Stories of
Women Building Peace
Transforming Inter-Ethnic Violence in North rift region, Kenya
Stories of
Women Building Peace
Transforming Inter-Ethnic Violence in North rift region, Kenya
Stories of
Women Building Peace:
Transforming Inter-Ethnic Violence in North rift region, Kenya

June 2014

Published by: Coalition for Peace in Africa (COPA)

P.O.Box P.O. Box 61753 – 00200
Nairobi
Kenya

Telephone: +254(0)203866686
Cell phone: +254(0)717912151
E-mail: copa@copafrica.org
www.copafrica.org

With support from UN WOMEN

© 2014 Coalition for Peace in Africa. All rights reserved.
No part of this book may be reproduced in any form without
written permission from the publisher, except for brief
passages included in a review. Printed in Nairobi, Kenya.

Contributors: Women in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya

Editors: George Kut
         Francis Okinja Kut

Design and Layout: James Chege
CONTENTS

ACRONYMS................................................................................................................................. 9

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT ........................................................................................................... 10

PREFACE .................................................................................................................................. 12

SEVENTY-FIVE YEAR OLD WOMAN INSPIRED ME TO BECOME A PEACEBUILDER:
By Mary Chepkwony ........................................................................................................... 14

IN SEARCH OF UNITY IN DIVERSITY
By Aileen Simatei ................................................................................................................ 24

FROM AN INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSON TO A PEACEBUILDER
By Beatrice Kimani ................................................................................................................. 29

PICTURES ................................................................................................................................ 35

PREMATURE BIRTHS AT IDP CAMP TRIGGERED MY PEACEBUILDING WORK
By Florence Njeri Gathungu ................................................................................................... 36

HOW I TAKE PEACE FROM DOOR TO DOOR
By Rael Chebichi Bett ............................................................................................................. 43

FORGIVING THE WOMAN WHO TOOK MY HOUSE MADE ME BECOME A SUCCESS STORY
By Jane Asman ........................................................................................................................ 46
I BECAME A WOUNDED HEALER
By Mary Njoki ................................................................. 52

WE USE COMMUNITY CHOIR TO TRANSFORM LIVES
By Roda Cheptanui Koech ........................................... 60

PICTURES ............................................................................. 65

I WITNESSED VIOLENCE IN ITS WORST FORM
By Susan Akello Ojwach .................................................. 66

LOVE FROM THE CHURCH
By Josephine M. Uswii .................................................... 72

I HELPED A GIRL NOT TO ABORT
By Emily Jepkemboi Korir .............................................. 76

HOW I WORKED WITH A PRIEST TO AVERT PLANNED VIOLENCE
By Anna C. Bungei ........................................................... 80

HOW I HELPED RECONCILE COMMUNITIES IN MAILINNE
By Truvena Chelangat ....................................................... 82

OVERCOMING PERSONAL CHALLENGES
By Sophia J. Sang .............................................................. 86

PICTURES ............................................................................. 91

I USE MY POST IN THE CHURCH TO BRING PEACE
By Catherine Nelima Yaura ............................................. 92
Stories of Women Building Peace
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACRONYMS</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AP</td>
<td>Administration Police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAPI</td>
<td>Change Agents for Peace Initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CJPC</td>
<td>Catholic Justice and Peace Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COPA</td>
<td>Coalition for Peace in Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CWA</td>
<td>Catholic Women Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC</td>
<td>District Commissioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DPC</td>
<td>District Peace Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDP</td>
<td>Internally Displaced Persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IGA</td>
<td>Income Generating Activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MYWO</td>
<td>Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCCK</td>
<td>National Council of Churches of Kenya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PEV</td>
<td>Post Election Violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RWPL</td>
<td>Rural Women Peace Link</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TJRC</td>
<td>Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNSCR</td>
<td>United Nations Security Council Resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USAID</td>
<td>United States Agency for International Development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

COPA would like to acknowledge the financial and technical support provided by the UN Women in the implementation of the ‘Anchoring the participation of women in peacebuilding processes through UNSCR 1325’ project which culminated in the production of this documentation.

Additionally, COPA remains grateful to the over 50 peacebuilding organizations implementing projects in the Uasin Gishu County for their partnership in the project. Without their support, it would have been impossible for COPA to reach the right targets.

To the ‘Stand alone’ women who took part in some of the project’s activities and those who patiently narrated the contributions they have made to ensure stability and normalcy in communal relations in the county, we say a big thank you. Your work demonstrates that indeed the UNSCR 1325 has been operational in Uasin Gishu.

COPA is grateful to George Kut and team who did the editing and layout design of this documentation. We appreciate it took time to patiently go through different stories and put them into perspective in ways that showcase that indeed, the UNSCR 1325 has been at work in Uasin Gishu and the women have been at the fore front in its implementation.
We say thank you to COPA staff Martha Ndogoto, Rose Ouko, Jeremy Kiprutto, George Baraza, Isaac Wamalwa and Susan Kungu. Last but not least, we say thanks to our volunteer in Communication and documentation Klaudia Brezna for her efforts in the project
PREFACE

Since time immemorial, the number of women participating in peacebuilding processes and subsequent reconstruction of broken down communities has always been small. It is notable that even in contexts where women have been able to make substantive contributions to such processes, their efforts have often been under valued and at most times are not acknowledged. This could be partly attributed to the practices in patriarchal cultures in which peace and security matters are seen as the roles of men, and women engagement is viewed as a social responsibility towards family and community.

Despite this, there are indications in many conflicting communities that women have been at the fore front in peacebuilding initiatives e.g. in the provision of food and shelter to victims of violence, building bridges of reconciliation across the conflict divide, engagement in intra and inter community dialogue, provision of psychosocial support to victims of rape and other violations and in the reintegrating of returnees back to the community.

Women have been able to do all this although in many instances they have operated from the grassroots level and at the peripheries from where they have hardly been seen or heard. Despite this, there is evidence that their work has resulted in real impact on the ground especially in areas like the Uasin Gishu County in Kenya. This documentation is an effort to acknowledge those grassroots women who despite working at the lowest level and with little or no resources have left a positive mark in communal relations in their areas.
COPA is hopeful that this documentation will raise the profiles of the grassroots women peacebuilders beyond their communities and that it will also motivate others who are working in similar contexts.

Martha Ndogoto
Programmes Coordinator
SEVENTY-FIVE YEAR OLD WOMAN INSPIRED ME TO BECOME A PEACEBUILDER

By Mary Chepkwony

“Women are a resilient people. They can bend but their spirits are not easily broken.”
Seventy-five year old woman inspired me to become a peacebuilder

‘Leave me alone and go your way! I am old and my life has no value in this world. Save your energy now and use it later to help someone else who is as young as you are.’ A seventy-five year old woman protested as I offered to help her cross a swollen river. The level of desperation displayed on her face drew me closer to her, to request another chance to help her. She ignored my efforts. As we stood facing each other in silence, my mind took a journey down the memory lane.

The events of the year 1992 that led to fear, hate and mistrust amongst neighbours vividly played into my mind. It was the year when the first ethnic violence erupted in the Burnt Forest in Uasin Gishu County. The violent conflict was so abrupt it came as a shock to me and to many other people in the area. Never before had I experienced violence of this magnitude. Many of us dismissed it as a passing cloud but by evening, things were so bad that we had to go seek shelter with our children at Burnt Forest Police Station. The following morning, we were all ordered out of the Police Station with our children. Though calm was yet to return, we had to take the risk and go back to our homes.

At the Police Station, we had learnt that it was a conflict between the Kikuyu and the Kalenjin communities over the issues of land ownership and political inclination. We were all scared of what would happen next. Most women decided to leave Burnt Forest with their children for their ancestral homes. My three children were young and very small at the time. I also
Stories of Women Building Peace

decided to take them to Nandi, my ancestral home. At that time there was no mercy accorded to anyone. We all had to carry our cross. There was a lot of bitterness and mistrust. I remember carrying one baby on my back, another on my lap while my sister helped me to carry the other. No other person could assist.

In search of safety, I had left my farm and my livestock in Burnt Forest and landed in Nandi empty handed. Life had suddenly become hostile and unbearable. With children to feed and no source of income to turn to, I led a restless life, always thinking of my farm and livestock that I had left in Burnt Forest. Land ownership was one of the causes of the violent conflict, yet I had left in a hurry and carried no title deed. Many questions lingered in my mind all the time but no of the favourable answers came even once. Will I get my land and the livestock when I get there? Had I lost so easily all that had taken me years and energy to acquire? It was so demoralizing to imagine such possible misfortunes turning into reality.

A time came when I could not bear it any longer and I started my journey back to Burnt Forest, to see for myself what the situation was like. It was during this journey that I met a seventy five year old woman, stranded at a bridge of a swollen river with no one to help her across. I offered to help her but she refused. She actually looked at me straight and protested, “Leave me alone and go your way! I am old and my life has no value in this world. Save your energy now and use it later to help someone else who is as young as you are”.

I drew closer to her to request another chance to help her. She ignored my efforts. This really pained me. I looked at her face and suspected a high level of despair and exhaustion. Was her refusal a case of mistrust or despair? I remembered my own case. Life had suddenly become unbearable. Losing your all, within a day was something none would easily come to terms with. Besides, neighbours had become extremely unresponsive, suspicious and
Seventy-five year old woman inspired me to become a peacebuilder

hostile. I concluded the old lady could only be a victim of circumstances and so resolved to help her regardless of how long it would take to do it. I shared my own story with her; how I had ran for safety, leaving all my property in Burnt Forest, how life had suddenly become meaningless and how I had decided to pick up the pieces and face the situation head on. We found ourselves holding hands, sobbing and crossing the bridge. It was this experience that made me decide that I would do something that would help bring all the women in Burnt Forest together regardless of their ethnic background. The driving force would be the fact that all the women, regardless of their ethnic affiliations were affected by the violence.

“Though I was a victim, I chose the path least travelled. I decided to work for peaceful co-existence.”

When I arrived at my home in Burnt Forest, things were not in order but I still chose the path least travelled. I decided to work for peaceful co-existence. I mobilized other women and we formed ‘Toror Chepsiria group’- This name is symbolic and in reference to a wild tree that grows in Uasin Gishu. Its uniqueness lies in the way it towers above all other trees. It bears forth fruits throughout the year regardless of the season. I dreamt of a day when women in the area would be like that tree- giving hope to all and all the time. The group comprised Kalenjin and Kikuyu women and through it we were to speak in one voice as women. Through it we were to show our communities that we had had enough of the conflict and that we wanted to chart our path to economic prosperity as women. In the group, we started a merry go round particularly aimed at helping women victims of the violence to reconstruct their houses which had been burned, demolished or vandalized during the conflict. With the little money realized, we helped members to buy iron sheets. We would then go and plaster the houses in turns using
mud and cow-dung. When the reconstruction was finished, we decided to use the cash to buy a sheep for each member of the group and thereafter we started sinking shallow wells in the compounds of each member. This effort saved our members from walking long distances in search of water and they could use the time saved to empower themselves economically. All this time, we had no institutional support.

In 1996, there was ethnic violence again between members of the Kikuyu and Kalenjin communities. It was still about land ownership and political inclinations. Some of our group members were badly affected. The National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK) came in and provided them with humanitarian support. To enable us effectively carry out peacebuilding work, the NCCK trained members of the group in basic peacebuilding skills for a period of 10 days. This was done in 1997 and I was among those who were trained.

**My peacebuilding Journey**

A month after the NCCK training, I was called upon to facilitate a peacebuilding training for 200 people in Labuywet, Turbo, Uasin Gishu. This was my first time conducting training and it came as a big shock given my inexperience in the field. After this, they gave me a 3 months contract and in 1998, the contract was extended with 18 months.

In 1999, I went back to Burnt Forest and the fire to work with women was still burning in me. I approached the late Rose Barmasai who at the time was the Project Coordinator for NCCK and Selline Korir, the Assistant Project Coordinator. Luckily, they too had similar passion and dreams. The three of us approached NCCK for support. We further approached other women who agreed to work with us to realize peace in Uasin Gishu. We called this movement ‘The Dream Team’. We enjoined three other women in the Team and had our first meeting at Burnt Forest in June 1999. It was attended by
Seventy-five year old woman inspired me to become a peacebuilder

50 women from different communities. We shared our ideas with them and they told us to go ahead with all what we had planned to do. Our focus was on peacebuilding, development, advocacy and dialogue. This would help women move out of poverty. We prioritized peacebuilding, research, link and evaluation and trained other women. Our research findings revealed that all women in the area were suffering the same challenges. It was during this time that some men who were the Team’s technical advisors suggested we change from being the ‘Dream Team’ to being the Rural Women Peace Link1 (RWPL). We were able to move to all the NCCK areas.

My work in 2007 violence

In 2007 December when Kenyans went to the polls again, Burnt Forest was very calm with no indications of possible violence. People cast their votes, went back home and began waiting for the announcement of the Presidential election results. When this was done on 29th December, the area just erupted into violence. By 30th December, it was total chaos. I could not just sit at home and wish all would be well. I started mobilizing other women so that jointly we could do something. I talked with Selline Korir on what was going on in the area. It was moving from bad to worse. Selline helped to connect us with Betty Murungi of the Urgent Action Fund, Florence Mpaayei of Nairobi Peace Initiative and Berewa Jommo. Betty and Berewa would send me airtime since all shops in Burnt Forest had been closed. I used the same to coordinate rescue efforts of people from their homes to safer areas such as the Catholic Church compound within Burnt Forest shopping centre. With a group of other women, we started moving around, rescuing old people who had been abandoned in their homes. We took some to the police station and others to the Eldoret show ground. I took some to my house, others to the House of Beatrice Kimani,  

1 Rural Women Peace Link is a network of rural women involved in peacebuilding within their communities. The network mobilizes women to respond to conflict early warning and humanitarian response where violent conflict has actually occurred. It operates in rift valley Kenya including cross border areas with Uganda
Stories of Women Building Peace

my colleague at RWPL. With other women, we started communicating with the police about people who needed to be assisted and also to doctors about people who had been hurt. For those who had died, we sent messages to the police telling them where the bodies were so they could identify them and alert the relatives for decent burials.

The Risks of being insider impartial

The work seemed simple but grew very risky for me. My Kalenjin community saw me as a betrayer while the Kikuyu community saw me as a spy out to get information for my people. Some members of my community started to organize how my house would be burned. I was saved by the chief and the Divisional Officer (DO) who warned that anyone who dared touch my property would face the law. The chief and the DO appreciated the peacebuilding work I was doing. Though I was spared, for the next 6 months life was very awkward for me. While many affected Kikuyu families had moved out to the Eldoret showground and camps within Burnt Forest town, the affected Kalenjin families were suffering. There were those without homes yet they could not go to the IDP camps and without being in camps, they would not receive humanitarian support. The Nandi community believes that living in a camp is worse than a curse. It indicates the highest abdication of a man’s duty of protecting and providing for his family. For this reason, homeless Kalenjins refused to go to the camps. I approached the Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK) Christian Community Services and
the Red Cross but they made it clear that humanitarian support was only provided for those in camps or the show ground. I decided to organize dialogue with members of the Kalenjin community to convince them to go to the camps. After 5 days of dialogue, they finally agreed and they went to Boror, Ngarua and Ndugulu camps in Burnt Forest. The ACK provided them with tents and food. This was a major achievement, even to me. It made my community to see my efforts as helpful and they softened their stance towards me. Some started being sympathetic to my plight.

