

IN THE SHADOW OF DEATH

My trauma, my experience



**Voices of Kenyan Women
from post-election violence**

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and
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In the shadow of Death: My trauma, my Experience

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Rosemary Okello Orlale

African Woman and Child

Preface

In the Shadow of Death: My trauma my experience shares real stories of Kenyan women in the wake of post election violence that engulfed the country after the botched December 27, 2007 elections. Like thousands of women made strangers in the land of their birth, this collection of short stories documents the horrific experiences of women who found themselves uprooted from their homes, gang raped and infected with HIV/AIDS, separated from their children and husbands, impregnated by strangers, flung into internally displaced peoples camps and shattered dreams for a future and a hope for themselves and their families.

Yet amidst all the chaos the book illustrates the admirable courage of the women who despite facing uncertainty, are able to pick up the pieces and move on. Their enormous ability to reach out and nurture even in the worst of circumstances. Having survived the violence, they emerge not only as brave but also represent a particular triumph: the triumph of affirming life.

By giving an account of the pain, struggles, dilemmas and challenges that have continued to haunt them long after the violence stopped, the book is an indictment on the government for failure to protect its citizens from both state and non state orchestrated violence. By documenting the experiences of women, the book tells not only the stories of these women but is a record of a whole people abandoned by a government indifferent to their plight.

We hope that *"In the shadow of death"* will prick the conscience of the political class to provide a channel for women to amplify their voices in the proposed Truth Justice and Reconciliation Commission. May their stories serve as an inspiration to others who are hurting to come forward and relieve their pain so they can start healing. May their cry for justice be so loud as to drown the voices of impunity. As they yearn for justice we salute their courage as their dignity remains a source of hope for recreating a better Kenya.

Anne Gathumbi

Touching the Star of Hope

Once in a while, something so significant happens that changes the way society lives. Such events define the extremes of hope and despair, draw the line between good and evil, and enable humanity to be aware that it carries good and evil in the same breath.

They also help human beings to draw the line on things they will never accept again. The violence that occurred in the aftermath of the 2007 General Election was one such experience.

This book, *In the Shadow of Death: My trauma, my experience*, is a collection of public testimonies about what many women went through as darkness engulfed Kenya.

With the exception of the stories about rape and HIV/Aids in which only the identities of the women affected have been altered to protect their privacy, every experience in this book is real, every teardrop wet, every sweat-drop salty, and every blood drop red.

The stories here affirm one thing, that Kenyan women's bodies were battlefields upon which wars were waged. The pain they continue to bear from personal injury to the body and the spirit, the trauma they suffered in watching their children, fathers and husbands killed or maimed, is for the first time put together in this collection.

This book collects the major highlights of the crisis and puts them on the record, arranged according to themes encompassing the whole spectrum of experiences – political, social and economic with anecdotal experiences ranging from physical abuse to psychological torture, sexual violence, homelessness and widowhood.

This book also seeks to be part of the solution by fundamentally affirming that violence against women constitutes a violation of the rights and fundamental freedoms of human beings.

The book adds to the clarion call rallying all society to end the long-standing failure to protect and promote those rights and freedoms.

