



Issue 008

e-newsletter

The Concerned Citizens for Peace is a group, which came into being following the violence that erupted in Kenya after the disputed December 27th 2007 elections. The group embraces the values of peace, justice, inclusiveness, non-discrimination and non-violent action. Through regular meetings, the group seeks to provide a forum where members can generate and harvest ideas to restore peace, truth and justice in Kenya.

Aggrey Omondi: Force Positive in Siaya

By Jessica Hoy and Angela Vance

"It doesn't matter who you are, what tribe you come from, or what side you're on; if you are suffering, we will help you"—so spoke Aggrey Omondi, farmer and community organizer, in the aftermath of the unrest that followed the December 2007 presidential election in Kenya.

Omondi is a humanitarian with a vision who refuses to define where community ends. He doesn't care which mother tongue you speak, what hue your skin is, what land you come from; he cares that you are a human and that you are struggling to live in a world that isn't always friendly and isn't always stable. Yet his steely determination to help all who suffered—not just his family, or his town, or his tribe—led to criticisms and even threats from those with more partisan or parochial sentiments.

Aggrey Omondi's history as a tireless social advocate predates the post-election crisis by more than two decades. In 1986, he and a group of fellow farmers in Ugunja, a small town in Siaya District of western Kenya, pooled their resources and established a humble dairy cooperative with one dairy cow to its name. In response to the felt needs of the co-op members, Omondi spearheaded the sequential expansion of the co-op's activities: first, the creation of a community library with

books on sustainable agriculture, and then the development of a farmer-to-farmer agricultural training course, and then a nursery school for local children, and so on.

These efforts did not bear fruit easily. An ordinary farmer himself, Omondi lacked start-up capital, a vehicle for transport, and even a healthy body; a childhood bone infection had left him with a permanent, polio-like limp. And yet, Omondi recalls, he would wake at 3 A.M. to walk the 25 km to Siaya town, where he met with government officials to seek support and partnership for his group's activities.

As with so many other NGOs, no amount of experience could have prepared UCRC—or Aggrey Omondi—for the aftermath of the late December 2007 presidential election. When the violence hit, UCRC immediately reorganized itself from a community development organization into a humanitarian rapid response unit.

Ten years later, the erstwhile dairy co-op had become a formidable community development organization in its own right, with additional programs in microfinance, community health, women's empowerment, and peacebuilding.

In recognition of this radically expanded identity, in 1997 Ugunja Community Resource Centre (UCRC) was born and in short order became a model for indigenous, Kenyan-led,

holistic community development. It developed impressive partnerships with organizations such as the World Agroforestry Centre, Microsoft Corporation, and the Peace and Development Trust—and yet it remained a community-owned initiative through and through. All of the staff, for example, lived in the very same villages that the organization serves.

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Omondi called a meeting of local business owners, government officials, religious leaders, and village elders to enlist their help to stop the looting and violence. In particular, Omondi recognized that the explosive rage of the perpetrators had deep historical bases. "The primary perpetrators," Omondi observed, "are ambitious young men, aged 15 to 35, with nowhere to go thanks to a soaring unemployment rate. They have truly suffered, and their anger has seethed at the surface for a long time. The post-election fracas has merely provided an opportunity for tensions to explode."

Omondi's philosophy of universal acceptance was challenged when these youths turned

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THE WATCHMAN

A Season for Wondering

By Eric Quantai

Children ask the most exasperating “why” questions. They force us to turn things upside down and examine them from angles we hadn’t considered before.

Childhood curiosity reconnects the rest of us to the world and rejuvenates our wonder in the universe. We realize that for life to make sense we have to embrace it with childlike faith and observe it through childlike eyes.

Many of problems that we keep going through might never have happened

if we had paused for a while and asked ourselves “Why?” or, better still, “Why did it happen?”.

Seasons come and go, and still we need more than ever to arm ourselves with enough reasons so that we can solve our problems once they arise by implementing what we have found through our enquiries to be the solution.

You and I need to be part of the team that does all of this questioning and wondering. We need not leave it all to the politicians.

Now that it the opposition party is included in forming our government, we have a duty to keep on reminding them that we are watching them by pointing out things that ought to be done.

“Do not be like the mosquito
that bites the owner of the
house.”

Malawian proverb from
African Wisdom on War and Peace,
compiled by Annetta Miller

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This weeks profile

George Wachira

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George Wachira is an experienced peace and justice worker who had been involved in the field of peace building in Africa for a long time now. George, driven by a personal motto, MAKING KNOWLEDGE WORK FOR PEACE, has worked in different positions at the Nairobi Peace Initiative - Africa, a leading pioneering peace-building organization with a history of 22 years of work experience across Africa.