During the violence, many schools within Burnt Forest were closed down while others were turned into temporary camps. Together with Beatrice Kimani, a teacher we started to lobby for the reopening of Arneseis Primary school which had been closed as a result of the violence. Many members of the Kikuyu community had sought shelter there. They were the majority there. When it was reopened, I started talking to members of the Kalenjin community to take their children back to the school and reassuring them that nothing bad would happen to them. Together with Beatrice, we requested for security support from the government and an Administration Police (AP) camp was set up inside the school. After school time, the APs would escort the Kalenjin children to ensure they were not attacked on their way back to the camp. The school was reopened at the end of February while the secondary school was reopened in April. Lobbying for the Kalenjin children living in the camps to go to the Kikuyu dominated school was a big gamble on our part. If anything happened to them, my community would hold me responsible.

In April 2008, United States Agency for International Development (USAID) gave us the first funds to hold dialogue forums in Burnt Forest between the Kikuyus and Kalenjins. In total, we organized 18 dialogue forums. At the time tension was very high. The Burnt Forest town was subdivided into 3; the section fronting the main road was the Kalenjin Zone, the middle area was a no man’s land while the back section was the Kikuyu Zone. Anybody who dared cross the no man’s land section without
police escort would be killed by the rival community. Out of the 18 forums, 4 were for women alone. Women at the time were not ready to reconcile. We decided to go to the showground where majority of the Kikuyu community had camped. Initially the women were very hostile to us and they said they were not ready to talk to us. We left but returned after 2 days and still the women would not talk to us. After 2 days, we went with some more women and still they would not talk with us. Later on, I received a call from a Kikuyu pastor living at the show ground concerning a 5 year kid who had drowned in a cattle dip and died. When we went there, he said he only called us because they were desperate for help and if we wished we could help but if we did not wish we were also free to leave.

Using the little funds that we had, we helped to organize for a decent burial at Kiplombe cemetery. When the community came back from the burial,

"...we had 150 Kikuyus and Kalenjins all calmly seated. When the DC saw this, he wept."

they had softened their stance towards us. They called to say they felt like we had genuine hearts and as such they were sending us to the Kalenjin women in Burnt Forest to let them know why this had to happen to them. We suggested they should write to them letters on what they wanted to tell them. They wrote the letters asking them why they did not warn them about the attacks. The Kalenjin women wrote back and said they were not aware of any impending attacks. After this, both the Kikuyu and Kalenjin community women decided to meet face to face but we made them promise that no matter what happened in the meeting they would not fight. After this meeting, communities said they felt relief. They agreed that each would be free to say exactly how they felt. I then went for dialogue forums in Kesses. In Burnt Forest, the eighteen dialogue forums were held as follows; five
Seventy-five year old woman inspired me to become a peacebuilder

for the Kikuyu community alone; five for Kalenjin community alone; five were held as joint forums for the two communities. On the 16th meeting, the communities even embraced and forgave one another. It was agreed that similar forums should be organized for the youth. Two forums were separately held for the Kalenjin and Kikuyu youth and one jointly. Initially, the youth were very angry and did not want to listen to the elders. A separate joint forum was also held for the elders. There was a lot of arguing. One joint forum was also held for Kikuyu youth, women and elders and same for Kalenjins. Several meetings were then held for the two communities to help them agree on certain issues. These involved back and forth mediation between the two groups. The 17th meeting was for the elders, women and youth to give the way forward. They agreed that the Government representatives be invited in the 18th meeting. The DC Mr. Ngaruma felt they should bring security forces but we said no. When he arrived, we had 150 Kikuyus and Kalenjins all calmly seated. When the DC saw this, he wept.

On the 17th meeting, women agreed that the construction of Burnt Forest market should start immediately. USAID agreed to fund it. The Market was opened by Ambassador Ramberger. After this, the District Commissioner (DC) requested we should conduct similar forums in Kesses. There we did 12 dialogue forums. The 12th forum led to the formation of the Wareng Youth Initiative for Peace and Development.

After the 18th dialogue forum in Burnt forest, many more actors came in, the no man’s land was abolished and the market became fully operational. Business came back to normal.
IN SEARCH OF UNITY IN DIVERSITY
By Aileen Simatei

“Women are a resilient people. They can bend but their spirits are not easily broken.”
In search of unity and diversity

Uasin Gishu is a County with many different ethnic communities. The County would be highly developed if unity in diversity was achieved and sustained but the much desired unity has been quite illusive. Ethnic tensions abound and erupt into violence at the slightest provocation. I decided to engage in peacebuilding work after continuously seeing how the different communities in Uasin Gishu argue, fight and hate each other over issues that they can sit down and resolve peacefully.

No one wants to face reality and everyone seems to specialise in blame games. Each community wants to blame the other for what has been happening. None is ever willing to take responsibility. In my peacebuilding work, I always work with the area chief, the village elders, the women, the youth and the church. I am what you would call “a stand alone woman” since I am not affiliated to an institution. Everything I do is out of my own personal drive and a desire to bring about positive change in my County.

Aged 63, I am a widow and a mother of 5 children who are now all grown up. I worked as an untrained primary school teacher after completing my Secondary Education but after a few years of teaching, I resigned due to poor health. My knowledge of peacebuilding came as a result of receiving trainings from different organizations such as Non governmental organizations (NGOs), Health ministry and church organizations. I therefore became a role model in peacebuilding initiatives having helped many through my good communications skills.
Stories of Women Building Peace

Being a member of the District Peace Committee (DPC) in Eldoret west and a village elder in my location, I was in 2013 co-opted into the Kalenjin Council of Elders where I am the only woman. This is a great honour and an acknowledgement by the Kalenjin community that women too do have a say in peacebuilding and security matters in the community.

As a village elder I volunteer my time to undertake community projects. These revolve around social, peacebuilding, development and economic issues. I am always alone amongst men. They consider me to be honest, trustworthy and very passionate and confidential with matters affecting women in my community. This has earned me a place in their hearts. I have been involved very much with peacebuilding activities in the area. They call me in meetings whenever there is need to deliberate on issues affecting families. One quality that I thank God for giving me is confidence. I do not fear to say what is affecting women. Having worked with women to form multi-ethnic groups where we engage in merry go rounds and table banking, I have come to realise the great potential women have in maintaining peace in their communities.

The obstacles women face in the community is that all the work within the family set up is left for women. They are not able to go out and socialize with others. Women are therefore left out in many issues concerning the community in terms of decision making. As they are left out, men make decisions which do not help the women but infringe on the women human rights. My advice to women is that they should stand firm, go out there and support one another because women are the majority in our County and women make good leaders. Women play an important role because they are more receptive, responsible, loving, kind and faithful. Women are very sincere and they mean well in leadership because they are the mothers.

Even after relative peace is restored, we still work together in development issues to help each other. I talk about peace in churches, barazas\(^2\) and funerals

\(^2\) Barazas refer to a places where public meetings are held. It is also used to refer to the actual meeting and thus may be used to simply mean public meeting.
just to remind the communities to continue embracing peace at all times. I have been selected to represent my community in exchange programmes in different occasions. This is due to the hard work because after the post election violence, other DPC members and I worked tirelessly to preach peace in Uasin Gishu County. Mercy Corps sponsored me to a four day learning trip to Wajir in Wajir County to visit women who have advocated for peace in the area. While there, I learnt the Wajir conflict was between two clans called Degodia and Ajuran. I was inspired by the fact that Wajir women played a key role in resolving the conflict. In order to build a culture of peace in their midst, the women established a peace centre for excellence in Wajir town. The Wajir women together with the youth also make ornaments and other things which they sell and get money for school fees and family up keep. They have also started a Peace University in collaboration with Cambodia University.

As a village elder, I was sponsored by NCCK for a five day exchange programme in February 2013. The exchange programme was about preaching peace, talking and analyzing how to have sustainable peace in the country of Rwanda.

My proudest moment was when I saw peace return in my community. It was the greatest moment in my life to see various ethnic communities sharing the same line waiting to vote. The general elections of 2013 will go into history as the most peaceful election in Uasin Gishu since the re-introduction of multi-party democracy in Kenya in 1991. The training on UNSCR 1325 on March 17th to 20th 2014 was good because as a person, the knowledge I have gained from this training has given me strength and a voice to speak more on women issues. Coalition for Peace in Africa (COPA) through trainings has empowered me with skills which I use to have women participate in issues affecting them at the grassroots level.
FROM AN INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSON TO A PEACEBUILDER
By Beatrice Kimani

“Our ethnicity should not be used as a tool to divide us; but should be embraced as a tool for peace and respect for the different cultural backgrounds.”
In the 1991 election violence, I almost lost my life. All my possessions were plundered or went up in flames. I was reduced to a complete pauper; a beggar with nothing to call my own. I remember collecting dead bodies in the area because they were being eaten by dogs. I called the police to come for them so they could alert those who had lost their loved ones to come and identify them and if possible, take the bodies for burial.

Life became unbearable. There was no alternative but to go back to my parents to seek their financial assistance in order to survive.

Born in 1961 in Nyeri County, I came to Burnt Forest, Uasin Gishu County in 1987 and settled there as a teacher. My first posting had taken me to Kakamega in Western Kenya. I then transferred to Kirinyaga. Later I came and settled in Burnt Forest which is an area occupied by many different ethnic groups. Since 1992, Burnt Forest has suffered much from politically instigated skirmishes. This was initially triggered by the repealing of section 2A of the Constitution of Kenya in 1991, as a result of the pressure mounted on the government by senior politicians outside government. The repeal re-introduced multi-party politics which had been outlawed by the Moi government. At the time, there was a, misconception that the communities that were agitating for the repealing of the section wanted to dislodge President Moi from power.
The President was a Kalenjin, a dominant community in the area while the agitators were mainly seen to be members of the Kikuyu and the Luo communities. Since then, those who see themselves as the original inhabitants of the area have intermittently threatened other residents with eviction whenever they differed on which political alliance to support. Whenever there are skirmishes in this area, people from other communities flee the area and settle in temporary camps. Property is looted and destroyed but most regrettable, lives are lost. This has been a bone of contention in the area in every election year except for the 2002 and the 2013 ones when both the Kikuyu and Kalenjin communities were in the same political alliance, supporting the same presidential candidate.

When I came back from my parents’ house in Nyeri, I settled in a camp near the shopping centre. This was in 1992. I was very hurt because though I am a Kikuyu, I am also related to Kalenjin since my husband is a Kalenjin. The clashes left me traumatized especially after one Kalenjin teacher in the area was killed and people started saying that I too had to be killed because they believed I was responsible for that death. I was rescued by the area councillor who gave me a safe passage out of the area.

My contributions in rebuilding Burnt Forest

In 1993, after some relative peace returned, I decided to go back to my farm in Burnt Forest. Many children and their parents had already vacated the area. The schools that were operational were seriously understaffed. Many teachers had died in the clashes while a number of those who were lucky to survive had fled the area. I approached the area chief and requested him to assist me to teach either in a different school, or in the same school where I operated from before the skirmishes. I went back to the former school where I had been teaching. My desire was to assist those who were about to sit for their Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE). They were very much behind in syllabus coverage. A good number of learners were still unable to concentrate in their studies as a result of the trauma they had experienced.
From an internally displaced person to a peacebuilder

during the violence. Since many of the teachers refused to come back to teach in the schools, I organized with some of the bright students to be coaching the weak ones in some of the subjects.

Next, I approached four Kalenjin teachers to come back to the school but they refused. Their fear was that they could end up being harmed by the surrounding communities or some people who would perceive them as enemies. I had to go to them continuously and reassure them over and over again that all would be well with them. I even took personal responsibility over their safety. That was the only way they could agree to come back to the school. While this worked well, I knew it was a big risk I had taken upon myself because if anything were to happen to them, their families would hold me personally responsible.

After this, I started going from house to house in the area, requesting and pleading with the parents to release their children back to the school. I kept reassuring them that all would be well. With steady persistence and my willingness to take personal responsibility over the safety of the children, many parents agreed to release their children to school. During my visits to various families, I talked to them about the value of peace and the need to talk and discuss about our differences. I was hoping this would help to prevent violence in future at least for the sake of the children. While in the school, most of the time I reflected much about what had happened to the communities in the area. I started encouraging other teachers to start talking about the effects of negative ethnicity in their classes. They agreed. As teachers, we talked to the students about the bad effects of violence and why it was important that peace should be maintained.
Stories of Women Building Peace

As time progressed, I felt the need to work more on peacebuilding issues in the area. I needed to reach out to the communities, not just the students in the school. In 1999, I met Selline Korir and Mary Chepkwony both of the Rural Women Peace Link\(^3\) (RWPL). I joined the network. This was as a result of my belief that an institutional support would help me to reach out to more people. I had a burning desire to talk to the people in the area to ensure that what had been experienced in 1992 and in 1997 does not happen again. My inspiration to mediate for peace was a result of what I went through and the suffering I experienced during the 1992 and 1997 clashes. I experienced life as an Internally Displaced Person (IDP) and the experience left a bitter taste in my mouth. At the IDP camp, life was deplorable. There was abject poverty, rape, hunger, incest, HIV infections and many deaths from respiratory diseases.

**My challenges as a community peacebuilder**

As a Kikuyu married to a Kalenjin, I belonged to both communities and thought I could be seen as neutral but instead, I suffered from what I would call a double tragedy. First, I was not accepted by the Kalenjin community. They regarded me as an outsider and many viewed me as a spy of my people. Likewise, the Kikuyus sidelined me. They felt I was living with the enemy and could therefore not be trusted. This did not deter me from continuing the peacebuilding work I had started. Whenever there were village barazas, I made sure I took the opportunity to talk about the need for peaceful coexistence between neighbours. As a result, I always received threats from both sides. Most of the time, I lived in fear.

\(^3\)Rural Women Peace Link is a network of rural women involved in peacebuilding within their communities. The network mobilizes women to respond to conflict early warning and humanitarian response where violent conflict has actually occurred. It operates in rift valley Kenya including cross border areas with Uganda.
From an internally displaced person to a peacebuilder

**My contributions during the 2007 post election violence**

During the 2007 violence, I was in Burnt Forest and I was badly affected. I had to leave my home and settle with other people at an IDP camp. During this period, my life was in constant danger. I received threats from so many people I even lost count. I felt it was unsafe for me to ever go back to my farm. At one time, when the threats became too much, I sought assistance from the police. Even when people returned to their homes, I felt unsafe and sought refuge in a nearby school which had police protection. Being safe would help me champion the rights of the people through mediating. During this time I worked with the police and other Kalenjin peace makers. I got so much support from the local administration, community leaders who were supporting peace initiatives and women from the IDP camps who supported me by joining me wherever I went to mediate for peace amongst our communities. After so much lobbying, the mediation that I undertook to bring back peace and harmony in my area worked well. Schools reopened and so were businesses. Communities are living in relative peace now. When relative peace was restored in Burnt Forest, women in the IDP camps and others in the community recognised my leadership skills and five women joined me to support this peacebuilding initiative.

