

Jan-Apr 2008

**mama
cash**

Post-election violence Edition **To Hell and Back!!**



The 2007 general elections results still remain etched as an ugly scar in many Kenyans' minds. The violence was unprecedented. The damage catastrophic. The consequences deadly.

Yet three months later, Kenyans walk the streets with a strong willed urge to live. To erase the mind-boggling events that left an estimated 1,200 people dead and over 500,000 others displaced from their homes.

In the midst of all the madness, hundreds of women and girls took a trip to hell and back. Though the government or international non-profits have not released official figures of how many women/girls were involved, estimates indicate that hundreds were sexually abused during the post-election violence.

"I personally assisted over 86 women/girls access emergency treatment in two healthcare centers within a span of two weeks," says Stella Amojong, GEMINI Executive Director.

With a grant from Mama Cash and donations from GlobalGiving, GEMINI was able to reach out to (Cont. page 2)



Children stranded in one of the internally displaced camps set to accommodate homeless

We need YOUR help to open a VCT center

On behalf of all GEMINI community, I would like to personally extend my appreciation to everybody who stood by us during this daunting period.

Thanks so much: for believing in us, for supporting us and for always encouraging us through your donations, prayers and moral support.

As we enter another phase in the healing process, we still believe you are going to rally behind us.

This is a Special Appeal for setting up a VCT center. This center, the only one in Eldoret, will enable us provide confidential HIV testing for women/girls who were sexually abused during the post-election period and provide them with the necessary support to overcome their trauma.

We will also be able to reach survivors in remote villages with mobile VCT. I know I can count on you for support.

Once again, thanks so much and we will continue to update you on our progress.



Stella, Director

GRASSROOTS EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVE

The AFTERMATH

To Hell and Back!!

hundreds of women and girls, especially in volatile areas.

“With most health centers shut down and medics fearing for their lives, we faced the biggest challenge in seeking basic drugs and emergency healthcare for sexual abuse survivors,” says Emily Cheptoo, one of our volunteers who was involved in rounding up women/girls for medical check-up. “In most cases, there was nothing we could do since even the few hospitals that were open could not provide specialized care to abused women/girls.”

Yet GEMINI was able to respond to the crisis as it unfolded with the little resources at its disposal. “One of the



most painful experience was when we were tipped of an impending mass rape in one of the villages in the district. Our informer told us that a whole village of women/girls had been secluded from their village, with a false promise of security by one of the warring communities,” recalls Steve Ngao, another volunteer.

When GEMINI arrived, it was too late. “Though none of the women/girls wanted to open up and share their experiences, it was obvious they had just undergone a traumatic experience,” reminisces Stella, who was instrumental in offering counseling to the survivors.

With the violence escalating to all the parts of the country, thousands of families sought refuge in churches, schools and other open grounds. Some of these institutions were caught unawares, with no food supplies, minimum access to medical care and practically no water. As humanitarian agencies sized up the situation, GEMINI had already received some donations from GlobalGiving to provide emergency supplies to some of the families living in nearby churches.

“I still remember how timely the maize and beans you brought to our church assisted us,” says Father Vincent Sunguti, then Majengo Parish priest. “Within days, our food supply had dwindled to a few bags and your support was instrumental in saving lives.”

Even getting the food supply was hectic. “We had to pay three times for transportation from the town center to our destinations,” discloses Jessica, who was in charge of Logistics. “All roads had been barricaded by armed youth who demanded food and money before letting any vehicle through their roadblocks.”

By mid-February, the Kenya Red Cross had the situation under control. They had started providing food, tents, clothes and basic drugs. GEMINI’s activities moved a notch higher, concentrating on the psychological aspect of counseling. And for this, we sincerely thank *MamaCash* so much.

“I still remember the scared faces of hapless children. They were huddled together in a makeshift tent in one of the churches, not even sure of tomorrow,” says Stella. “All GEMINI volunteers who lived in safer residential estates, provided shelter to these children, offering the much-needed comfort. We could not assure them of tomorrow. They screamed each time we switched on the television...which was filled by horrendous pictures of churches burning, whole villages being torched to the ground and old men being hacked to death.”

(Cont. page 5)

They scarred my body....but my spirit lives on!!

"I've never felt disgusted in my life...if given a second chance, I would erase the two hours of hell that I underwent at the hands of my attackers!"

Purity was brutally abused by a gang who also torched her house.

"My husband was away and I thought since I was married into the community that was orchestrating the attacks, I would be safe. I disregarded warnings from some villagers to flee before the violence took a turn for the worst...now I regret," says Purity, a mother of five.

As the violence escalated, ethnic alignment became more apparent as communities took positions. For women like Purity who had cross-married, it was tricky to take positions.

"I thought I had been assimilated into my husband's community after 14 years of marriage. But some things just go beyond skin-deep," observes Purity.

On that fateful day, Purity did not sense if anything was amiss. She attended to her daily chores but ignored villagers who remained huddled in small groups for most of the day.

"I had nothing to worry about. I had no difference with any of my neighbours, had no political affiliations and even if I did, they

were personal...I'm not a politician to share my thoughts with everybody."

But this proved to be her undoing. Villagers expected public outbursts and open declarations of support for the political party that dominated the area. Purity misread the political mood.

"Maybe they expected me to bless the young people as they were dispatched to cause havoc," ponders Purity, her eyes rheumy and distant.

She was referring to allegations of traditional rituals where young people were cleansed and blessed before going to unleash violence. While the community elders offered the rituals, women were expected to welcome the youth back from their violent missions with ululations and merry-making.