Wachira has been involved in mediation and dialogue facilitation in conflicts in Ghana, Liberia, Somalia, Rwanda, Sudan, and, more recently, in Kenya. He has also consulted widely on matters of conflict, peace building, and conflict transformation in Africa.

Over the years, Wachira has acquired skills and experience in research; conflict analysis; training in peace building; conflict resolution/management; conflict early warning; design, monitoring and evaluation of peace building strategies and interventions; mediation and facilitation; and reconciliation support. His current peace studies PhD research focuses on “Transitional Justice and the Politics of Truth, Memory and Reconciliation.” He is also an editor specializing in the peace-building field.

With this rich knowledge and experience in the field, George felt obligated to promote peace and stability in his own country when violence erupted after the 27 December 2007 general elections in Kenya. Together with four others, he initiated the formation of the Concerned Citizens for Peace (CCP), a forum that has been involved in various activities at both national and grassroots level to restore peace and justice in Kenya.

In his experience, Wachira says, the world is more attuned to preparing for than preventing the worst. We therefore spend huge amounts of resources treating symptoms of conflict but rarely address how those symptoms could be lessened or eliminated. He believes that the best preventive action occurs when we address the underlying issues and causes of conflict long before they explode into violence. These may involve structures of governance, distribution of resources, perceptions of inclusion and exclusion, economic marginalization, and poverty.

Finally, reflecting on the words of renowned peace building specialist John Paul Lederach, “We may have to invest twice as long in peace work as has been invested in war making,” Wachira says that in the short term, peace building and other aspects of change are not so much about immediate results, but more about sustaining a platform through which change may be realized over the long term.

Compiled by Dolphine Ndeda

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Remembering Our First Responders

By Sahondra Kiplagat

First Responders, also known as Emergency Responders, are those first on the scene during an emergency. They consist of fire fighters, the police, ambulance attendants, first-aid workers, public healthcare workers, volunteer humanitarian relief workers, educators, community leaders, and other rescue personnel.

Emergency Responders work long hours, and their resources may be limited or stretched to capacity. In addition, their work is performed under stressful and chaotic conditions, and first responders have to work through unprecedented personal demands and may even be exposed to life-threatening situations on a recurrent basis.

Not surprisingly, there has been an increasing recognition that Emergency Responders can be affected by their exposure to traumatic events. The effects of this exposure can result in their feeling overworked and overwhelmed. In addition, Emergency Responders are likely to be the first person on the scene, and so may bear the brunt of the victim's emotions. This all can lead to the development of long-term psychological difficulties such as anxiety, depression, anger, aggression, and even post-traumatic symptoms similar to those seen in the victims of an event.

Among First Responders, the prevalence of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) after serious incidents can be as high as 30 percent, compared to 1 to 2 percent in the general population. Knowing this, First Responders nevertheless still show a willingness to expose themselves to potentially distressing situations and the associated risks to their well being in order to help the thousands of others in dangerous situations.

In agriculture, first responders must deal with typical agricultural emergencies such as animal, aquatic, or plant disease outbreaks that may pose additional risks to their health. The burning of agricultural land that was seen during Kenya's post-elections violence created an altogether different agricultural emergency: The flight of farm labourers and, in some cases, farm owners resulted in hundreds of thousands of internally displaced people and many farms abandoned and smouldering.

Emergency responders were first on the scene delivering food and emergency supplies to those affected by the post-elections violence. They worked tirelessly in extreme conditions whilst remaining seemingly invulnerable to stress and emotion.

The Kenyan Emergency Responders willingly exposed themselves to these distressing situations and the associated risks to their well being, choosing to work to help others.

We pay homage to the post-elections violence First Responders: The Kenya Red Cross, NGOs, civil society groups, individuals, and all those who assisted the hundreds of thousands affected. They are all true Kenyan heroes.

Sahondra Kiplagat holds a PhD in environmental psychology. She is a research fellow at Tegemeo Institute of Agricultural Policy and Development, which undertakes empirical research and analysis of topical agricultural policy issues.

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their anger on UCRC. One evening, for example, youths attempted to set fire to UCRC's newly established vocational training institute. And yet, UCRC stayed the course: Not only was it the first organization to provide humanitarian and medical relief to hundreds of displaced families in Siaya District, it was also the only NGO that actively reached out to the perpetrators themselves. Mere days after the election, Omondi himself was stepping into harm's way to engage in dialogue the youths manning road barricades.