**My advice to women**

‘There is no time a woman will have a firstborn twice, but a man can have a firstborn when he marries a second wife’,

- a Kikuyu saying

I would encourage women to do all what they could to promote peace within the families and communities. During conflicts, those who suffer the most and are left behind to pick the pieces of their lives are women. Our ethnicity should not be used as tool to divide us; but should be embraced as a tool for peace and respect for the different cultural backgrounds. Women are able to
easily mend their lives again. They are strong and as such, they symbolize hope for their families and communities. Women should jealously guard peace. Unlike the men, if they lose their first born, they will never have a first born again even if they go ahead and bear other children. It means that when a woman loses her firstborn child in conflict, it is a loss because she cannot give birth to a particular child in that position again. For this reason, I would encourage women to talk earnestly to their young sons not to be used to fight other communities. Apart from mediating at the community level, I also work with victims of gender based violence in Burnt Forest. The vice is very rampant here. There are many cases of defilement, incest, wife battery and women being disinherited by the extended families upon their husband’s death.

**My thoughts on peacebuilding and future support**

Peacebuilding is a continuous process at all levels of the community including within the families. If a family has peace and respect, this will be replicated in the community and the country at large. We need to socialize our children to respect other people who are different from them. We need to train them to resolve their differences in non violent ways. I am still working on sustaining the relative peace that we are currently having in Burnt Forest. My greatest achievement has so far been witnessing the area go through peaceful elections in 2013. I am hopeful that come 2017, this will be replicated again. Together with my fellow women, we will not rest until the fragile peace in our area is sustainable.

I am very grateful to all those who have walked with me in this journey. The Rural Women Peace Link has been my mentor. COPA ushered me into the world of trauma Healing and Counselling. I use the skills a lot when doing my mediation work. Since then I have received other trainings in counselling, I am now a trained counsellor and using the skills to help my community members overcome their challenges.
Women discuss a point in a training session

Women pulling together during a Training for Trainers session by COPA in a past training
Due to stressful conditions in the camps, many pregnant women delivered premature babies...and in the open
Rev. Bishop Cornelius Korir had just left the Burnt Forest Catholic Church compound in town. There was some relief as the evictees shared water, food, medicine and tents the Bishop had brought for them. Then there came a sudden commotion. I saw women chasing men and men running away in obedience, literally! This is a rare scene in our community. I gave my partner the food I was distributing and headed straight to where men were running away from. The otherwise open place was cordoned off by women. Inside the circle, one baby was already out and crying. Another woman was down in labour pains. The place was cold, no clothing, no blankets... They showed me other premature births, probably a result of stressful conditions associated with the violence. I communicated the information to the Bishop immediately. He brought in lots of blankets and priority was given to those mothers and the elderly. This was my first experience of violent conflict in 1991.

It was the first violent conflict in the Lorian area of Burnt Forest in Uasin Gishu where I had lived all my life. The battle was mainly between members of the Kikuyu and the Kalenjin communities over issues of land ownership and politics. When the violence broke out, all our properties were burned down and our livestock taken away from us. The place was so hostile that we had to run for safety. My family found temporary shelter at the Burnt Forest Catholic Church in the town. We ended up staying in camps for 2 months after which we decided to go back to Lorian Farm.
Stories of Women Building Peace

Though tension between the two communities was still high, we felt we would be better off at the farm. The conflict badly affected me as my parents could not afford to reconstruct the houses, restock the livestock and pay school fees for us. I had just completed my secondary education. It was decided I should stay at home while priority of school fees payment was given to my younger siblings so that they too could have some secondary education. It was painful seeing my hopes for further education diminishing but I accepted it as the fairest option the family could take in the circumstances. Though violence eventually came to an end, tension between neighbours still remained especially because many of us felt the issue of land ownership in the area was not being addressed.

In 1997, the country had another general election and once again the area erupted to violence. My family again lost everything that we had rebuilt in the 4 years. We moved out to live in the camps at the Burnt Forest shopping centre and stayed there for one month. We then moved back to the Lorian Farm. Again we started rebuilding, restocked the livestock and resumed Luke warm relations with our neighbours. In 2002 when Kenya held general elections again, there was peace because Kikuyus and Kalenjins were for the first time supporting the same presidential candidate. It became evident that politics was a major precipitant of chaos in the region.

In 2007 December, Kenya went to the polls again. Immediately the presidential results were announced, there was chaos all over the region. During this time, I was working as the Secretary to the Burnt Forest Catholic Parish. I will never forget the 29th Day of December 2007. It was a Sunday and I was still in the church when violence broke out in the area. The Parish priest had gone on an official assignment outside Uasin Gishu and had left me in-charge. I was all alone and wondered if I would be able to handle the emerging situation. By evening, so many people had flocked into the church compound and I had to let the priest know what was going on. He gave me the go ahead to do whatever I felt was necessary to save lives. All this time, I was at a loss as to where my children were as earlier in the week they had gone to visit their grandparents. I also did not know if my parents
Premature births at IDP camp triggered my peacebuilding work

were safe or not. I could not reach them by phone and I was also trapped in the Church, away from my house. The condition back in my house worried me as I already knew that looting and destruction of properties are part and parcel of violence in Kenya. Due to this, my mind was very disturbed even when I went about helping the displaced persons who were seeking shelter in the church compound.

When I managed to get through to my parents, they informed me that my children had gone to seek shelter in the neighbouring Rurigi farm since it was calmer. By this time, the road to Burnt Forest had been closed and even when the situation in Rurigi got bad, they could not leave. They were sheltered at Rurigi primary school. Soon after, Rurigi farm was burnt down but the fire did not affect the school where my children and other people were sheltering. This is when the police went for all those sheltering at the school and brought them to the Burnt Forest Catholic church where I was and got reunited with my young children. As a Christian, I realised that God is love. While He gave me His people to help in the Church, He also played a good Father to my children and ensured that He safely brought them back to me. To date, I do not want to imagine what would have happened if the children had not gone to visit their grandparents and if the violence had erupted when they were all alone in the house.

My role in the 2007 crisis

During the first day of the crisis, my main concern was to ensure that people got a place to sleep. In total, there were about 30,000 of them. I talked with elders on what we should do. The suggestion was for people to camp anywhere. There was no one with food, or blankets. Many who had come had injuries, some with very serious injuries. The church dispensary was busy throughout taking care of the injured. Since the number of those displaced was too large, some were asked to go to the neighbouring St Patrick’s Catholic School (neighbours the Catholic Church). People camped in the classroom, others outside.
Stories of Women Building Peace

I started communicating to the Catholic Diocese of Eldoret to give us help. On the 3rd day the Catholic Bishop of Eldoret Diocese, Rev. Cornelius Korir came to see how the situation was and how he could help. He called a staff from the Catholic Relief Services (CRS) who then brought in water and medicine. They also brought tents, some food and this helped the situation. Due to stressful conditions in the camps, many pregnant women delivered premature babies...and in the open! The situation was very dire with the cold and no blankets. When I communicated this information to the bishop, he brought in lots of blankets and priority was given to those mothers and the elderly. Looking at those mothers and the desperation in their faces, I vowed that from then on, I would do everything possible to ensure that these constant cases of violence between Kalenjins and Kikuyus in Burn Forest came to an end. This is when the peace work was born in me.

While at the camp, the CRS started a peacebuilding initiative for those in the camps and the communities outside the camps. As the secretary to the church, I was part of the initiative. We decided to bring in the two warring communities together. We started with intra community dialogues in April 2008. Many people at the time were still in the camps and the psychological wounds were still very raw. The dialogue forums started in the church compound. They had to do intra community because both the Kalenjin and Kikuyu were not ready to engage each other face to face. People would come from the neighbouring camps and farms to the church compound for the dialogues. At the time, there were 4 different camps in Burnt Forest. Majority of those in the camps were drawn from the Kikuyu community. Displaced Kalenjins did not stay in camps. In the Kalenjin community, it is an abomination to live in a camp for the displaced. These dialogue meetings

“As a Christian, I realised that God is love..."
Premature births at IDP camp triggered my peacebuilding work

were held every Thursday of the week and were led by Bishop Korir because he had the confidence of both Kikuyu and the Kalenjin communities.

Bishop Korir is deeply respected by all communities living in the larger Rift Valley. People have confidence in him. He is seen to have always been impartial in the conflicts and is very supportive to all. The communities decided to write down what each community felt about the other. The messages were put in a sealed envelope which was given to the Bishop for safe keeping. The Bishop kept the envelopes for one month as he gave the communities time to think over anything else they wished to tell the rival communities. After one month, envelopes were opened and the bishop gave a neutral person to read the contents out. The contents for each were read in a joint forum. Common grievances advanced by members of the two communities included land, unemployment and security. The Bishop said that these would form the agenda for the next meeting. After this, the Bishop organized 35 representatives of each of the 2 communities to go discuss more in Eldoret at the Pastoral Centre and he hired a bus for them. Interestingly enough, the Kikuyu and Kalenjin just found themselves talking to one another during the journey as they shared seats. This enabled them to sit together and share their traditional foods at the Pastoral centre in Eldoret. The traditional foods for both communities had been prepared. Relations started building. This worked because for the first time since the violence erupted, the two communities sat together and were able to talk. The three agenda were discussed in joint successive meetings for a long time. This lasted for two years. In 2008, June, the camps in the church were demolished and people went back to their farms.

Challenges

At the initial stage of the forums, most of those who came to the meetings were men but they elected me as their organizing secretary. I was the only woman in the meetings at the time. It was hard. They trusted the church and
in turn trusted me as a church employee. Even the minutes of the meetings were stored in my office.

Though many women in this area did a lot to ensure that relations are restored, we do not hear much about them. Women are socialized not to talk much about their achievements.

**Gains from the UNSCR 1325 training**

Knowledge of UNSCR 1325 has helped me to appreciate the need to work with women in a structured way. In our groups, most of the beneficiaries are women. I will use the knowledge to sensitize them on how they can play substantial roles in maintaining peace in their areas. I will advise women to form groups at the village level and to carry out their peacebuilding work effectively. In their groups, it is easy to talk of what they have done as it comprises efforts by many individuals. Through groups, it is also easier for them to access financial support to uplift their lives e.g. through the Uwezo (empowerment) fund. Peacebuilding requires sacrifice. I would like to tell my fellow women not to engage in it expecting quick results or financial gains. With time however, the communities start appreciating the effort when they start recognising the fruits of your labour.
HOW I TAKE PEACE FROM DOOR TO DOOR
By Rael Chebichi Bett

“As business ladies, we use the avenue to preach and reach out to more women and other members of the society with the message of peace and good neighbourliness.”
Stories of Women Building Peace

*St. Stephen Kipkeino group focuses on women empowerment to uplift the livelihood of women through table banking and women ‘chamaa’ - which means small group. We have an outreach programme on peace demonstration where we perform skits and plays that seek to encourage and promote good neighbourliness and peace within the community. We held one peace demonstration in Langas after the post election violence in 2007. It helped a lot in uniting the people together and embracing forgiveness and reconciliation for the purpose of moving on and continuing with life in spite of what had happened to them.*

I am widow aged 52 and a mother of six. Initially, I found it very challenging to address issues to do with peacebuilding since people were filled with hatred and bitterness. It was not until I attended training on peacebuilding that I became confident to handle such situations. We learnt how to share with the people who still harboured bitterness and hatred, the importance of living together in peace and loving ourselves in our diversity. We realized that the people who suffer more in times of conflict are women since they are the ones who shoulder a lot of responsibilities. The importance of engaging in leadership at all levels as women was exhaustively discussed and women challenged to take a plunge into leadership.

> We realized that the people who suffer more in times of conflict are women since they are the ones who shoulder a lot of responsibilities.

As business ladies, we use the avenue to preach and reach out to more
women and other members of the society with the message of peace and
good neighbourliness. As an individual, I usually do door to door selling of
merchandise and through that avenue I am able to get a lot of information
of different kinds. The platform presents me with the opportunity to address
the issues that I have heard through open dialogue and solving any conflicts
and issues that crop up through peaceful ways. I usually emphasize the
importance of living together in a peaceful way and the fact that we need
each other since no one can live in this world alone.

It is important for women to know and pursue what they are entitled to. This
will help them towards transforming the society for the better. They should
take appropriate responsibilities that do not hinder them from playing their
rightful roles as women in the society.
FORGIVING THE WOMAN WHO TOOK MY HOUSE MADE ME BECOME A SUCCESS STORY

By Jane Asman

“ My cows and chicken were all missing and I knew the people who had taken them
Forgiving the woman who took my house

When I lost my house to a woman whom I knew very well, it became clear to me what a minute of lawlessness has in store for the weaker persons. Aged 39 and a mother of 4 young children, I was thrown out of my house ruthlessly with me only striving to save my dear life and those of my children’s. My family lost everything else.

It was in 2007. I was living in Kapsaret, Uasin Gishu County. Violence erupted after the Presidential election results had just been announced. My family became among the first victims of the post election violence that extended into the early months of 2008. We had to flee our home. Without anything to call our own, we landed in an IDP camp at the Showground in Eldoret to start a new life. The experience was very painful to me. It had taken me and my husband years to put together a house for the family yet during the violence the house was forcefully taken over from us by other people. While I started a new life of misery in the open air space, they had my roof over their heads, the cows, the chicken...The possibility of losing my all for good demoralised me to the extent that I could not concentrate on anything I tried to do. Life in the camp was heartbreaking. Many necessities of life were missing. The few that were available existed in small quantities and accessing them was difficult and irregular.
My work as a peacebuilder

After living in the IDP camp for three months, I decided to go back to Kapsaret to check how things were. My cows and chicken were all missing and I knew the people who had taken them. The people who had occupied our house threatened me with dire consequences should I be perceived to be making any attempts geared towards regaining my properties and especially the land on which the house stood.

I realized it would be difficult for me to recover what I had lost. However, I strongly felt that I was able to recover even part of it if I designed and pursued a non violent strategy. In Kapsaret, the post election violence involved three communities. This was a challenge to me. I resolved to go the dialogue way. In this dialogue, I first approached my husband to go and talk with the village elder about our situation and the forceful occupation of our property. In a rare turn of events, those who had occupied our house agreed to the dialogue meeting and they even agreed to leave if we did not ask for the chicken and livestock. Though it was a loss for me, I realized it was a better option than the situation in which we were at the time. When this approach worked, I reasoned that if we used the same at the village level, we could all reach some compromise as different communities.

I resolved to do something to bring the three community groups together; the first strategy I used was to approach women and form groups in which every community living in Kapsaret Division was represented. The main agenda of forming the groups was to discuss peace. We looked at what we had gone through as women and what we should do in order to succeed in bringing back peace and harmonious co-existence within the community. One of the things I emphasized to the women was to embrace dialogue. I gave the women messages to take to their husbands, telling their husbands that as women, we had decided to work together to try and bring peace in the community.
Forgiving the woman who took my house

I was inspired to do reconciliation work mainly due to what I saw and went through during the post Election Violence (PEV). I formed groups that were meeting in members' houses. So many women were afraid because their husbands had warned them not to talk with other women from other ethnic communities. The purpose of the women meeting in the houses was to drink tea together in order to enhance trust. I partnered with the DPC Wareng and the local administration to reach out to more women. In all the meetings we talked about peace only. At first it was a challenge to have women come for the meetings. But as time passed by and being insistent, more and more women kept on joining the various groups I had helped form.

The challenge that I got during this process was to convince women to attend meetings. Most women were suspicious of one another. Since I belonged to the ethnic community that was largely the victim of PEV, some women thought I was grouping them in order to revenge in a big way! They were also afraid of their husbands because they were told not to interact with other women from other ethnic backgrounds. There was poor communication which made it very hard to find the women.