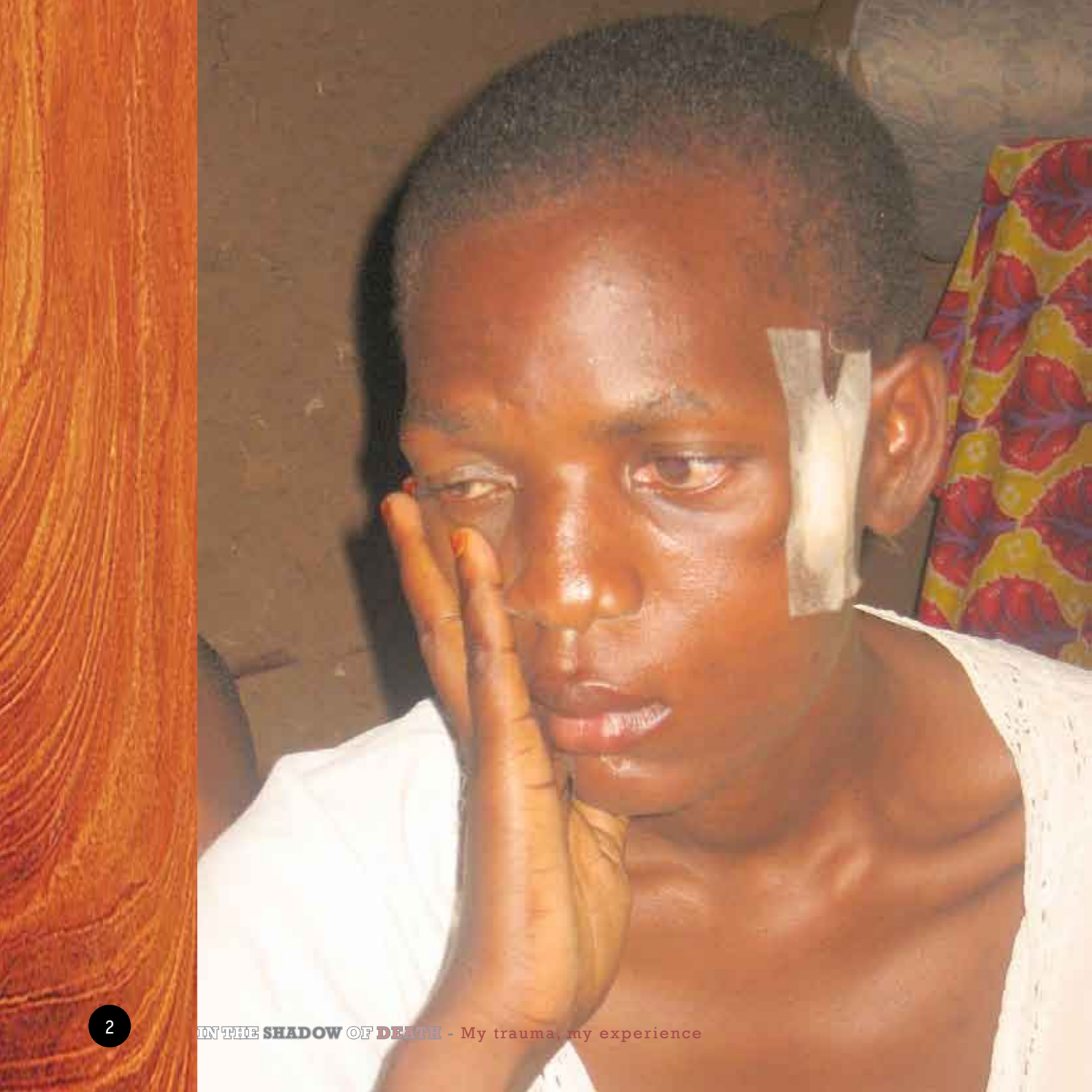
Even though the stories in this volume, told by women survivors and those that cared for them, depict the raw experiences from Kenya's most regrettable political upheaval, in them lie messages of hope and succor, as well as powerful lessons that should make it possible for society to vow: Never again!; Because a sovereign Nation such as Kenya should celebrate and uphold its women.

At the end, this book offers to celebrate endurance and throws down the challenge, echoing a theme inspired by Martin Luther King Jr's post-humous book, *"Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?"*

In that book, Dr King captured the moment when black America was at its lowest in the fight for civil and other democratic rights. King was the lone voice in the wilderness, encouraging humanity not to give up.

In it, he says, "There is the star of hope dangling up the sky. And it is not very far from our heads. All that we need to do is to jump up and touch the star."

Experiences and trauma



Shot in the jaw

She arrived at the hospital in a coma. The doctors gave her one look and decided that hers was a minor injury. She would remain in a coma for two weeks.

After six weeks' stay at the New Nyanza Provincial General Hospital, she would be discharged – on condition that she attends the referral Kenyatta National Hospital for specialised treatment.

She fights back tears, sobs and shakes her head in bewildered anger.

"I don't want to be reminded about that incident. It makes my heart sink. Please, ask me something else," she screams at the memory.

When Alice finally opens up, it is with a torrent of questions: "Why did they shoot me? I was an innocent woman who hardly made ends meet. Why did they shatter my life?" she asks as tears roll down her cheeks.

The 27-year-old security guard had left her one-roomed mud-walled house in Kisumu's Manyatta slums in January 2008 and was shot in the nape. The bullet exited through her face, damaging her jawbone.

"The police were shooting indiscriminately. I saw them but there was no time to escape. I found myself in hospital," she says.

