can uplift the living standards besides exporting produce to distant customers in the cities.

Speaking at the same meeting the chief executive officer of Sony Sugar Company Paul Odola reiterated that cooperatives will enable consolidation of fragmented land, investments in mechanisation and irrigation as well as better bargaining power to buy seeds and fertilizers cheaply.

Other benefits include arranging for proper common storage and greater bargaining power in selling farm produce to traders as well as making banks comfortable in providing agricultural credit. This will improve productivity and generate income for poor farm-

ers. The end result is that it will automatically contribute significantly to economic development.

"Cooperatives have provided an alternative channel to ordinary people from the central part of the country by improving their basic needs to affordable cost," noted Odola.

Speaking at the function, Omondi Abila, a teacher at Oyugi Ogango Girls' Secondary School said that it is high time Nyanza separated politics from development reiterating that the former was the worst inhibitor to progress within the community.

"We need leaders who are development oriented. We have a lot of potential that is untapped," reiterated Abila.

The move came after Cooperative Development Minister Joseph Nyaga visited Rongo District and urged the community to venture into cooperative so as to mobilise resources.

# Church turns a blind eye on blind children

By NZINGA MUASYA

The church is portrayed as a sanctuary where people go to seek solace and comfort in times of distress. This is so because the men and women of God are expected to offer hope and encouragement to those that are on the verge of despair.

However, for over 100 visually impaired children in Kitui most of whom have albinism, the church has turned out to be the source of their misery and untold anguish. The children, some of whom are orphaned and others from single parent families have suffered in the hands of the Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK), Kitui parish.

For the last ten years, the children, all of whom come from poor backgrounds have been accommodated at St Luke's Centre in Kitui town under a programme sponsored by Christophel Blinded Mission of Germany and run by the church.

The children are integrated in two local schools within Kitui township: Central and Muslim Primary schools under a special programme for the visually impaired.



Mwalimu Katua (Centre) with other blind children when they demonstrated in August. Pictures: Nzinga Muasya

## Hostels

A few who have completed Standard Eight attend local day secondary schools within the town but in the evening retreat to the hostels.

For a very long time, there have been endless protracted battles between the church and the poor children, sometimes resulting in the children sleeping in the cold.

The ACK church has finally kicked out most of the children from the hostels. They now roam the streets looking for alternative accommodation as they attend classes.

According to Margaret Mwikali, a representative of the visually impaired in Kitui, the last five years have been rough for these children since the church has been trying to kick them out of the hostels in order to relocate their privately run school to the facility.

Mwikali says that many times the children have been beaten by the church administration, denied food and generally lived in squalid conditions.

## Fight

"This was to frustrate these children so that their parents could withdraw them. The children have nowhere else to go since the centre is the only central place for them to attend school," she observes.

Mwikali, a judicial officer at Kitui Law Courts who is also blind, has taken it upon herself to shoulder the responsibility of fighting for the visually impaired children.

She says they were finally evicted a day after schools opened for the third term. She claims the children were brutally assaulted in a callous attack

supervised by the chairman of the ACK board Paul Kyathi. The children confirmed these claims saying most of them suffered injuries in the attack.

Mwikali says: "I have been walking around with these children in all the Government offices but no action is being taken. For nearly five years the children have suffered under the cruel hands of the ACK management. The church has treated the blind and poor children like worthless beings," she explains.

## No action

"I reported the matter to the local police and the area DC Joshua Chepchieng' but no action has been taken. When I visited the ACK offices, Kyathi, the chairman of the board and the manager told me that the children must vacate since they are a bother. Now where do they go?" posed Mwikali.

She says the administration in Kitui knows the plight of the blind pupils but for unknown reasons they have decided to look the other way.

Mwikali appeals to the Government to come to the rescue of the blind pupils noting that their academic performance has gone down due to years of unwarranted frustrations.

Some of the parents who talked to *Reject* said that the church is now demanding hefty accommodation fees for their children's continued stay at the facility.

Mwende Mutua, whose daughter is a Standard Six pupil at Central Primary School said she had been told to pay KSh76,000 for her daughter's upkeep at the hostels, an amount that

is way beyond her reach.

"I am jobless, where do I get this amount of money? It is a way of telling us our children are no longer wanted," said Mwende.

Another parent Titus Mulwa whose blind son is a Form Four student at Engineer Ngilu Day School said the church demanded that he



*"I have been walking around with these children in all the Government offices but no action is being taken. For nearly five years the children have suffered under the cruel hands of the ACK management."*

—Margaret Mwikali

pays KSh36,000 for his son's stay at the hostels. He wondered why nobody was coming to their rescue.

"We have political and other leaders in this region, can't anybody hear our cry, why are these children being subjected to this kind of inhumanity?" posed Mulwa who comes from Masii, Machakos County.

The land where the hostels stand belongs to the Municipal Council of Kitui. Trouble for the children started when the donor pulled away.

In August this year, the children poured out in the streets of Kitui town waving twigs and placards following alleged harassment by the church administration. They had spent the previous night in the cold after they were thrown out forcibly and the gates to the hostels locked.

The children walking with the aid of white canes stormed the DC's office where the administrator called the church officials to resolve the matter but they declined to attend.

## Challenges

Although various charitable organisations have been giving food donations and other necessities, the children claimed that the same was being diverted by the church to their private school.

"We have endured problems for a long time. We only persevere simply because we have nowhere else to go. It is very unfair for the Church to subject us to this kind of torture," said Mwalimu Katua, one of the pupils' leaders.

They also complained that the church had taken away some of the centre's property given by donors

such as livestock and a vehicle.

The children accused the manager of the centre John Mainga of frustrating their academic performance by blocking special teachers from attending to them at the hostels.

"We used to have special teachers coming to coach us and assist with assignments but Mainga blocked them. This has really affected our academic performance. We wonder how we are expected to compete with other students if our teachers are not allowed to assist us," said one student who suffers albinism.

## Frustrations

One of their teachers who spoke on condition of anonymity said that the church diverts food donations and other supplies to their privately run school within town centre in a scheme meant to frustrate the children so that they can leave.

"The ACK church has for a very long time frustrated these poor children so that their parents can withdraw them. Their plight is a public secret here," said the teacher.

Kitui Deputy DEO Peter Maundu acknowledged receiving reports of the children's problems with the church, noting that the matter had been referred to the provincial administration.

Efforts to get a comment from the ACK Bishop Josphat Mule were futile as he was said to be constantly out of office. Even previous efforts by the press to get the church's side of the story have always hit a snag as they maintain those are internal matters that do not warrant press attention.