I overcame the challenges by first of all forgiving all the people who had wronged me during the PEV. I particularly chose to overcome the bitterness I had within me by forgiving and reconciling with the woman who took my house. She became my best friend. I worked with her so closely to the extent that other women wondered how I could work with the same person who enjoyed the comfort of my house when I was enduring deplorable conditions at the IDP camp. This gesture really worked positively for me. It made me a role model and a success story. It brought the competition between revenge and forgiveness into sharp focus but I was there to assure them with words and my life example that forgiveness works miracles. I challenged them to think about one sentence someone once told me that completely changed my life; that living with bitterness is like drinking poison and expecting your enemy to die. Every time you genuinely forgive your enemy, you instantly feel as if a heavy burden is lifted off your shoulder.
The women started looking at their own issues differently without holding grudges. It encouraged more women to form groups or join the existing ones. When women spoke in one voice, the situation became lighter and signs of peace started being seen. Markets and other businesses resumed operation. I got support from Focal Area Development Agricultural Committee (FADAC). At the village barazas I was appointed the leader and FADAC took me to the interior areas where it was difficult to reach. My other source of strength was the International Funding for Agricultural Development (IFAD) of which I am a member. The area chief also supported me to reach out to more people especially women and youth.

Another issue is that women do not support one another because of various reasons like, ignorance, jealousy and illiteracy.

What worked for me was confidence, my life example of forgiveness, determination and dialogue. I used that a lot. The impact I had was that more women groups meant for reconciliation were being formed, people opened businesses, there was more interaction, and more women started working together even in sharing work in one another’s land.

Women are seen as children in some communities. They can hardly talk in front of men or community. In some communities, women have strived to be where they are because they used that window of opportunity to economically empower themselves through income generating activities (IGA). Some women lack confidence while illiteracy has also played a major role in hindering women from effectively participating in peacebuilding initiatives. I have realized that most men have left their roles to the women. The women hardly have time for themselves to attend meetings that discuss
their issues. A big percentage of men have relaxed and left women to do their work. Another issue is that women do not support one another because of various reasons like, ignorance, jealousy and illiteracy. I once asked women to support me because I wanted to vie for county representative position in the 2013 elections. The women asked me what I was going to give them so that they could vote for me.

I advise fellow women not to listen to distracting issues around them. They should block their ears not to take in some of the pushdowns being said out there. Our members are socialised to stand firm and do what is right in peacebuilding. Now that relative peace is prevailing, we know that peace is a process and we must work for it. I emphasize that the women continue with the IGAs, peace meetings, dialogues and reconciliation whenever there is a sign of conflict.

I have added skills on Peacebuilding and how to handle issues concerning women. Focus should now be extended to address domestic violence which is rampant in my area. The issue is very sensitive because women talk about it so much whenever they have their meetings. Most of them get advice on what to do but many are not able to access help because of ignorance and very high levels of poverty and retrogressive cultural beliefs. From my community, women have contributed a lot to peacebuilding. Even as COPA was training me on the UN SCR 1325, I realized that as women from Kapsaret, we have been implementing the resolution especially the participation, promotion and relief and recovery pillars.
Since I had not engaged in peacebuilding before, I did not know what I was doing was an act of cooling emotions so that people could get to talk together again.
The 2007 post election violence in Kenya presented me with an experience I will never forget. It changed my life completely. Not only did I lose my father and younger brother in the violence but also all the worldly possessions I had acquired over the years. A mother of six children, I was evicted out my land and felt reduced to nothing. I became a destitute with no place to sleep, no food and no clothes to wear except for what I had worn on that fateful day.

The violence pitted Kalenjins against Kikuyus. The residents receded to their ethnic identities and organised themselves into battle groups for protection and attacks. I was already a Kikuyu lady married to a Kalenjin man. We wondered which of the tribal groups we would fit as a couple without being suspected of leaking information to the rival community.

My experiences with conflict

Before the 2007 post election violence, though I had lived in Uasin Gishu, I had not been personally affected. On 30th December, my family was among those that went to set camp at the Catholic Cathedral in Eldoret town. The small space had suddenly become home for too many people. I decided to relocate to the Eldoret Agricultural Show grounds. This marked the beginning of the disintegration of my family. The older children moved out of Uasin Gishu to Naivasha in Nakuru County while the others remained with me. It soon emerged that the 2007 was ethnic in nature. There was disputed land
ownership in the area. Members of the Kalenjin community felt that their land had been unfairly taken from them during the colonial period and in the post colonial era had been unfairly sold off to the Kikuyu community through land buying companies that had been set up with the help of the first government following Kenya’s independence in 1963. There was a feeling that the first government only assisted Kikuyus to buy land in Rift Valley. Issues of economic power in the area also came up. Some of the communities had been prospering while others were languishing in deprivation. There was also the issue of political leadership. Members of the Kalenjin community and others were against a Kikuyu presidency. They wanted a change of guard. The Kikuyu community on the other hand was supporting President Mwai Kibaki who is a Kikuyu.

Initially when I was evicted out of my land, I was very bitter and in shock. I had never before imagined that a time would come when my survival would depend on the good will of other people. I had to depend on others for food, clothing, where to sleep and more. It was deeply humbling and humiliating at the same time. I did not like the situation I had found myself in. I convinced myself that I needed to go back to where I had lived before and have my former life back. I needed to relate and to talk with my neighbours in the same way it had been before this violence tore us apart.

The strong desire for things to normalize pushed me to start moving in the show grounds, from one family to another, listening to their experiences, and comforting them. I used my story to help others realise how they were better off since they had just lost material possessions which with time they could accumulate again and revert to the kind of life they had before. I had lost lives that were very dear to me and which would never be recovered yet I was willing to move on with life. This helped to bring down the levels of bitterness those at the showground felt. I became a wounded healer.

Since I had not engaged in peacebuilding before, I did not know what I was doing was an act of cooling emotions so that people could get to talk together again. As I talked to other families within the showground, I would gather...
I became a wounded healer

the courage and venture out of the camp and back to Kimuri farm to talk with the Kalenjin neighbours we had left behind. I particularly used to engage with women asking them where things went wrong. I would appeal to them as a woman to give me food and clothing to take back to those I had left behind in the showground. This shuttling between the communities helped to keep the bridges of dialogue alive between women of the two communities. Whatever I got, I would distribute to those in the showground. This gave me courage to also go to humanitarian organizations like the Red Cross asking for help on behalf of others who could not. I would get sanitary pads for the girls and take back to the showgrounds. Through this, I also started creating linkages with other organizations. Through these activities, my peacebuilding work for the community was born.

Operation Rudi Nyumbani (go home)

In 2009, we were taken out of the showground and back to our farms by the International Organization of Migration (IOM). Through the informal shuttling that had been taking place between those at the showground and those at the Kimuri farm; we decided that once we got back to our homes, we would form joint peace committees comprising all communities within the farm. The committees would monitor peace in the area and steer dialogue meetings. They had the support of the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission (CJPC) and the provincial administration.

I had never before imagined that a time would come when my survival would depend on the good will of other people.
Though I was absent in the first meeting, those who were present elected me in absentia on the strength of the shuttling I had done between the two groups while we were at the showground. Mercy Corps was looking for people already doing peacebuilding to be trained. This is how I got my first official peacebuilding training through Mercy Corps. With the new knowledge I had gained and the backing from the community, I started doing serious peacebuilding. I was elected to head the District Peace Committee. My passion for this work comes from the fact I would not want anyone to go though the humiliating experience I went through as an IDP. That is also when I realized that violence affects women and men differently. Most women were traumatized while many men had managed to pick up their lives.

I have hitherto organized many dialogue forums between the Kikuyu and Kalenjin communities. While some have been formal, others are informal engagements between members of the two communities. One thing that needs to be clarified is the assumption that only members of the Kikuyu community suffered in the violence. Many Kalenjins were also affected and several families are living in pain. There are those whose sons disappeared during the violence. Nobody knows what happened to them. Their trauma comes from the fact that without seeing the bodies, it has become hard to put a closure to this and to start the healing process. With the ongoing investigations by the International Criminal Court (ICC) about the atrocities committed in the area in 2007 and 2008, nobody talks about this experience because many are afraid that if they speak, they will get arrested. So they suffer in silence. I have been organizing forums where these people talk about their experiences and this has helped to start the healing process.

The biggest challenge facing women in peace work is that they do not have the financial capacity to engage.
I became a wounded healer

I remember a time when some members of the Kalenjin community hired a Kikuyu taxi driver to take them from Eldoret to Smart in Eldoret South. Before they could reach Smart, they had a disagreement about the amount he was to charge them and he was killed. When this information reached the Kikuyu community, their young men grouped together and vowed to revenge. I received the information while I was in my farm. It was obvious that if the Kikuyus did revenge, things would be really bad. I immediately took a motor bike and rode very fast to where the Kikuyu youth had grouped together. By the time I arrived, they had already barricaded roads so that they could pull out Kalenjins travelling through the road and kill them. I pleaded with the youth, begged them to explore alternative ways of handling the case. I told them to remember what had happened in December 2007 and that they needed to put themselves in the shoes of the innocent Kalenjins they were planning to kill.

‘How would members of your families feel if you were the ones travelling probably to meet them and you got killed on the way just because of a conflict that you knew nothing about? Please think of the anguish your families would have waiting for you, not knowing you were killed along the way’. I pleaded. The words had a magical effect. The verbal defence expected of a youth dissatisfied never came out of any of them. Instead, I saw them stealing a glance at one another. The Kikuyu youth silently started removing the barricades from the road. Later, the next surprise came from the members of the Kalenjin community. They easily gave out names of the suspects. Seven of the suspects were apprehended and the law took its course.

In Langas where I live, majority of the residents are Luos and Kikuyus. The two communities dislike each other. I wanted this Luke warm relationship to end. I devised a way so that in every peace meetings, these communities frankly talk it out and build bridges in their relationship. In the peace meetings, we decided to have forums where Kikuyus would openly tell the Luos why they do not like them and vice versa. These open forums have helped in building trust. During the initial discussions, people would get
so surprised to realise that their dislike for each other is mainly based on assumptions or flimsy reasons. They would be surprised at what makes them fight and hate each other.

**Challenges faced in my work**

Economic capacity of a woman seems to mean they rely on the man all the time. They find it difficult participating in peacebuilding since in the communities, no one pays you to engage in peacebuilding work. I have been doing this out of my good will. I was very humiliated when I went to live as an IDP and I do not want this to happen to me again or to any other person. As I began this work, no one seemed to recognize what I was doing. Now that the results of the work I have done are visible, various communities in my area really appreciate me. They give me early warning information. During the March 2013 general elections, the Kikuyu and Kalenjin communities came to ask me if I wanted to be a nominated member of the County Assembly. Although this was a great honour and in recognition of my work, I said no since I felt I was not ready to get into politics.

The organizations that have helped me in my work either through finances or trainings include COPA, Nairobi Peace Initiative (NPI)-Africa, UN Women, Accord, Mercy Corps, Konrad Adeneur, CAPI and NCCK. The biggest challenge facing women in peace work is that they do not have the financial capacity to engage, sometimes even when they want to do something they are not able. Other times, the funds are too little to make impact.

I have been encouraging women to participate in peacebuilding. I have tried very much to have women in DPCs. Whenever there are peace meetings, I go from door to door to ensure that women will participate. When the DPCs were started, there was only one woman out of fifteen officials. Now the number of women is seven. I have assisted to form the Uasin Gishu Women for Peace which also engages in table banking. This group has about 105 other smaller groups spread across villages in Uasin Gishu and engaging in
peacebuilding and economic empowerment. In our group, we have succeeded in eliminating tribalism. Women still need a lot of support especially in building their knowledge capacities in peacebuilding and leadership. My suggestion is that peacebuilding projects should have connector projects that help communities come together. Exchange visits also help appreciate other communities. In bringing women on board, let us also work with male allies. They will help support our efforts. I would encourage women to emulate the late Wangari Maathai and Martha Karua⁴. The two women have always been very firm in what they believe in. They fight for the rights of women regardless of the opposition they face. I want to let them know that one woman’s effort can result in a lot of impact. For instance, in February 2008 when main parties to the Kenyan conflict were negotiating, Graca Machel single handedly ensured that women voices were heard. Women should not shy away from working for peace.

**Gains from the UN Women and COPA project**

The UN Women and COPA project has sensitized me to keep records and to document what I am doing. This way, I am able to know if I am having desired results or not. Through records, I am able to know how many people I have touched. It has been a source of encouragement to me and I recommend to all women working for peace to keep records of the work they are doing.

⁴The late Wangari Maathai was founder of Green Belt Movement and winner Nobel Peace price. Martha Karua is a former minister in Kenya and also contested for presidency in Kenya in 2013 general elections.
WE USE COMMUNITY CHOIR TO TRANSFORM LIVES
By Rhoda Cheptanui Koech.

“If you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping in a closed room with a mosquito.”
'If you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping in a closed room with a mosquito’, says an African Proverb. The moral of this African proverb had remained hidden from me until 2008 when I came face to face with reality.

The 2007 post election violence was gradually coming to an end. Tension was still high. I had been living in Burnt Forest for a long time but this was the only violence that directly affected me. It left the area badly devastated and relations among Communities completely destroyed. Many lives were lost and many of those who were lucky to survive had had their property destroyed or forcefully taken away from them. People were evidently desperate and worried of what the next day would bring. The area obviously needed a ‘Messiah’.

At 35 years of age, I felt young, inexperienced and too small to fit in a ‘Messiah’s’ shoes. It was this feeling that brought live in my mind the African proverb, ‘If you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping in a closed room with a mosquito’. I felt challenged and instantly resolved to arise from despair and to do something that will help me and others to restart our lives.

Before the violence interrupted our lives, I used to work at the community but on livelihood and economic matters. I used my knowledge of the community and started tracing my former contact persons that could be found. This search led me to a group of members of many different communities living
Stories of Women Building Peace

in Burnt Forest. We formed the Interpeace Community Choir to help heal the wounds and to enable us interact the way we used to before the violence. The choir was cosmopolitan comprising members of the Kikuyu, Kalenjin, Luo, Kamba, Luhyia, Turkana and Kisii communities. It also had a number of men. The group initially started with a membership of 160 people but it has currently dropped to 55 active members.

Forming the Interpeace Community choir was a big challenge. At the time, there was a lot of suspicion between members of different communities. People were still hurting and there was scepticism that this group would break down along ethnic lines like it had happened to others before. When we were forming this group, it was a big challenge as different communities were not even communicating with others perceived as ‘enemies’. Talking to a member of an ‘enemy’ community raised questions. To her community, one risked being branded a betrayer while to the other community; the same person could be seen as a spy. The idea of Interpeace Community Choir was good but the risk involved made the potential members drag their feet. We were convinced it was the best way to go and we never gave any doubt a chance. We intensified mobilization and recruitment.

"The idea of Interpeace Community Choir was good but the risk involved made the potential members drag their feet."

The choir has attracted the support of all communities in Burnt Forest and has been able to bring on board all groups including the youth and the men. To link up the youth from the different communities in the area, the choir formed a Community Based Organization (CBO) by the name Bedsup Youth Peace Group that specifically brings the youth from the different communities together and engage in economic and community peace activities. The regular
meetings and group activities of the youth body have helped to ease tensions and to break barriers to communication by the different youths in our area. In 2009, the choir was joined by a group of elders from all the communities in Burnt Forest and they engaged on a tree planting project in a place known as Tarakwa. The tree nursery is aimed at uniting the different communities. The proceeds from the sales are shared among the members to uplift their lives and to rebuild what was destroyed in the 2007 and 2008 violence.