She cannot eat solid foods because the bullet shattered her jaws.

Alice, a single mother of one, moved members of the Commission of Inquiry into the Post-Election Violence to tears when they sat in Kisumu for three days to hear from the police, politicians, provincial administration and victims about what really happened.

"I was shot by people firing from a saloon car. I could not tell who they were but they looked like policemen." Although Atieno escaped death by a whisker, putting her life together is a daunting task.

She is still in pain and cannot continue working as a guard to support herself and her child.

"I can barely talk," she says. The bullet disfigured her face. Her once striking beauty is only a memory preserved in a photograph hanging on her wall.

She is one of the many residents of Kisumu who are still nursing gunshot wounds months after police turned their weapons on them.

Alice lives in misery. She relies on well-wishers to pay KSh500 monthly rent, which is many months in arrears, and to buy food. Her son's school fees is another KSh500 a month.

The house leaks whenever it rains. She has to use polythene paper to cover her bedding.

When Alice first went to the Kenyatta National Hospital to seek help, she was asked to pay KSh10,000, money she did not have.

"Now, I am told the cost has escalated since. The KSh10,000 was just to start off the treatment," she adds.

Before the shooting, Alice worked for the security firm, Da'Ross in Kisumu. Her former employer has been generous so far, sending her money often, but there is no telling when the tap will shut.



Suffering in silence

Loud ceaseless banging on the door woke up Miryam at 4 am. She had turned in early after an exhausting day treating goatskin and running a vegetable kiosk, but she still did not feel ready to get up.

In a moment, a group of youthful men broke into her single-room house in Mshomoroni Village in Mombasa.

"Before I could sit up," says the 54-year-old widow, "about ten men stormed in and started ransacking the house. They ordered me not to make any noise. One of them, who was carrying a blunt object, hit me on the right leg." The spot has turned into an ugly scar.

One man grabbed Miryam by the neck, pushed her hard on the floor and raped her. "I could not imagine that at my age somebody could do that to me. Up to three men raped me that morning," she sighs with resignation.

She later learnt that her kiosk had been torched and everything she had left in it the previous day had gone up in smoke.

She went to a nearby dispensary to have her swollen leg treated but never mentioned the sexual assault. Neither did she report to the police as she did not deem it necessary. The thought of reliving her trauma, as well as the stigma that would follow were sufficient to buy her silence.

Betty Sharon, a community worker who has been caring for Omala says: "We took her for counseling and she was tested for HIV but was found negative. She is yet to go for another test but in the meantime she is taking some painkillers for the festering wound on her leg."

Sharon runs the Coast Women in Development organization, where up to 17 cases of rape have been reported to have occurred during the post-elections period. Many more have decided to keep to themselves for fear of stigma or reprisal from the perpetrators. Omala and her grandchildren now live with well wishers.

"After everything has cooled down, the government should identify the other people who were affected but were not classified as being internally displaced, especially the women who have lost everything," Sharon adds.

Mrs. Obuya, represents hundreds of people who have nowhere to turn to for assistance and her only hope is that such cruelty will not be visited on innocent people again.

Omala contrasts her harrowing story with the situation back in 1982 during the failed coup attempt when she was in Nairobi; "During that time what the soldiers did when they saw us in the crossfire was to shield us. But this time round things were different because it was civilians who were looting and killing each other while the police kept off," she adds with eye besieging for justice.



Gang-raped by the police

Kibera women narrate their ordeal

Her lips are dry. Tears rolling down her cheeks in thin streaks. It is several months since she was raped.

She also contracted HIV.

Maureen Wanjira, 35, had dashed out of her house to look for her missing eight-year-old son moments after police crushed violent protests in the sprawling Kibera slums.

"I found my son unhurt, but in shock, by the railroad. As we were going back home, we were accosted by police officers from the General Service Unit who sought to know where we were coming from," the single mother of two says.

Before she could explain what she was doing outside, one of the officers grabbed her from the back, dragged her a few metres from the rail and raped her. After that, his other 10 colleagues raped her in turns as her son watched in horror.

"They left, and for some time, I lay on the ground unable to come to terms with the horrifying attack," she adds, unable to hold back tears.

"The pain was incredible and it felt like I had a burning poker inside me. I was utterly devastated and I knew I should report the matter to the nearby chief's camp."