Purity did not take part in all these.

"It nearly cost me my life. Maybe the senseless violence they meted on me was a tacit warning that something worse could happen to me if I did not embrace their culture," says Purity.

Purity was one of the beneficiaries of the psychological counseling that GEMINI provided to sexually abused women/girls.

"I feel I will never be the same again. The worst part is that some of the perpetrators are friends of my husband and even recently, one of them visited our home. This is simply preposterous!! Through the rigorous counseling

that I have received, I believe I have forgiven them but the scars still remain."

She might be down. But certainly not out. "If they thought they would crash my spirit, then I will prove to them that I'm stronger than they thought!"

Purity's inner strength is amazing. She is contemplating going public

with her experience as one way of encouraging other women/girls to do the same.

But before that, there is one important thing she has to do first.

"I'm still mustering the courage to test for HIV. Only then will I be able to decide my next move."

And GEMINI is right besides her. Read our plans to set up a VCT center...with your help, of course!

*"Through the vigorous counseling
that I have received from
GEMINI, I believe I have forgiven
them...but the scars still remain."*

To Hell and Back!!

(From page 2)

"I still remember when we heard the first screams. It was around midnight and throughout the day, a sense of foreboding had permeated our village. We had received tacit warnings from our neighbours that an attack was imminent," reminisces Mwikali, a women leader in Rehema.

But when the attack finally came, it was nothing that Mwikali had anticipated. "It was ferocious, swift and deadly! Within two hours, houses belonging to some ethnic communities were razed to the ground, property looted and men hacked to death. My only shock was that these were people we had lived with for so long, people we had bought the land from, people who had asked our daughters in marriage. Why?"

Like hundreds of other women, Mwikali has now gone back to her village after pitching tent at the Eldoret Showground for four months. She was among the beneficiaries of your support and as she boarded a military truck, ready for her journey home, she whispered, "I hope you won't forget about us?"



A guest hands over a trophy to a player at the Eldoret ASK camp after a soccer match for IDPs.

GEMINI won't forget about her. "Our next move is to support these women in settling down and more importantly building their self-confidence and restoring their dignity. They have been through so much and the hard part begins now," observes Jessica Ogendo, the new chair of the Board of Directors.

They defiled my daughters...as I helplessly watched

"They grabbed me, tied my hands and feet to the central pillar of my hut and gagged my mouth with a piece of cloth torn from my shirt.

"I tried to fight back but the gang, almost 15 people, overpowered me, in the process breaking some of my ribs.

"They then grabbed my two daughters, ripped their clothes off and violently defiled them. Two of the men forced me to look.

"One of my daughters is thirteen years while the other is seventeen. Their piercing screams could not stop the attackers.

"My struggles were in vain and as the tears cascaded down my cheeks, I felt a deep rage form within me, and at that moment, I could have killed all of them had I been released.

"Almost an hour later, both of my girls had lost consciousness, and a pool of blood spread all over the room.

"As the gang left the house, two of them kicked one of my daughters on the backside and spat at her.

"I had never felt humiliated in my life. And I'm still not sure what I would do should I meet the men who violated my daughters."

Why a Stand Alone VCT Center?

VCT is a key entry point for needed medical, psychological, social, and legal interventions for HIV-positive Kenyans and their families. Interventions include treatment and prevention of opportunistic infections; prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV; home-based care; orphan support; and post-test clubs.

-www.usaid.org



VCT is a catalyst for behavior change—for clients who test HIV-negative as well as those who test positive. Setting up the VCT will enable GEM-INI to reach out to marginalized communities, survivors of post-election violence and other vulnerable groups at high-risk of contracting HIV.

-*Ruth, volunteer*

“A VCT center will enable hundreds of women abused during the post-election period to access services that will assist them make informed decisions about their future,”

-*Dr. Cheserek, Uasin Gishu District Aids & STI Coordinator (DASCO).*

Special Appeal

GEMINI's VCT Center

At first, we were tempted to run a 40-page newsletter highlighting all the stories of women/girls who were brutally abused. But we believe, for the time being, this is enough. We have to do something for them.

We need to raise **US\$10,000** to enable us reach the 14 heavily affected villages. This amount will cater for rapid test kits, counselors' allowances, transport to villages, Mobile VCT and financial auditing.

We need to reassure them. To build their confidence. And, most important, to enable them regain their self-worth.

We can only do this through your support.

As usual, we promise to keep you updated with every success story, every challenge and financial summary of how your contribution will be utilized.

Thanks so much and we hope, just like all the times we have reached out for your help, YOU will respond to this special appeal.

**GRASSROOTS EMPOWERMENT
INITIATIVE
(GEMINI)**

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Inform. Inspire. Involve.

Coming soon:

www.geminikenya.org

APPRECIATION

GEMINI would like to extend sincere appreciation for all the donors who extended their support during this trying period.

In particular we would like to thank **Mama Cash** for being with us all the way, offering encouragement and financial support for our post-election project. We would also like to appreciate all **GlobalGiving** donors who responded to our appeal and made a donation. We are indebted to GlobalGiving staff, Dana Ledyard (now with IYF), Saima Zaman and Manmeet Mehta for their quick response to our appeal.

We would also like to thank all the volunteers who risked their lives to offer support to vulnerable women/girls.

We wish we could personally hug all of you!!

How you can Help

This Special Appeal will be posted in all the four GEMINI projects at GlobalGiving, www.globalgiving.com

You can make a contribution to any of the projects and we will acknowledge your contribution immediately we receive it.

We appreciate all your support