Likewise, within the choir, in 2009, we formed another CBO known as Kalyet Thayo. The word, ‘Kalyet’ is a Kalenjin word that means, ‘peace’, and ‘Thayo’ is Akikuyu word that means, ‘peace’. Kalyet Thayo is all about making peace with various groups in Burnt Forest. It is aimed at assisting group members who were affected by the 2007 post election violence to restart their lives. The Kalyet Thayo CBO helps the women to integrate peace in their economic and livelihood day to day activities. For instance we started by buying a sheep for each of the women in the group. Each sheep is called ‘amani’, a Kiswahili word meaning ‘peace’. The subsequent kids are all named ‘amani’. We have many of them now in different homes and owned by different communities. The sheep are aimed at reminding members the importance of peace and why the area should never experience another 2007 type of violence again. The Kalyet Thayo group organizes group meetings in which issues of peace and security are addressed. When we attend barazas, we are given an opportunity to talk to the community members. Sometimes, we do individual visitations to families who were badly affected by the post election violence. This has helped a lot to start rebuilding trust among the communities in Burnt Forest.

In the Kalyet Thayo group, we have been doing individual visitations to community members who have gone through trauma as a result of their experiences in the violence. We talk to them and give them hope that it is possible to start live again. When we are visiting members of a Kikuyu family, all non Kikuyu women are expected to buy gifts and present to the family as a sign of good will and reconciliation. This happens when we visit
**Stories of Women Building Peace**

different communities. For instance, if we are visiting a Kalenjin family, all the non Kalenjins in the groups are the ones expected to buy gifts and do the presentations. This has helped to break the ice between various communities and to build reconciliation bridges. Our mixed groups have helped to keep the dialogue on peace amongst the various communities live.

In our group, we have now completed plans to buy a ‘peace’ cow every month for each of the members. Apart from reminding us that we need to stay in peace, the cow project will also be helpful in uplifting the living standards of members as each family at one time will have access to their own milk. When the cow calves, the grown up offspring or the mother can be sold out to help members engage in another economic activity or even use the money to pay fees for their school going children.

As a group, we are working with the local administration personnel, especially the Chief, the District Officers and the County Commissioner’s office. We have been integrated into the Nyumba Kumi initiative, a community policing strategy by the Kenya government in Burnt Forest where we seek to promote good neighbourliness and knowing our immediate neighbours as a security measure. We have also worked with Peacenet and Safer world organizations. As women, we face many challenges in our day to day life. We need to work together as a group to ensure our families and our girls are safe. If we do this, we will have built and protected the future generations.
A demonstration of how peacebuilders should support each other across all levels

Women sing and dance for peace in Uasin Gishu accompanied by Mary Chepkwony
I WITNESSED VIOLENCE IN ITS WORST FORM
By Susan Akello Ojwach

...do not expect instant love in return from the ones you have assisted; just wait for love to grow in their hearts.
I first experienced ethnic violence in Uasin Gishu County immediately after the Presidential election results were announced in December 2007. I was living in Langas estate, the area that was badly affected by the violence. I witnessed violence in its worst form. Very close to me, a man turned against another man and killed him just because he belonged to a different community. What pained me the most was to see a group of young men violently attack ‘Baba Kangumu’, my immediate neighbour. We fondly referred to him as ‘Baba Kangumu’ – Father Pastry’ because he used to cook and sell pastries on a roadside kiosk. The merciless group roughed him up, dragged him along the road and thoroughly beat him up, leaving him down for dead.

He was always very kind to us. I remember crying and shouting for the youth to stop beating him but they threatened to beat me the same way if I did not stop the ‘noise’. Eventually, what they termed as ‘noise’ attracted some people and a crowd was gathering. This made them annoyed, scared and they fled away leaving the bloody scene for us to manage. In a mixed feeling of pity and hope, I saw some of his body parts making uncoordinated movements in a pool of his blood. He was still alive but helpless. There was chaos everywhere and it was risky moving anywhere. We helped the old man reach the safety at the Race course centre. I felt the man was tortured for no reason and it was so shameful that regardless of his age, he was not spared by the youth who were obviously the age of his son. I thank God up to date that I saved his life.
Aged 48, I serve as a secretary with the Race Course United Sisters which is an organisation we founded together with Joyce Moraa and Pamela Awino. I have had a formal training in security, gender and child protection and I serve as a treasurer in the Kapseret Divisional Community Policing, Gender and Child Protection Group.

The Race Course United Sisters had no financial resources but we all agreed there was need to do something to help the people who had been displaced and were living at the Eldoret showground. The situation was pathetic and the young people were using the opportunity to indulge in immorality. I visited the show ground severally and made friends with some of the women there. I would then go out to the community and solicit for support with basic things like food and clothing which I would then take back to the women at the showground. As a result, I made friends with many of them though I come from what was perceived as a rival community. With time, I realized that the work of bringing the communities in the area together needed more people than just me.

One Sunday I invited my chairlady Joyce Moraa to the show ground. Immediately we left the site, we discussed and agreed that it was a high time something was done to end tribal clashes and embrace peace. We discussed the same during one of our group meetings. Many group members supported the idea. The campaign scheme was laid down but we felt inadequate in terms of funds, knowledge and skill. We started preaching peace in our churches and the nearby schools, politely convincing people to forgive and reconcile to embrace peaceful co-existence within ourselves. Consistently, we popularized the chorus inviting everyone to say, ‘Peace begins with me’.

...the more I stumbled in handling difficult situation the sweeter the success when it finally came.
I witnessed violence in its worst form

We then started door to door campaigning for peace within our area. My dear group chairlady Joyce Moraa gave us material support like blankets for a few victims. Peacebuilding continued in Uasin Gishu because of positive reactions and the changes we observed. Some members of the community voluntarily returned the stolen goods to their owners as they apologized and reconciled with the owners. Such cases were real and numerous but we may not mention any household due to security reasons.

As the Group suggested, we also wanted to be “a ray of hope to the hopeless”. The group also worked closely together with Pioneer Chief Mr Philip Songok, community policing and the Langas Officer Commanding Police Station (OCS) to enable the residents embrace peace. I became so much known in my community because of my participation in peacebuilding.

Despite the challenges we went through, we managed to form smaller community self-help groups preaching peace. Some of the groups exist to date. Those who were psychologically affected got help through counselling, came to terms with what had happened to them and moved on with life in their new situations.

I am a little bit empowered with skills and knowledge gained from seminars training and practical participation in public forums, barazas and churches.

Some of my community members have resorted to unite as one. This is a window of hope in peacebuilding that we cannot afford to take no notice of. It is my request that the government, international organizations and other stakeholders give us financial support, health support, material support, skill and knowledge support to sensitize our community on the importance of peace right from their household to public places.

In Kenyan, matters touching on women are very critical. The Kenyan population must be socialised to realise that ‘Behind any successful man there is a woman’. We must discard the outdated and baseless belief that
“a woman is there to be seen; not to be heard.” The old saying is still in use especially in many parts of the countryside. It is high time the government mobilized and sensitized the stakeholders on this issue so that all women know their rights and potentials to enable them fully participate in nation building.

Many women especially in the rural villages are lagging behind simply because of the following among others reasons;

- Lack of empowerment in skills and knowledge
- Discrimination based on myths and beliefs like ‘a women is there to give birth while a man is the head of the house whether is a drunkard, wife batterer’
- Ignorance and failure to know their rights as women in a society.
- Lack of education for girl child

Personally, I got married immediately after completing my secondary level of education but not until I participated in such forums did I know my rights as a woman and consequently embraced change. The Group has boosted some women financially through table banking. Some of our women were able to pay school fees for their children through loans. Our members have participated during election campaigns since 2007 and have even encouraged women to participate and vie for major seats like chairpersons, secretaries and treasurers in various institutions. I am for example the current treasurer Kapseret Division community policing.

In Kenya society, women have to grapple with the traditions and cultures some of which have no real meaning in life but are serious health hazard and a barrier to taking full charge of one’s sexuality

My advice to the women; “Tenda wema nenda zako” (do your best and go your way) and when the door of happiness closes another opens. As peace makers do not expect instant love in return from the ones you have assisted; just wait for love to grow in their hearts. If it does not, be contented it will
I witnessed violence in its worst form

grow in you for your achievements.

**Lessons learned**

I’ve learned that there is no prosperity without stumbling blocks. I kept on stumbling in most cases but the more I stumbled in handling difficult situation the sweeter the success when it finally came. Therefore, never ever give up due to challenges. This phrase has kept me running smoothly in my day to day peacebuilding. A bird once asked a bee,

‘You work so hard to make honey but people steal it all, don’t you feel sad?”

The bee replied, “No, they will not steal my art of making it; neither will they separate me from the source of my blessings.”

• My final advice to a strong woman for peace builders, come one come all to join and promote Uasin Gishu women for peace to restore peace in our society.
Some of my community members have resulted to unite as one. This is a window of hope in peacebuilding that we cannot afford to take no notice of.
When the 2007 post election violence started, the groups involved were dangerously armed and attacked with the swiftness that would make one believe it was well planned, soldiers well trained and that they had clear targets. I panicked.

Now 62 years old and a trained Public Officer turned business woman, I have lived in Uasin Gishu for many decades. I can say that since 1992, the inter-community relations in the area especially between the Kikuyus and the Kalenjins have always had unresolved issues. These issues are brought about by misunderstandings and have unfortunately resulted in the loss of lives, destruction of property and displacements of people.

When the first tribal clashes happened in Uasin Gishu in 1992, I was the leader of the Catholic Women Association. I was heavily involved in provision of relief for families that had been displaced including food stuffs and clothing. Together with other Catholic Association Women, we took the initiative to find out why people were fighting. We realized that apart from political differences, there were also issues of land ownership and general animosity. We talked to the women, men and youths. We had meetings in church that were steered towards fact finding missions. It was easy for me to talk to the different communities in the church since I am neither a Kikuyu nor a Kalenjin. The fact that I was the leader of the women earned me a lot of respect. Initially we faced a challenge in that men were not willing to be part of our group. We were able to form ‘Jumuia’ (small Christian community) that was made up of members from the different communities from the various zones.
We were able to control the situation and the initiative helped restore calm and harmony in the church and in the community. We had 7 zones comprising of different Jumuias. The Jumuia were composed of the family (mother, father and children). We were able to come with a peaceful environment in the church. Being universal, the Catholic Church accommodates members from different churches in our initiative.

Our worst experience was the 2007 post election violence. It came as though it had been planned and calculated but we later realized that was not the case. Everything turned upside down. We could hear about destruction within Uasin Gishu and it affected everybody. It was as though there was no government, no administration, and no faithful hence the worst experience that anyone who lived in Uasin Gishu at the time will never forget.

It came up to us as church leaders to see how we could reconcile and how to reach out to the affected people. Majority of the victims were children and women who had gone back to salvage their property. Most of the churches were occupied by the internally displaced persons. It took us time to capture and address the situation. The healing time was challenging in that, people had to search their hearts. As a church we initiated the healing avenues where people could go and talk out their experiences towards promoting reconciliation. I am proud of the Catholic Church since they did a good work in giving out livelihood items to all the affected individuals in the displacement camps. The inter-denominational meetings between and among the tribes living within Uasin Gishu also helped a great deal.

“Majority of them wanted to move to a new environment with the hope that this would help them forget what had happened.”
The initiatives to promote healing and reconciliation were initiated by the local administration by providing avenues where groups of persons from different communities came together to solve what they had witnessed and gone through amicably. Biblical teachings and guidance helped to soften their hearts and allow for acceptance and forgiveness. We received good will from the head of the church through the donation of basic human needs such as food and blankets.

My work was made easy by the credibility I received from the community because of my age, my Christian disposition and the position that I held in the church. I was also seen as neutral because I belonged to a community that was not part of the conflict. Through our outreach programmes to the camps, the affected individuals expressed bitterness and anger but through our humility and Biblical approach, we reached out with our message of forgiveness, healing and reconciliation. It was quite a challenge talking to the affected individuals to convince them to forgive the perpetrators of the violence and especially those who had done wrong to them. Convincing them to go back to their homes was not easy either. Majority of them wanted to move to a new environment with the hope that this would help them forget what had happened.

We experienced numerous challenges in our work. A number of livelihoods had been destroyed. This led to lack of income and hence dependency was so high that we were forced to shoulder the basic human needs. Different communities engaged in blame games, accusing one another of causing the violence but themselves playing the righteous. Not even the church was spared the blame. Some of the victims thought that the church was aware of what was to happen but did not take the initiative to inform them in advance. We saw a number of families break apart just because the parents came from different tribes.

The impact of our work was positive and successful. As we noted the importance of various communities to understand each other, we formulated
initiatives that ensured inter-community dialogue and culminated in forgiveness and reconciliation. Churches realized a good turn out and attributed it to self acceptance and embracing the new hope of living together as a community. Through avenues of merry go rounds we were able to unite and bring together people from different communities. Our faith and bringing different denominations to work together as one helped to strengthen unity and enabled us to achieve the goal of peace.

As a mother working with the Catholic Women Association and a leader in the area of peacebuilding, I feel encouraged that we were able to restore the trust among all the people whose lives we touched. There was no discrimination on the basis of religion or ethnic group. Justice was realized as people willingly returned whatever they had taken from their neighbours. As a member of the peace committee we did an evaluation on what worked and we were happy to know what worked and what did not work out. The committees exist in every church and they work towards ensuring that peace prevails within Uasin Gishu.

In the peacebuilding field, an individual should be ready to practice self denial and focus on the well being of the society. We all surrender to the umbrella of peacemaking. As women we should be at the forefront of peacemaking, a model in the family and a model of peace in the country. We should be at peace with self and the peace we are looking for will be achieved in all grounds, institutions and the government at large.
I HELPED A GIRL NOT TO ABORT
By Emily Jepkemboi Korir

“...I could not hide my joy when I heard of the successful delivery and that the girl had reiterated that she would love her newborn baby.”
I was born in Nandi County, in a family of five; two boys and two girls. My mother passed on in 1978 when I was still young and to date, we live with my father. I got hooked up in an abusive relationship that forced me to engage in the brewing of illicit alcohol in a bid to earn an income to sustain my family. I got involved in an accident that left me using hand support crutches. This made me to reflect on my life. I requested God to give me a second chance to live and an opportunity to reach out and serve Him since this was a deep desire in my heart.

My desire to serve God was promptly put to test on a matter of life and death. I met a girl who was pregnant and had planned to abort the foetus, or kill the child immediately she gave birth. The decision to kill had already been taken. It was the decision on when and how to kill that remained to be sealed. God had indeed opened an avenue for me to serve Him.

I took the initiative to talk to her and persuaded her not to abort or kill the baby after giving birth. It was difficult for me to go further than that but I saw the Girl’s face brighten when I told her I would ensure someone or I adopted her child as soon as she gave birth. That marked the beginning of a series of guidance and counselling sessions that followed. I kept praying for the girl and through the intervention of God, she gave birth to a baby girl at a time when her heart had been transformed and she decided to own the baby. I thanked God as I recalled my own experiences and especially the time I was hooked in an abusive relationship.

I could not hide my joy when I heard of the successful delivery and that the girl had reiterated that she would love her newborn baby. This experience made me to pursue guidance and counselling for girls as a way of helping them transform internal conflict and contributing to peace in the community. My entry point to community is through church groups, I have since extended the peace teaching to churches and even had the opportunity to reach out
I helped a girl not to abort to 300 women in Elgeyo Marakwet through the groups that I work with on the basis of invitation.