Wanjira chose not to confide in anyone and instead bottled her emotions. She never sought treatment as the situation was still volatile. She spent the next few weeks hiding from the world.

And just when she thought things could not get any worse, she tested positive for HIV at a health centre in Kibera weeks later when she sought help.

"My world just collapsed. They had left me with a permanent reminder of what they had done."

Wanjira went through some very dark days and spent hours of each day sobbing.

At the Kibera clinic, she was referred to the Kenyatta National Hospital Gender Based Violence Recovery Centre where she has been receiving comprehensive counseling.

Today she is able to talk about the rape ordeal.

***Rose Nasike had full-blown Aids and was bedridden when Kenya went to the elections in 2007. Her health status did not stop the General Service Unit soldiers who stormed her house during the post election crisis from raping her. Nasike says her husband had died of Aids-related complications the previous year and her condition had deteriorated since. In fact, she was so sick that she had given up taking medicine.

"The counseling sessions at Kenyatta National Hospital's Gender Based Violence Recovery Centre have helped me a lot. I have been able to tap on my inner strength and continue with the Anti-Retroviral Therapy," she adds.

These two women represent a considerable number of people who were raped during the violence following

the election but were unable to seek medical help immediately.

As plans to set up a Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC) get under way, much remains to be seen of how women will use the hearings to make their case.

Atsango Chesoni, a human rights, governance and gender consultant, says a gender-responsive TJRC is necessary to encourage the participation of women.

"While it is commendable that the law provides for special units and specific mechanisms and procedures to address the experiences of women and other vulnerable groups, there is need for certain specific mechanisms to ensure a gender responsive TJRC," she adds. Legal provisions to protect victims of sexual and gender-based violence, including provisions to allow for testimony in camera, must be incorporated as part of the law setting up the TJRC. Chesoni suggests that the commission must have counselors with expertise in handling complaints relating to sexual violence.

"Given that rape carries the extra burden of stigma, there may be need for provisions that protect complainants and witnesses." Women, who form half of Kenya's population, have an inherent interest in the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission as they bore the brunt of many violations in the past.

Women are traditionally under-represented in Kenya's decision making institutions, such as Parliament. "If women do not participate in the on-going processes geared towards the reconstruction of Kenya, it is unlikely that the new dispensation will address their historical subordination.

It is imperative that mechanisms to ensure women's participation in all processes of the Kenya National Dialogue and Reconciliation are instituted," says Chesoni.

The lawmaking process and the TJRC law have gender gaps that need to be addressed in order to ensure effective participation of all Kenyans.



My ballot, my curse

A post poll violence victim swears never to vote again

Salome Njeri, 20, wanted to beat the long queues at the polling station, but now says her vote caused her all the problems she has endured. She had just given birth and wanted to be around her baby.

"I was very excited since it was my first time to vote and I wanted to be the first one. I cast my vote in a nearby school," she says.

As Njeri eagerly awaited the outcome of the election on December 28 and 29, word started going round in her Marachi Estate in Busia that people from certain communities would be evicted from their houses.

"It was terrible and every person who was perceived to be from a particular tribe was kicked out of his house and the house set on fire," she narrates tearfully.

She goes on: "Gunshots rent the air as any person who was suspected to be from a particular tribe was attacked by protesting youth. I did not look back. I just found myself in a police station where most people had fled to."

Njeri says she had no time to carry her clothes and only returned to her vandalised house later with the police in order to rescue to get the few clothes left behind by looters.

"I spent eight months at the Busia Police Station depending on relief food from the government and other well wishers. I had never been used to such a life before. It was a hard experience," she says.

At the police station, a number of internally displaced persons died from illness while others gave birth under unhygienic conditions.

"At the Busia Police Station, we were congested and some had to sleep in vehicles parked at the compound until tents were brought from the Kenya Red Cross Society," she says.

"We were mocked by area residents who accused us of being behind the manipulation of election results. But we kept quiet as the police had given us full protection," Njeri adds.

Her mother, Rose Wangechi, was also affected as she was kicked out of her house after she went to pay rent.

"The landlord threw back the rent I had given him and that is why I decided to move out of the estate and look elsewhere," Njeri's mother said. Njeri used to run a small business to make ends meet but now her friend has employed her as a shop attendant at the border town.

"The time we were staying in camps was wasteful and I have to catch up because my son needs to eat," Njeri says.

