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| C:\Users\Joseph Akoule\Desktop\IMG-20190302-WA0025(11).jpgC:\Documents and Settings\User\My Documents\My Pictures\Logo.jpg  SIKOM  ***PEACENETWORK FOR***  ***DEVELOPMENT*** |

Doors remain Locked: Keys are nowhere to be found!

***“Education is the most powerful weapon, which you can use to change the world” - Nelson Mandela***.

We all have heard this adage, but for *Chemaywa Lolim*, so many doors remain locked, and the keys are nowhere to be found…

I met nine-year old *Chemaywa* on a windy market day afternoon at Naruoro trading center in Chepchikarar village of Akoret location in Pokot North Sub County. Chemaywa is a Pokot name, given to a girl born amid preparation of the local brew known as Maywa. Her mother was a local brewer who had found herself in trouble with the area chief several times.

I was in the line of duty when I visited Akoret and heard the first gunshot that made my heart skip immensely. To my surprise, everything else around the market was normal and no one seemed shocked. Local traders went about their businesses of buying and selling goods and services unperturbed. Akoret is characterized by frequent gunshots that rent the air due to cattle rustling. Seeing a young boy armed with a gun herding cattle and goats is no big deal to those in the area. They are well used to it.

On the day Chemaywa and I met, she had just returned from a successful mission of selling goat milk. She had an empty milk *guard* swinging on one hand and a few coins tightly clinched in her fist on the other. She had a contagious smile which she seemed well aware of since she could not stop smiling. Her chocolate brown skin glowed and the neatly made cornrows on her hair brought out her round face well. She wore a nicely pleated yellow stripped skirt (*lorwa*) and a blue fitting vest. She stretched out her hand to greet me and bent slightly as a gesture of respect. After learning that she was just from selling milk, I was curious to know how she was going to spend the money and asked her the question. I was also interested in finding out why she was not in school since it was a weekday and girls of her age were supposed to be in school.

Sadly, *Chemaywa* informed me that as much as she would have loved to go to school to acquire the one very important key to a better life, there was no school nearby due to insecurity in the area. The only school in her village that is 11.9 kilometers away would take 1hour.30minutes to reach. She went on to explain that her reason for requesting her mum (*Yoo*) for a little milk to sell was so that she could make some money to pay for beaded necklaces that she had ordered from *Ko Cheptoo*, an elderly woman who is a prowess at making beaded necklaces and bangles. At first I assumed Chemaywa was buying the beads for beauty and while this was true, there was more to it. Chemaywa and many of her friends wanted to look more attractive in order to get the attention of potential suitors. Since they did not get the opportunity to go to school, the only option left was for them to attract suitors from among able warriors who could pay a high bride price from the proceeds of cattle raids.

After a lengthy talk with Chemaywa she assured me, amid tears, that together with her 13 year elder brother, who was out in the field looking after their goats and calves, they have the passion and desire to go to school. Unfortunately for them, and other children in Chepchikarar village, there is no school. This reality touched me to the core!

I thank God that I met Chemaywa at a time when Sikom is working on a very important and noble initiative dubbed “Pen for Gun Campaign”. The slogan *“Pen for Gun”* literally means replacing the gun with a pen; an initiative aimed at enabling the 80% out of school children in West Pokot County to access basic education. The Pen for Gun campaign holds the key that could rescue these young, at risk lives, and open the door that will lead them to a bright future.

The Pen for Gun campaign will be piloted at Chepchikarar learning center where the community has donated twenty acres of land for the construction of classrooms, dormitory. Funds raised from the campaign will also provide desks, school uniforms and learning materials to enable the young children like Chemaywa and her age mate access basic/quality education.

***Increasing access to education will finally silence the guns!!!!***

***IT TAKES YOU AND I WORKING TOGETHER TO REALIZE THIS GOAL.***

***WE INVITE YOU TO JOIN US AND THANK YOU FOR THE SUPPORT!***