Through the groups we use different approaches towards promoting peace. The use of video promotes self questioning on what is the best way forward, proposes and encourages intermarriage between the different tribes living in the area and helps in discouraging women from engaging in the brew of illicit alcohol. This is done by encouraging them to form groups that help them generate income for themselves in a proper and right manner. Since I know that I have a talent in mobilizing and working with children and women, I look forward to forming an organization that focuses on empowering and building the status of women in my area.

Women are change drivers; they have a way of convincing men and the whole society to see it their way. This power of influence should be used to bring a positive change that will transform our society into a peaceful one. Women are generally receptive and outgoing. They have the power to change and they can manage the change when they know who they are as the managers of their homes and the country at large. Women are open and they rarely keep things that are bad to themselves, they usually open up easily. It is important to know that when you train a woman you train a nation.
Stories of Women Building Peace

HOW I WORKED WITH A PRIEST TO AVERT PLANNED VIOLENCE
By Anna C. Bungei

“Many men see themselves as the communities’ defenders and that the power to create war and peace is in their hands.”
YaMumbi is an area within Eldoret that is predominantly occupied by members of the Kikuyu community. Starting from 1992, the area is always affected by ethnic clashes especially during the country’s general elections. Violence hit the area in 1997 and again in 2007 and 2008.

During the 1992 violence, I overheard a group of youth talking about how they would fight members of a particular community. From the tone of their voices, I knew this was serious and I was sure that if I did not act, innocent people would be hurt. As a social worker with the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, I decided to give the information to the Catholic Priest of YaMumbi Parish. He was neither a Kikuyu nor a Kalenjin. As a priest, he had connections with people in authority and also if he decided to talk to the people; they would mostly listen to him and do as he said since people had a lot of respect for religious leaders. The fact that the Priest was neither Kikuyu nor Kalenjin made it easy for him to intervene to ensure there was no violence.

When the Priest got the information, he called the elders of the church from the two communities. They had a meeting and saw the need of talking to the youth from the two communities to ensure they would not engage in violence. This was done promptly. I am happy I gave information to the Priest. The move completely averted the looming violence in which lives would probably have been lost and property destroyed.

In Uasin Gishu, a number of women are not empowered in leadership and decision making. Many men see themselves as the communities’ defenders and that the power to create war and peace is in their hands. This is the mentality that many women have been trying to battle to ensure they are equally enshrined in peacebuilding efforts in their areas.

Being a woman has not made me shy from going for public engagements. I believe with the right information and attitude women can make a difference in their communities. That is what I go out to do.
As you can see, we are ready to burn this house. You either vacate fast or it burns with you inside. Choose!
I almost lost my life protecting a property which was not my own. It was in December 2007. An angry mob confronted us with the order to vacate the house.

‘As you can see, we are ready to burn this house. You either vacate fast or it burns with you inside. Choose!’

This order that was shouted repeatedly from the crowd as they drew closer and closer to us frightened us to a shock. I looked at my husband. He too was silent but looked agitated. I sensed danger and pleaded with him not to dare the heavily armed mob for a fight. I took the lead in pleading with the mob for mercy.

Aged 56, a mother of five and a business woman, I was well known in Mailinne. I felt I deserved a better treatment but there I was, pushed to the wall pleading with young people, some younger than my own children. Soon I discovered that I was not the target but a stumbling block. The owner of the house we lived in belonged to the ethnic community that the mob considered as their enemy and they had to destroy his property to ensure he never returned. I still shook in fear because the violence which initially seemed political, had taken ethnic dimension and I did not belong to either of the communities. There was a lot of fighting and burning down of houses in the neighbourhood. Members from other communities were being evicted and chased away from the area. The mob directed us to give way so that they could burn down the whole building to teach their enemy a lesson. Using pleas and shouts for help, me and my husband stood and defended our ground. We refused to allow the people to burn down our house just because it belonged to a different person from another community.
As the violence escalated, I saw it necessary to start preaching and promoting peace within my area but where and how to start became a mind boggling issue. Already people were suspicious of one another and lived like enemies. It was difficult to even greet your neighbour with whom you had previously shared many things and you had lived with peacefully for many years. I realised how painful it was to have your friends turn into violent enemies at the time you needed them most. I started visiting my close relatives and the few friends I had managed to retain. We talked and agreed to work for peace. They too resolved to recruit friends from the other communities so that our talks would be all inclusive. Our target was to work for peace in an effort to bring all the communities as close as we were before the violence. As the group quickly grew bigger and bigger, I realised that many women were thirsty for peace. We had dialogue amongst ourselves and we all agreed that it was not our fault as women but what was happening was a making of the men. I encouraged them that we work as a group until peace was restored in our area.

My greatest challenge was to convince those who had fled the area to return to their homes. Most of them had distanced themselves and did not want to associate with anyone from a different ethnic community. They endured anger and bitterness as they tried to come to terms with the losses incurred. Worse still, they were not sure of their safety in case they returned to their homes where they had been evicted. It was painful listening to them narrate their side of the story. I continued to visit them, showed them love and talked to them about the importance of coming back and living together as a united community that we were before. Initially I was resisted by many people while others received me with open dislike. The few who joined in my peace campaign helped me reach them and gradually change them with my peace message. These were my individual initiatives and I am happy I played a role in peacebuilding. I did not get support from any institution or any recognisable source apart from involving individuals to help me reach others with my peace messages.
How I helped communities in Mailinne

The peace campaign helped me trace my group members who had scattered due to the violence. In the consequent relative peace realised, we were able to come together and revived our merry go round group that we had before. I had the interest of the group in my heart and I did not want it to break apart and disappear just like that. I visited each woman individually, twice a week. Our group came back live. Initially, we were 24 members but the number has since grown to 35. We used the opportunity of table banking to promote healing and reconciliation amongst ourselves. This was possible in that, we allowed members to share their experiences and the lessons learned. The residents realized that we were able to unite and bring back the community together despite coming from different ethnic communities. Admiring the unity that we had as a group and that we were able to restore calm and peace in the village, certain women who were not part of our group praised the group and expressed their desire to join us and be part of the group.

Even though many women play a substantial role in peacebuilding, a number of them still shy away from it because of the perception of the community about women as being weak and so cannot stand up for themselves. Many women in the rural areas have fear in them and hence cannot participate in any initiative fully. Few women can stand up and talk before a group. Generally speaking, their relatively low education levels and lack of exposure make them feel inferior.

I encourage women to stand for what they believe in and dedicate themselves completely to what they want to do especially when it comes to peace work. Women should know that nothing is without challenge hence they should be courageous and pursue their goals without any fear. It is important for women to engage in peacebuilding because from the family, it is the woman who has a lot of responsibility. They are the mothers and hence the losers in every violent conflict that erupts in their areas of residence.

The woman is the backbone of the family and the society. It is also important for women to be recognized for the work they do in keeping their communities in peace.
OVERCOMING PERSONAL CHALLENGES
By Sophia J. Sang

"We shared our common stories on how life can change with time bringing with it challenges that were difficult to overcome."
I never knew that today, at 53 years old, I would live to tell this story about my peacebuilding work with Uasin Gishu Women for Peace (UGWP). This is especially after I experienced a lot of challenges from the time my husband died leaving me behind with children to bring up all by myself. I struggled each day catering for their daily basic needs and education. Thanks to the piece of land we had purchased together with my husband before he passed on. This piece of fertile land provided me with a place to farm and addresses my financial challenges from farm produce.

The decade spanning from the year 2000 brought with it important experiences in my life that was later to see me become a peacebuilder in my community. Life became unbearable for me in the year 2002 when my husband died exactly two years after I had lost my job. Life became a cruel journey difficult to be part of as I had to single handedly provide for my children. I did not however give up living and constantly sought pieces of advice from fellow women whose life experiences were similar to mine and who gave me good courage to look at life positively. I accepted my status as a widow and an unemployed woman, took to peasant farming and was able to provide food and income to my family. I grew passion fruits in small scale for sale at the local market.

As a single parent I met many women whose life experiences were similar to mine, some times even worse and needed to be encouraged. My neighbour for instance could not afford to continue supporting her family by giving
Stories of Women Building Peace

them the same quality of life they had enjoyed when her husband was a live. We shared our common stories on how life can change with time bringing with it challenges that were difficult to overcome. One of her biggest worries was shelter for her family. She needed to put up a new house for her family on a piece of land they had jointly acquired with the husband when he was still living. She requested me to stay with her child in order that she could go and construct a house on the family land which was a far distance from our neighbourhood. I accepted to take the child with me, gave her accommodation, food, clothing and education with my meagre income from passion fruit farming. Living with the orphaned child came with yet another challenge of added responsibility. I started seeking alternative support just in case I was not able to support her further education. Luckily enough the child was able to qualify for scholarship that was being offered by Equity Foundation, a local banking institution that runs an educational support programme for poor children in Kenya. The child is currently enjoying the educational support and has a promising bright future. The fact that I supported an orphan to have hope in life makes me happy. The realization that I did this while also struggling to support my own children as a single parent provided me with a lesson that has formed a positive narrative in my life. I have since decided to be available to help even many more women and families in need.

My peacebuilding experience

The immediate period before the 2007 general elections was full of ethnic divisions occasioned by political tensions. This situation resulted into mistrust and suspicions among neighbours who were members of different communities but had lived together for decades. Tensions built towards the election date, threats to lives of ‘unfriendly’ ethnic communities increased forcing others to flee. The threats were even extended to those who wanted to protect friends from other communities. Such was the situation between me and my neighbour whose children and mine attended the same school. My neighbour was from a community different from mine which was considered
Overcoming personal challenges

as being politically unfriendly. Having had rumours of possible attack on the members of her community, she decided to move with her family to another place for safety. They left me the responsibility of watching over their house. I did that work with total commitment and dedication and at the height of post election violence in 2008 prevented my community people from burning down the house.

The threats were even extended to those who wanted to protect friends from other communities.

After the post election violence, the family came back and were very happy to find everything in their house intact. My action during her refuge status period helped her to change the negative perception she had developed against members of my community and was willing to accept to forgive them for the acts of violence they had done to members of her community. She was convinced that not all people from a particular tribe or community are bad; there are also those who are good people with kind hearts and love for other communities.

Women to Women Support

Our fellow women who returned from the displacements after the 2007 post election violence found it difficult to cope with life as they required support to re-settle on their farms. As a group of women focusing on self help for members, we saw it important to reach out to the women returning from displacements to help uplift their livelihoods. We focussed on growing and selling passion fruit, an activity that was successful, made the membership increase and provided a forum for women community peacebuilding. In the year 2013 we were able to form the Uasin Gishu Women for Peace with the
sole aim of uniting women and informing them about peace and upholding women’s rights. As a group we do work on peacebuilding. Our activities include hosting forums for dialogue and inter ethnic communities’ visitations aimed at creating awareness on issues to do with peace and women human rights.

Pioneers of the Uasin Gishu Women for Peace are women from the self help groups I helped initiate. Currently we have over 100 women members and a few men. We engage women in peacebuilding activities within Uasin Gishu County. Through my work in peacebuilding I have encountered a number of challenges that I believe still hinder the involvement of women in peacebuilding work. Negative perception from the society, tribalism and ethnicity are still prevalent and contribute to low levels of awareness of the women human rights. As part of our activity of uniting and bringing together women in Uasin Gishu with the agenda for peace, we also celebrate the International Women’s Day of Peace by bringing together many women groups from all over the county to help in building and fostering our recognition within the whole of Uasin Gishu. For us, this is an opportunity to celebrate and create awareness on women’s involvement in peacebuilding work.

As an individual I usually tell women about the importance of peace and how they can work towards upholding and promoting peace. Women should know that their involvement in peacebuilding work is vital since they are bestowed with the duty of upholding the society together starting with caring for children and building trust in the community. I also work with them in knowing how to solve conflicts amicably. I encourage women not to fear since they are protected by universal human rights and should venture out for leadership positions in the country. They also need to build their capacity more to learn and understand about their rights as women.
Mary chepkwony addresses community members in a peacebuilding meeting in Uasin Gishu County

A group of women engage in a discussion during a training on UNSCR 1325
I USE MY POST IN THE CHURCH TO BRING PEACE

By Catherine Nelima Yaura

“Some victims of the violence had experienced the worst calamities that made them go to the extent of blaming God for what had happened to them.”
I had been interested in peacebuilding work for quite a long time but not until 2007/08 post election violence erupted did I venture into it fully. Even after the violence, the situation was very bad. There was a lot of mistrust, anger and hatred amongst the different community members living in Kapsoya Location of Uasin Gishu County. Many family members were separated from one another. Everyone had a painful story to tell as animosity escalated to dangerous levels.

As a leader, I realized that there was a big problem. Due to what had happened, people receded into their ethnic groupings and reaching the women was not easy. I took the initiative personally to reach out to the women and try to talk with them about what had happened, how they could reconcile and come back together as the peaceful and united community they were before the violence.

Peacebuilding work was indeed challenging and hard from the start but necessary to reduce the chances of violence recurring. Many people were living with bitterness. Some victims of the violence had experienced the worst calamities that made them go to the extent of blaming God for what had happened to them. A few others were able to open up to share their experiences. This was a positive sign of change and that healing was taking place. There were those who remained silent and it was hard to figure out what they were thinking. I was preaching peace and reconciliation from the basis of a Christian approach, stressing on the need and importance of forgiveness and living together as a family.
I was impressed to realize that the women recognized and appreciated the work we were doing. Whenever we failed to visit them, they would call us and ask us why we had not gone to visit them. The top authority also reached out to them by providing them with the basic needs for survival. They too appreciated the work we were doing. We had a number of meetings which were done in the churches. The meetings helped to bridge the gap between the communities. We suggested for them to be meeting at the community level in their Jumuia (Small Christian Communities). While we thought it was difficult, they embraced the idea despite families being victims of the violence. Some families lost their loved ones and hence the need to reach out to them with the gospel of peace through encouraging and promoting healing, forgiveness towards reconciliation.

Through the work we did, we were able to reach out to many households that were living in bitterness. We helped them go through the healing, forgiveness and reconciliation process. Through the Jumuia, individuals derived encouragement and the will to move on. It also bore fruits in that the communities accepted to forgive each other and to restore peace amongst ourselves. The work I was doing called for total dedication and sacrifice to reach out to the different individuals. Working as an individual, (stand alone) issue to do with logistics is a big challenge.

...it is important for us as mothers to accept ourselves as women and appreciate ourselves.

I was recognized by the church for the work I was doing. Being a Luhya by tribe, I was seen to be a neutral individual and this fostered the belief and trust in me. Through the top leadership in church, the community members have realized the benefits of peace.
I use my post in the Church to bring peace

Women should be involved in peacebuilding as they are usually the first to turn up for any calling and request. Women are receptive and quick to accept change. They are involved in various activities within the society and hence it is easier for them to reach out to other women. They are the ones who get affected by the conflicts more since they experience the pain and hence they can act immediately. Women are not tied to work that denies them the opportunity to reach out and they also interact with one another easily.

My work in peacebuilding was blessed with many successes but it was not without challenges. Bringing together the families that had separated due to their ethnic differences was difficult and risky. Lack of trust made many people worried about their personal security. I was also wearing a brave face but since I worked alone, I was aware of the risks involved but the call to serve was stronger. I met difficult circumstances and at times attributed the difficulties I experienced to my low and inadequate capacity in terms of skills, knowledge and experience in peace work.