She sees inter-marriage as a solution to all problems that affected Kenyans.

She maintains that if all elections will mean violence, then the government should adopt another way of coming up with leaders. "I have lost confidence in human beings and neighbours as they can turn against you any time because of political differences," Ms Njeri observes.

She has decided to continue living in Busia despite what happened to her.

She notes that the proposed Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC) could ensure that

those who perpetrated the violence are brought to book and the victims compensated. Betty Maloba a lawyer based in Busia, proposes that inter-marriages be encouraged so that each community appreciates the other.

"We should now do away with provincial schools that seem to encourage tribalism so that students can learn from anywhere. Kenyans should also be ready to work anywhere across the country in order to bring back the unity and national cohesion that had existed before the post election violence," Maloba observes.

Busia District Officer 1 Richard Karani says that peace building and reconciliation is on-going and it's targeting returnees from various parts of the country and those who were evicted from Busia. "We are using every person

to ensure that we preach reconciliation so that we can co-exist the way we used to before," Mr. Karani says.

Victor Bwire of the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR) observes that historical injustices that were committed by the two previous regimes should be addressed. "The whole problem is on resource allocation and land grabbing that was done by a few greedy individuals and the government has to come up with along lasting solution to these problems else what was experienced early this year will be repeated come 2012," Bwire adds. "We have to put aside what happened in January and live harmoniously and forget about the past else we shall continue to engage in unnecessary argument over what happened during post election violence," David Erulu chairman of Catholic Peace Justice Commission in Busia observed.

No compensation for rape

No one can compensate you for rape, being infected with a sexually transmitted disease, and some of us are now HIV positive with children looking up to us, says a woman who survived the post-election violence.

“But there is a certain amount of peace that only justice can bring, there are those of us who meet our perpetrators every other day, they are our neighbors, it’s tough knowing that they are still very safe from the arm of law,” she adds.

Experts say laws to prosecute sexual violence against women do not hold much promise for the victim.

Lawyer Moses Otsieno explains: “The Sexual Offences Act, though fundamental, has major weaknesses in the sense that it leaves out some key offences.

“It neither recognises that sexual abuses performed during a period of political chaos are genocidal or war crimes, which therefore means that cases of this nature cannot be tried under this Act,” he adds.

The law does recognise and criminalise gang rape, but not within the unique context of political upheaval.

This, therefore, makes the law stronger against the day-to-day sexual offences that are not associated with political instability. Additionally, the lawyer says, this weakness has become even more glaring in light of the United Nations resolution seeking to recognise acts of sexual violence as genocidal crimes.

Legal experts say various avenues of seeking redress will need to be explored to cater for survivors of sexual violence, who hold scant evidence against their perpetrators.

Although the proposed Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission does not narrow down on sexual abuses, it does make two important provisions.

First, it recognizes that sexual violence constitutes genocidal crimes, which legal experts say is critical, and is at one with international thinking on efforts to eliminate violence against women.

Secondly, in light of the heated amnesty debate, the TJRC law Parliament passed clearly says that no amnesty shall be granted for all cases of sexual violence.

Hundreds of women are still waiting for legal institutions to herald the much-needed healing and its cousin justice, even as the TJRC is set up.

Experts emphasise the need for closure through punishment for offenders. However, they also recognise that sexual abuse cases are difficult to prosecute, especially where evidence is unavailable.

The law has strict requirements and immense evidentially challenges. Even where a woman has reported rape, watertight evidence needs to be provided. This puts many people who have been sexually abused at a disadvantage.

For example, Section 38 of the Sexual Offences Act suggests reciprocal punishment, meaning that a sexually abused person must prove his or her allegation, or less face the punishment discharged suspects would have got had they been proved guilty.

Legal experts say that where evidence is strong but the witnesses are not forthcoming, the requirement of a witness can be suspended, but where evidence is the issue, the case becomes even more difficult.

"However, in light of the Commission of Inquiry into the Post-Election Violence Report and the recommendations made therein, in the event that certain proposed measures are put in place, all is not lost for these women," explains Moses Otsieno.

Having a tribunal in place as proposed by the Commission of Inquiry into the Post-Election Violence report will see such cases addressed comprehensively.

The report's recommendations seem to go beyond the TJRC law by aiming for special tribunal with international representation that constitutes the UN and the African Union.

The report recommends that if a tribunal is not set up, then the state and the victims can file complaints with the International Criminal Court.