Soon Omondi and his staff were

convening community forums to allow for the constructive venting of frustrations and to enable the disaffected youths to discuss concrete, peaceful ways to move forward. The most vociferous appeal that youths made was for opportunities to earn a living (could there be a more basic and decent demand?). Ugunja Community Resource Centre responded by providing direct start-up grants to youth perpetrators so that they could turn their energies from criminal destructiveness to productive and gainful employment—swords into ploughshares, as it were. Recipients of these grants have formed an association through which they help

one another to develop business plans and provide encouragement.

UCRC's post-election activities have expanded well beyond outreach to youths. Other initiatives have included constituency peace committees, a community-led truth and reconciliation commission, food and medical aid to internally displaced persons, and resettlement assistance to those returning to the area.

But Omondi's commitment to serving the youths—the very same youths who were wreaking the most havoc—has had perhaps the most far-reaching impact of his organization's efforts. His commitment is restoring hope to

a generation of Kenyans who have for too long faced only despair and destitution.

Aggrey Omondi—holder of the belief that every person in this world, regardless of credentials, age, ethnicity, or gender, can make a positive contribution to their society—has been a force for positive change for more than two decades. But never has his presence been more vital than during the last three months.

"If you are suffering, we will help you"—never has the Republic of Kenya needed more urgently such a simple and radical social sentiment.

Upcoming Events and Highlights from *Amani Sasa* daily

- If you are looking for information about the peace process and initiatives that have been established towards this go to www.rescuekenya.org. This site has information on IDP's, provides a resource to those who are assisting people on the ground and links up various peace initiatives. The site also has forums and blogs where people can post updates on any upcoming activities. See www.forums.rescuekenya.org/ccp to post a comment on the CCP forum.
 - i. All groups working with IDP's requiring assistance, please check www.rescuekenya.org/govt.coordination.php for contacts for specific government assistance.
 - ii. An online database has been set up www.crisis.rescuekenya.org to collect data on IDP's. To enable the collection of proper data, all those asking for assistance need to provide data by emailing info@rescuekenya.org. Required is Names of persons in IDP's, Gender (male/female), children, location of camp, IDP's from where, Date in, Specific assistance sought, skills of IDP's.
 - iii. Anyone in contact with persons who lost or suffered direct damage to their businesses in the Post Election violence, get government assessment forms from the nearest Chamber of Commerce offices or download a copy from:
- One Kenya-one Nation is looking for peace messages to pass on to school children and students to ingrain a patriotic culture in them with. If you have any ideas of such messages which pass on the idea of peaceful co-existence with no ethnic or religious animosity kindly send your them in to: nationkenya@yahoo.com or info@onekenya-onenation.com. You can also check out their website on www.onekenya-onenation.org
- There is a scholar in the field of conflict management and peace studies who is willing to give a talk on reconciliation the Kenyan perspective for free. She is also willing to share a talk on any other topic so long as she is informed about this prior. If interested contact William Nd'ungu on email wildleonnd@yahoo.com to facilitate the talk.
- The Leadership Institute of Kenya (LIKA) is still holding their meetings every Wednesday at LIKA offices, on Kirichwa road near Masaba Hospital from 5 – 7 p.m. The meetings discuss the deeper issues affecting our country such as ethnicity, failure of democracy, the youth, money culture and lack of nationhood, as Kenyans seek to go "GO NATIONAL". All are welcome.
- The Kenyans for Peace with Truth and Justice (KPTJ) online petition effort calling on all the Members of the 10th Parliament of Kenya to reduce their massive salaries and return land that they have acquired illegally is still on-going. They have been collecting signatures for the petition and an attached letter to be sent to the MP's, and plan on reaching 10,000 signatures. It is posted online on: <http://www.thepetitionsite.com/1/reduce-Kenyan-MPs-salary>. KPTJ urges all Kenyans, friends of Kenya, members in the diaspora to please take a moment and add your signature to the petition online.
- Copies of the Amani Sasa update and Weekly can be accessed on various websites including www.peaceinkenya.net and on www.amanisasa.rescuekenya.org

Compiled by Linda Bore

Kenya National Anthem

O God of all creation,
Bless this our land and nation.
Justice be our shield and defender,
May we dwell in unity,
Peace and liberty.
Plenty be found within our borders.

Let one and all arise
With hearts both strong and true.
Service be our earnest endeavour,
And our Homeland of Kenya,
Heritage of splendour,
Firm may we stand to defend.

Let all with one accord
In common bond united,
Build this our nation together,
And the glory of Kenya,
The fruit of our labour
Fill every heart with thanksgiving

Do you have an event? Send us the story and a photo.

E-mail it
amanisasa@gmail.com