The work is still on going. As a chair lady of Catholic Women Association, now 45 years old, I still make sure that I allocate time to meet with the Jumia women. Now behind us is the post election violence but what women now report as rampant is parent-child conflict. Thus as a leader I have to come in to provide guidance to the family in things of day to day life such as drugs, relationships and education.

I would want to say that it is important for us as mothers to accept ourselves as women and appreciate ourselves. Tracing back from the Bible, women have been a major force in peace work. They are in between men and children and are able to cover the whole society. I encourage the growing girl child to follow the role models. When you educate a girl you educate a nation. A mother is the pillar.
They ridiculed me that I was preaching peace and yet I was a victim of the post election violence.
I am one of the founder members of the Rural Women Peace Link (RWPL). The RWPL was founded after realizing the challenges that women went through after the 1992 ethnic clashes in Burnt Forest. As women, we realized that we were at the best position to promote peace in the community. As mothers and wives, we can easily reach our husbands and our male youths with the message of discouraging them from engaging in violence and any form of violent conflict. This was the foundation on which RWPL was built. The idea was steered by six founder members and it resulted to the formation of RWPL in 1994 with the agenda of promoting peace building.

We reached women through our table banking and ‘chamaa’ (groups) that we had. Men started recognizing us and the contribution we were making towards promoting peace. They appreciated that their property was not being destroyed as a result of the peace that prevailed. Initially as we started, we received minimal support from men. This was not a surprise and can be attributed to our traditional culture that looked down on women. Later on we started involving and engaging men in our peace dialogues. It was only then that we started getting meaningful support from men. We started getting support from the local administration as well. When we started, we did not have funds. However, we were able to join hands and we got money generated from our own pockets. Later on we received support from National Council of Churches and well wishers. We have also got support from USAID and Catholic Justice and Peace Commission.
The turning point in my peacebuilding work came in 2007. My property was destroyed during the post election violence. I was rejected and despised by people in the community. They ridiculed me that I was preaching peace and yet I was a victim of the post election violence.

Coalition for Peace in Africa (COPA) came in 2009 and took me through the trauma and healing course and from that time things changed. I accepted the situation and moved on. I decided to be an agent of peace in the community by reaching out to the community members who had been affected like me. Through joint initiatives, we were able to come up with a market in Burnt Forest. This was after we realized that there was animosity between and amongst the different communities living there. Women from both communities agreed to come up with an initiative that was meant to unite and bring them together. This project was facilitated by Rural Women Peace Link and financed by USAID. It was successful and still in existence to date.

After the year 2013, I was trained on the constitution and women, again a training that was facilitated by RWPL and the government. I went round informing women about their position and encouraging them to show up for them to be recognized. Earlier in 2012 I was able to do voter awareness and the importance of registering as a voter and we reached out to the women. We informed them on the importance of voting and also encouraged the men to allow women to make their own choices when it comes to voting. Through our outreach, we were able to reach out to all the locations, where we informed the women on their right to vote as an individual and making personal choice.

I am still a peace builder now at 57 years now in my own individual capacity where in case of any conflict in the society or village I am contacted to go and mediate together with the village leaders. I also involve myself in advocacy work on issues that affect people in the village for example local alcohol brewing. I do advocacy on the right to be involved in the devolution and their rightful involvement in the devolution process. In trauma healing, I am
Losing my property to violence made me a stronger peace worker

happy for the course that COPA took me through and hence it has helped me in solving conflicts in the village.

As a village opinion leader, I handle a diversity of issues affecting the community in day to day living. Some examples include child abuse and gender based violence. My intervention using skills I learnt from the course and training I underwent has helped me to help others be able to reconcile, forgive and hence live in peace. I have gotten an opportunity to be involved in radio talks to sensitize the community on the way forward towards bringing back the good aspects of our original culture and how society was oriented before. I also do girls mentoring teaching them on Godly integrity, how they can keep themselves from engaging in any harmful practices that can ruin them since they are the future parents. We do outreach programmes to girls in churches, schools and colleges

Women from both communities agreed to come up with an initiative that was meant to unite and bring them together.

We have been able to unite two communities who initially could not sit and eat together harmoniously. Burnt forest used to be called a conflict hot spot but now it is called queen of peace. Our contribution as Rural Women Peace Link has been recognized at the county level and beyond.

Women are the strong pillars in the society. They have influence in the society, so when we stand up as women we have a voice and it is going to be accepted and embraced by everyone. When you empower a woman you empower a nation. Women have strength and they can influence change in a country. They are the highest potential for peace in the country. Women should take their rightful position in the community since they can do a lot when they are empowered.
Important as women are, they are usually looked down upon in the society and especially by the men. This is still prevalent in the rural areas. Some discriminative cultural beliefs and practices, coupled with inadequate knowledge of what to do still conspire to hinder women from fully engaging in peacebuilding work.

I encourage women not to lose heart but give themselves in doing the work for the benefit of the community. They should commit themselves to the work and do it with passion and in that way, they will be able to influence others positively through their work. Women should never fear to stand for what is right and should not have any double standards. They should not give ear to what may bring conflict in the society but be mediators and persons who bring people together. When you do peace work you will enjoy and be happy since peace is the basis of everything. Women should stand for peace for the benefit of the society.
IT IS DIALOGUE AND UNDERSTANDING
By Fanice Wandulu

“We saw this as a time bomb and we did not want it to explode right at our faces.”
In 1992, I was still a visitor in Langas and I witnessed what happened in the villages within the area. We just saw houses being burnt down and property destroyed. Being a visitor and still new in the area there was nothing much I could do at that moment. In 1997, we were able to do outreach programmes as women within our area where we were living. We were able to reach out to many households with the message of peace, love and unity. We had door to door campaigns focused on teaching and educating the neighbourhood on the importance of living together in peace. This we did through our group where we sell our merchandise that is food stuff and clothing to the villager members at a lower cost.

Through our outreach activity, we were able to hear rumours of what was going on and what the people were doing or planning to do that would cause disunity and disharmony within our area. We acted immediately by talking to the village members and emphasizing on the importance of peaceful coexistence and that resorting to any form of violence would not solve the problem. Through dialogue and coming to agreement, the situation would be better.

Our women group, Simama Imara Development was formed in 2006 with the aim of uplifting the living and economic standards of women in the area. We set up income generating activities like buying of sewing machines which we used to make clothes for selling. The group comprised of members from different communities but we were working as a team. In 2007 we experienced a challenge in that our group started breaking apart since we were comprised of members from different communities. To counter the fall-out, we brought in the aspect of peacebuilding to unite and bring us together to deal with the negative attitude, perceptions and fears that had developed in the community.
We realized that members from other communities had started avoiding interacting with members from other communities to the extent of them desisting from doing business with others and buying only from members of their community. We saw this as a time bomb and we did not want it to explode right at our faces. We therefore took the initiative together with the local authority to hold a forum that aimed at uniting and bringing the different members from the different communities living there together towards fostering reconciliation.

Our driving factor was the knowledge that Women are important. They know and can take action at all levels. Peace starts with women and hence their inclusion brings togetherness since they are the initiators of peace. They too have a voice to air out in the society since in times of conflict they are the ones who usually suffer most.

Women need to stand up to continue preaching peace and to attend forums on peacebuilding. Women need to remain united and be involved at all levels. I am that kind of a woman from experience and still sojourning on at 47 years of age that I am now.
Women also have a tender motherly heart and can easily forgive and move on with life and assist other people in the healing process successfully.
My organization, the Sirikwa Women Fellowship (SWF) was formed in 1996. This was after the realization that there was no peace in many homes at that time. We identified that it was the woman who had the potential to be the solution to the problems in the community. The group was started by women from the local African Inland Church (AIC). We were twenty-six women and our focus was on women empowerment through teachings from the Bible. We encouraged the women to appreciate their families, husbands and children. Our other focus was on livelihoods in terms of uplifting the economic status of women by encouraging them to engage in income generating activities such as rearing of poultry and getting into business.

We realized the fruits of our work when the women were able to contribute to their family basket including paying school fees to their children. They consequently earned respect from their husbands and the community at large. Conflicts at their homes reduced drastically and families started living peacefully together as it was meant to be in the Bible. We had forums for educating women on their reproductive health and livelihood which was geared towards promoting a good relationship between husband and wife in the family.

We currently organize two conferences per year focusing on women empowerment, anger management and teaching on peace based on the Bible and the calling of Jesus Christ. We emphasize on having peace with other
denominations since we are all equal before our Creator. We also emphasize on respecting, accepting and loving our leaders since they are God given. It is important to focus on our role as citizens and Christians to pray for the leaders and respect them.

During our work, we realized that we as women we are faced with challenges and obstacles that hinder us from effectively participating in peacebuilding work. These include limited financial resources and the negative perceptions from the community about women that limits women from participating fully in peace work.

Women involvement in peacebuilding work is vital since women are gifted naturally with talks that help to build and foster peace from an early stage in the life of their children until adulthood. Women have the strength and the vigour to carry on and push on for an agenda that they have decided on. Women have synergy and they can easily work together towards a common agenda. Women also have a tender motherly heart and can easily forgive and move on with life and assist other people in healing process successfully.

I have undergone a number of trainings that have transformed me for the better. For example the Tap -Tap training organized by Initiative for Peace in February 2014 equipped me with knowledge on being a peace builder at an individual level from the mind by putting into action the knowledge through facilitating church and community forums. This has really worked in that in a span of three months a number of community members have expressed to me that they are now able to handle and deal with stress better as a result
of the trainings that I took them through. The stress levels in the area have diminished and now people are living happier than before.

At 43 year of age I have many more years to train many more women, God willing. My encouragement to women who are engaged or who would want to engage in peacebuilding work is that I urge them to be peace ambassadors wherever they are. They should be peace makers and with reference to the Bible the peace makers will see God. They should learn to forgive and let go of wrongs that they have hidden in their hearts.
Many consider me a role model
By Susan Jero Ronoh

“One day I got a call from the area chief who told me that I have been appointed to oversee the closing of drinking dens.”
I am married with six children, 3 boys and 3 girls. I am 47 years old and live in Ndunguli village in Uasin Gishu County. I completed secondary education many years back, worked for a local banking institution before resigning and starting various income generating projects including selling of second hand cloths and poultry farming. A member of Koibeiyop Women group, I also help Peacenet, a national network for peacebuilding to carry out community mobilization for peacebuilding in my county.

I had never in my life seen a problem to the magnitude of the Kenya 2007 post election violent conflict. During the violence, most of the girls victims were raped, mistreated and some chased from temporary marriages popularly referred to us in our area as ‘come we stay forced marriages’. Some girls were forced to stay in marriages without their consent due to the fact that they were in desperate situation and looking for money for survival. Others resorted to selling of firewood and washing clothes for people in order to earn a living. Girls and women were the ones who were affected the most. The effect has been seen in many girls dropping out of school after five years of primary school education. Most boys affected turned to taking of alcohol and drugs.

The ensuing interventions by non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) brought a lot of relief to the victims of the violence. The NGOs supported by United States Agency for International Development (USAID), International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Kenya Red Cross...
Stories of Women Building Peace

among others supported the victims erect shelters. They also mobilized both the returning internally displaced persons and members of the communities who were not displaced to have reconciliation initiatives. Initially, I did not take part in any of the initiatives and thought I was not needed in the process given the fact that I was not a community leader in any way. I witnessed from a far houses being built for returnees. I also noted other people complaining of the support to the returnees as biased and heightening new tensions. I did not want to give a chance for these new tensions to build into new violence. It was at this point that I developed the desire to become a leader and stop any new violence. I soon became a vocal and regular participant of the chief’s baraza⁵. I attended the barazas and spoke about need to maintain peace in our midst.

I also noted other people complaining of the support to the returnees as biased and heightening new tensions.

One day I got a call from the area chief who told me that I have been appointed to oversee the closing of drinking dens. “You have been appointed by my office as an elder to help the community get rid of illicit alcohol which is promoting crime amidst us”, the chief said. He added that I was to be first lady to be appointed a community elder because of my active participation during barazas and also due to my good education background. This was the beginning of my active life in community peacebuilding. I was able to link causes of conflict in my community to alcoholism and campaigned so hard against the habit.

⁵Barazas are regular village level meeting led by provincial administration to propagate government policies and also receive feed back from community members.
Many consider me a role model

Although the youth who consume alcohol do not like my campaigns against alcohol, many people are excited and happy with my work to the extent that they offered me as a role model to other women. I work with a committee of two elders who advise me on interventions regarding issues on land disputes, a youth representative who advises me on issues affecting the youths and one woman who guides me on how to handle family and domestic problems. I am proud of my work which is also supported by Peacenet.

Through my work, I have earned recognition and admiration from many women some of whom have joined me in the initiative. Many of them though, have not known their rights and need continuous sensitization.

I derive happiness and pride from successful third party interventions on dispute resolution. God gave me this honour and I am always ready to use it for the benefit of my community. Most common conflict issues I deal with are around farmland disputes. Some of the strategies I use include visiting farms and preaching peace, helping women maintain constant firewood supply for domestic use through revolving scheme for firewood supply and group meetings.
Stories of Women Building Peace

PEACEBUILDING EXPERIENCE WITH IDPs
By Alice Wanjiku Kinuthia

“They were not talking to each other despite having known each other for a long time.”
Before my experience during the 2007 post election violence in Kenya, I did not know the meaning of peace. Later I came to know peace as the act of building bridges between two communities and groups. Similarly, I did not know the meaning of conflict but later I came to know that conflict is a misunderstanding between two groups or communities.

The campaign period before the 2007 general election in Kenya was full of negative ethnic pronouncements and hate speech. Tension between the ethnic Kikuyu community and Kalenjin counterparts in Uasin Gishu County ran high each day. The Kikuyus were sympathetic to the Party of National Unity (PNU) which was the ruling party. The Kalenjins supported Orange Democratic Movement (ODM). Three days to the elections day were particularly difficult for us in the county. There were rumours and propaganda that elections would be rigged by PNU to lock out ODM from taking over the country’s leadership. Tension was high in Eldoret the capital town of the county as ODM supporters started alleging that ballot boxes were found around the town before the elections day. Members of the Kikuyu community and PNU supporters were very worried because they were being told that if they tried to steal the presidential election they will see. So the D-day people voted as usual but with a lot of tension. After three days the results were announced and all of a sudden the violence started. Life in Eldoret town came to a stand still; people were calling relatives and friends to run for safety. Some houses were burnt, people were killed some were injured. To add on, the Kiambaa church was burnt down, leaving a number of people dead and others suffering serious burns.
It became all war with different ethnic groups fighting the other. People ran around to looking for transport to escape to other places where they felt safe next to their tribe’s men and women. Transport soon became unavailable and displaced persons running away from violence were forced to seek refuge in churches and police stations. Everything was in a total mess; people were hungry because all the supermarkets and places of food were closed until when the well wishers and Red Cross came to help. They brought food and blankets for the affected individuals. Later the government offered security for people who were running away. Poor people booked buses while rich people booked aeroplanes.

I did not travel anywhere since I was and I am a resident of Uasin Gishu and did not have anywhere to go. After a while when the tension was still on, the Kikuyu landlords started giving notices to the non kikuyu tenants notices of less than 1 day to vacate their houses. Such tenants did not have anywhere to go and they started looking for houses where they could go. Some were running away and leaving their houses. Some people took advantage of that and they started stealing and breaking their houses and taking away their property since there was no security.

All the communities were affected, for example I went to a church and was very surprised to find members from the Kikuyu community seated in one corner and members from the Luhya community seated in another corner and same to other members from different communities seated the same way. They were not talking to each other despite having known each other for a long time. Marriages broke down as spouses in inter ethnic marriages had one of them chased away by the spouse’ tribe. The children in such marriages were the most affected individuals.
Eldoret show ground provided temporary shelter for the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). As MYWO we decided to visit the show ground to take the IDPs items like food stuff, clothes, sanitary towels which we collected from well wishers. The first day of our visit was met with anger and feelings of vengeance. We were almost chased away by the IDPs who on looking at us, they saw in us as the people who burnt their houses, killed their husbands, brothers and injured them. But we never gave up. We talked to them and convinced them that we were not the ones who performed acts of violence against them, and that we were there in good faith. In the long run, they accepted us and allowed us to attend to them. We gave them the items we had brought with us, consoled them and discussed peace.

The situation at the show ground camp was terrible. Children were crying, others were sick, women were crying too and telling stories of what had happened to them and it was tough getting their way to the camp at the show ground. We decided to visit them many more times. But the camp was not any safe for small girls and women. They were lured, raped or lured for cheap sex in exchange of food and tents.

Our efforts to talk about peace with the IDPs at the camp did not yield any fruits as they were too bitter to be told about living in peace by enemies who destroyed their lives. They never listened to the government either. I learnt that our approach was not the right one for the IDPs at that particular time. I was later to learn through my peacebuilding experience that IDPs at that time needed to be given the opportunity to moan, count their losses and come to terms with the reality before engaging in discussions about peace.

During my peace work with the communities that fought in the 2007 post election violence I found out that political conflict in our area are fuelled by idleness or lack of jobs among our youth, incitements, propaganda and lack of equality. I also realized so many challenges in peacebuilding work at the community level. Many people look upon you as the liaison person. External organizations bestow their work on you sometimes with very little resources to reach the people. On the other hand the community members
also expect you to attend to their problems including giving them handouts. There is also language barrier when handling cross cultural groups.

Women peacebuilders need to be supported in keeping alive forums to create awareness to everybody, in the churches, schools, and chiefs’ barazas and to encourage the government to be sponsoring the peace forums. Without peace nothing can be achieved. It is for this reason that Kenyans after the PEV put forth policy changes to help address the underlying causes of election related conflict. Many commissions were put in place to compile reports to inform policy. One such commission was the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC). It is very unfortunate that TJRC report has never been implemented.

Currently I have committed my life at 45 years to peace work in the church where I am part of the small group that seeks to encourage and foster peace and unity. We do read the bible together and given the chance to elaborate more on it. So in every group meeting I make sure I talk about peace in the neighbourhood. In instances of conflict I play the role of mediator and work with them towards getting an amicable solution. My peace work is also inspired by the fact that I am a single mother of two children a boy and a girl and still able to make up time to work for conflict prevention. I have also benefited from peacebuilding trainings sponsored by my Church, through the Catholic Women Association (CWA) and Uasin Gishu County branch of Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organization (MYWO) where I am an official.
FROM CONDUITS OF VIOLENCE TO CONDUITS FOR PEACE
By Emma Njeri Gaitho

“"Our society perceives single mothers and sex workers as people who are bad and have no room for change."
I am a single parent aged 42 years and a mother of five teenagers. I have been involved in peace work with the NCCK in 1997 and 1998 where I trained as a peace facilitator.

Work in peacebuilding

My most remarkable peacebuilding experience dates from December 2007 post election violence when people moved out of their houses and went to seek shelter in the camps. At the camp, there was so much hatred among the displaced persons allegedly propagated by single ladies. The ladies were used as conduits for information because they were idle with no work. I realized the behaviour of these ladies was a sign of a big problem to come and mobilized them for discussion about peace. I was also a single lady and found it very easy to reach them. When I engaged the ladies I discovered that they were not only peddling information for money, they were also an organised gang that stole people’s property at the camp.

Remembering that I also survived at one time selling illicit brews to men some of whom were criminals, I really empathized with the ladies and found more reason to engage them in discussion about change of behaviour. I started engaging them in dialogue on why did they have to do what they do. Some of them admitted that they were involved in crime. We discussed and agreed they needed to change. In any case they said that they also felt bad whenever other people stole from them. They also caused conflict at the camp. Our discussions revealed that there were so many women at the same camp with various problems that needed to be part of our discussions. Our discussion led to the formation of Mwireri single ladies group in 2008 with the main objective of promoting peace within our area. The group members were in agreement that there was need for peace for them to enjoy life.

Mwireri group was formed by 7 women and besides promoting peace we also had an agenda of uplifting our livelihoods standards amongst. We started with 7 women and the group membership grew to 30 women before splitting...
up to form another group called best ladies group. The split was as a result of tribalism. One faction of the group was opposed to us enrolling women from other tribes into the group while another faction did not mind. Trouble started when people begun pointing fingers at us saying that we were bringing in other women from other communities that had caused trouble to us. I remained the chair lady of the single ladies. The best ladies group elected their own chair lady who proposed that we help bring back the women who were with us initially. I reached out to them and the original group reunited. Peace being our main objective, we were able to reach other women and are now good example of unity to the community.

Challenges

Our society perceives single mothers and sex workers as people who are bad and have no room for change. They are therefore left out by peacebuilding programmes. To make the matters worse, this group is also identified as conduits for violence. Continuously leaving this group behind poses a great challenge to sustainable peace. I see it as an opportunity to bring them on board for them to be appreciated and recognized. Their flexibility and openness makes them a good channel for change. In our group we changed from conduits of violence to conduits for peace.

Word of Encouragement

I want to encourage the single ladies not to despise and look down upon themselves instead. They should know that we are all equal before God. They should know that they can do something. They should know that they too have children who are used as agents of war so they should guide and counsel them as they grow. Women are the ones who suffer in times of conflict and their word can easily be embraced and accepted since they are also the backbone of the society.
Everyone was suffering and only we, the insiders could rebuild our communities again.
After the 2007 post election violence in Uasin Gishu, there was a serious communication breakdown between the members of the Kikuyu and the Kalenjin communities within the Municipal market in Eldoret town. As a result, the flow of goods and services was affected as people were refusing to sell items to members of the rival group. Life became very expensive. People were starving and as a result of closure of access roads in some areas, even milk would not reach the markets. Farmers were recording huge loses every day.

I was staying in Eldoret North. As an official in the Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organization and a social worker involved in community empowerment, I knew bitterness had blindfolded the traders and was actually leading them to a fatal doom.

As a woman, I felt deeply sorry especially for the young children who were starving. I strongly felt somebody needed to talk to the community members in the villages. I approached our chief to let me address his public barazas so that I could appeal to the different communities to stop the hostilities because we were all suffering including the innocent children. We were all incurring losses. When given the opportunity to speak, I always appealed to the people by saying we were all being affected by the conflict. Everyone was suffering and only we, the insiders could rebuild our communities again. I used the same messages in churches and church led women groups. I called on different communities to embrace dialogue.
At the initial stages on engaging people in discussions in barazas and church groups, I was met with a lot of open hostilities. Many people were very bitter with what had happened and were not ready to sit and talk about it with the perceived aggressors. There was a lot of negative ethnicity and stereotyping. I was able to succeed because I always appealed to the women as a woman and would ask them to go talk with their husbands and their sons. Women are very strong. They do not easily break up from their experiences. After discussions, we would hold joint prayers as mixed groups of women. Sometimes we would even cook and eat together. In some instances, as women, we came together and constructed mud houses for fellow women whose houses had been destroyed in the violence. The constant working together helped in breaking down communication barriers.

In 2012, I am one of the women who were part of the ‘knitting for peace project” initiative that was supported by the Rural Women Peace Link. Through this project, women from different communities would meet and jointly knit such things as calabashes, kiondos, bracelets and other ornaments. We sold them at the local market. While doing the knitting, we would talk as women and discuss about what we thought about the recurring cases of violence in Uasin Gishu. We would also discuss ways of averting the violence in future. The project helped us to stay together as women and also acted as a bridge to keep communication between women of different communities open.

In 2013, I got support to do advocacy on peace in the Uasin Gishu County through planting of trees in Burnt Forest. The trees would be given to members of the various communities and they would then plant them at an
agreed space as a joint project. Working together helped in breaking the ice between the different communities. All this was geared towards promoting peaceful co-existence among different ethnic groups. The project ended in January 2014.

Despite our success, our traditions were a big hindrance. Some women shied away from working with the rest of the women because they were told by the men that culture does not allow women to engage in peacebuilding matters.

My advice to women especially those who live in conflict prone areas like Uasin Gishu is that they should be courageous and position themselves strategically to be able to influence authority and decision makers so that issues that are of interest to women can be taken care of. For instance, after the violence in Uasin Gishu, many women needed the authorities to consider empowering women economically so that they could rebuild their lives. As a group, it is easy to advocate for what we want but as an individual, your voice will be lost among all the other voices.

I strongly feel that since women are the main victims of any conflict, they should be the main stakeholders in peacebuilding.
Stories of Women Building Peace

SAVED BY A NON-RELATIVE

By Jane Knight Mandu

“I was saved by someone who we had good relations with and was not my brother or sister.”
When the post election violence erupted in 2007, I was in Eldoret town. All of a sudden almost everyone turned into a stranger and all roads became risky to follow. I was confused and fixed at a point, unable to choose my way out of an environment that had been familiar to me for ages. I understood what lack of peace could do to the mind. I longed for home.

I was born in Kakamega in Western Kenya but live and work in Eldoret. I am a single parent. I do business but initially I used to work as a hair dresser in a salon. Due to inadequate capital to keep up with the competitive saloon industry, I dropped out and shifted to the juakali(non-formal employment) sector. Working at the Juakali in the market, I realized things were becoming tough business wise. I went back to the estate and joined the church where I currently serve.

We sat together as women and discussed on how we would uplift our living standards. We started as few individuals and grew to 25 women. We wanted to be recognized and hence were advised to form a group and register it. The group that we formed was focused at uplifting the living standards by enabling the women to get economic activities that would help them generate income to sustain their families. Most of the members are single women.

The aspect of peacebuilding came in as an initiative of part of the work since we had the forum for sitting down and addressing the relevance of living in peace. In 2007/08 post election violence I witnessed what happened in town since I was still at work. I realized the importance of peace and living
Stories of Women Building Peace

together in peace and love. We had to escape to Kapseret in order to survive. Things were hard and that’s when I realized that peace is important and that the only thing that can help people live together is peace. I was saved by someone who we had good relations with and was not my brother or sister.

Women generally find it quite easy to respond quickly to issues. They have a warm heart and receptive attitude. As a result, women are best suited to work for peace. I encourage women to ensure each one of them plays a role in peace building. In this challenging and competitive world, women must give their best and struggle to get what they deserve through the rightful and just way. They should strive and never give up since God will help them through their hard work.

I want to encourage them that life is challenging currently and that the former generation things were not that challenging as now. You should try to give your best and struggle to get what you deserve through the rightful and just way. They should strive and never give up since God will help them through their hard work.
Uasin Gishu women taking part in a trauma healing session following the 2007/8 PEV

A drawing by women depicting what makes them happy and what makes them sad
FALLING IS NOT FAILING
By Jesinter Adhiambo Ogada

“Not all of us can be leaders but still we can be out there by either supporting other women.”
My office is all about dealing with conflicts. I remember when I came to Burnt forest the government was building houses for the internally displaced persons (IDPs). I looked at the list and it was purely composed of two communities (Kalenjin and Kikuyu). This left the other communities dissatisfied and disgruntled so through my District Commissioner we were able to urge the government to involve the other communities and hence we were able to avert conflict. Though the focus was on the two major communities, many other communities suffered too and the scenario appeared to be favouring the other two.

Initially, it was a challenge working in the resettlement programme. For instance, the scheme targeted individuals with one acre and the donors too gave conditions to the government to follow the set scheme yet there were other individuals who were also in need.

I took office as the Administrator in the Ministry of Interior and National Government Coordination when I was aged 33. The perception by the communities that I was a small girl was a setback for me but when they came to see the impact of my work, they all started respecting me. My background experience in social work enabled me to interact with people from different backgrounds and culture. My education in the field of social services and journalism has helped me a great deal to know how to handle various kinds of people. The outcome of my work has also helped win the confidence of the people.
I got support from my supervisors, the former District Commissioner Mr. Charles Mukele and Onesmus Chart in terms of the guidance and trust in what I was doing and my work. I worked hand in hand with the District Commissioner then and the then member of parliament Hon. Margret Kamar.

Most of us women look down upon ourselves. Women do not talk (in barazas); they have fear. It was the community men, women and elders and even previously the councillors who backed me up and made me feel that I can and I am able to do something. It goes without saying that the community is able to build, support and nurture confidence in she who comes up with a clear vision on how to make things improve in the community. They did it to me, and they can do it to any other woman.

“Sometimes as women we are not persistent and it is usually that when we are almost succeeding we give up.”

There is peace and security in Ainapkoi division. My work in the whole division and thus my impact can be assessed in the division. I have gone beyond my jurisdiction and gotten involved in building women up. I encourage women to form groups and we share pieces of advice with them. I have learnt that we need to let women express themselves. We do this by letting them stand up and express themselves on issues touching on their lives. My being in the office inspires the women and the girls. I am usually invited to schools to encourage and motivate girls not to be shy of leadership. I have encouraged many women and they ask me what I did and whom I knew that propelled me to my current position. I tell them that it came out of my educational qualifications. I applied for the job and got the job. I advise them that men nowadays go for women who are educated and I back up my statement by citing examples of the role models they admire.
Falling is not failing

Sometimes as women we are not persistent and it is usually that when we are almost succeeding we give up. Women do not support each other yet we have the numbers. We are not united as women. Many women lack empowerment. Most of the women depend on their husbands on all the necessities. There is lack of support from husbands when it comes to the chores and duties assigned to women.

There is also inclusion of the youthful girls (women) who abdicate their roles to the elderly women to do the peacebuilding work. Many elderly women have been brought up from the cultural and traditional nature that puts back the women.

Not all of us can be leaders but still we can be out there by either supporting other women though we might not have resources but we stand with the other women. We have been used to waiting for other people to do things for us and we have influence in other ways through our position as women. We also need to be resilient. If you meet an obstacle difficult to surmount, re-strategise and bounce back instead of giving up.

Falling is not failing. It is failing to stand up after falling.

(The writer is the Administrator in the Ministry of Interior and National Government Coordination, Ainapko Division in Uasin Gishu County).
Stories of Women Building Peace

MY COMMUNITY DREAM

- LOVE DIFFERENCE
  - HARMONY

- PEACE AND STABILITY
  - LIVE IN HARMONY WITH PEOPLE AND ENVIRONMENT
  - WOMEN BUILD ENVIRONMENT

INTERACTION
- BRING DOWN WALLS
  - MEN AND WOMEN SIDE BY SIDE
  - NEG.
  - ALL RESPECT IDEAS - NO MATTER WHAT DIFF
  - GIRL-CHILD PROTECTED

- IMPROVE ETC. AFTER PEACE

PROSPERITY FOR ALL RICH AND POOR

END WAR LIVE IN PEACE

BUILD RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RICH AND POOR

SUSTAINABLE PEACE AND TRANSFORMATION FROM CONFLICT TO PEACE

BASIC SERVICES
- SCHOOL, HOSPITAL, EVERYTHING

DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITIES

PEACE AND REDUCTION OF CRIME