"The Commission has been very significant because at the policy level, it has provided an opportunity for these women to connect with the government," says Millicent Obaso of CARE Kenya.

"How else can the plight of these women be brought to the ears of the government?"

The opportunity for justice exists, but it may be a long journey for most survivors of sexual violence.

"My daughter is a survivor of sexual abuse, she became pregnant and miscarried, we know who assaulted

her, but she has lost hope that she will find justice," explains a mother of four.

"I have been strong for her sake. Other young women like her are not this fortunate to have someone who stands by them and might give up due the long and delayed process towards achieving justice."

Otsieno agrees with her: "The longer these cases take, the lesser the chances for justice to be done. With time, people forget details, memory fails, files and important documents may be misplaced," he adds.

Despite the glaring challenges, women survivors hope to get an opportunity to testify at the tribunal, and during the truth, justice and reconciliation commission hearings.

Under TJRC, they will have an opportunity to talk about land, property destroyed and even the lives of the loved ones they lost.

In addition, TJRC will demand that compensation be granted to them accordingly. If the crime was by the state, then the state will be expected to pay. Individual perpetrators also face similar penalties.

Although no compensation can restore these women to what they were, it is nonetheless a necessary gesture in the spirit of true healing and reconciliation.

Widowed at 20

Geoffrey Korir left for the garage on the street to his house in Litein town to finalize repairs on a vehicle and promised to return as soon as he was done. He did not even take his breakfast, saying the work at hand was light.

Shortly thereafter, as hundreds of demonstrators poured into the streets of Litein, police confronted them, firing teargas and live bullets.

Minutes later, barely 200 metres from their rented house, Korir lay dead.

Only 20 years old, nursing a two-year-old boy and four months pregnant, Janet Cheptoo Korir had been widowed.

She dashed to the scene of the killing, but was only greeted by an ominous pool of blood. Her husband's body had been removed and taken to the Litein Hospital mortuary.

Lonely, confused and without any money, she had to make burial arrangements for her husband. Relatives and friends came in handy, and in two weeks, Korir had been laid to rest 200 kilometres away at his rural home in Segemian, Narok South District.

The widow who used to earn from selling shoes returned to town only to find that thugs had broken into her house and looted her household goods as well as her stock of shoes worth Sh30,000.

"It has become very hard to feed my little ones because I don't have a source of income."



Cheptoo's inheritance from her late husband, save for a quarter acre of land her husband left at their rural home, she has little else to fall back on. "We are asking for compensation from the government to assisting us start life afresh," the widow says.

"It is also time all Kenyans accepted that we belong to one country and one destiny," says Cheptoo.



Neighbours turned attackers

Jane Achieng had come to regard Naivasha as her home. She had lived most of her life there, invested all her wealth there, started and nurtured friendships and came to love its weather and routine.

On January 27, 2008, the 49-year-old widowed mother of one left rental houses her husband had left her when he died in a road accident in 1994, and travelled to the safety of her ancestral home in Siaya.

From collecting rent for 16 units in Naivasha, Achieng struggles to raise the rent for her single room in Busia town. It holds all her earthly belongings – chair and a one-inch mattress rolled up on the floor – a far cry from the plot in Naivasha's Kabati where her husband had built rental units.

"Sometimes I do not like talking about Naivasha I remember the merciless killing of innocent Kenyans by armed attackers. What I saw was too inhuman," she says before breaking down into tears.

All her 16 rental houses were set on fire. She lost all her belongings except the land where the buildings stood. Two days before the attacks, Achieng recalls that leaflets circulated. They warned people from named ethnic communities that if they did not leave the town, they would be killed.

Their eviction from Naivasha was in an apparent retaliation for the killings and displacement of families in the North Rift, Nyanza and Western provinces.

"I escaped death narrowly because I pleaded with the attackers that I was a helpless widow but some of my neighbours lost their lives," she says.

A good number of people locked themselves in their houses but were burnt alive.

Even after fleeing her house to a nearby police station where she camped the attackers still followed them.

"They threatened to burn us alive," she says, adding that the arrival of General Service Unit saved the situation.

Achieng and other internally displaced persons were transported to Kisumu where they were offered temporary shelter in a church compound.

"Even though I married in Siaya, I own nothing there and that is why I decided to come to Busia," she says.

Achieng's son, William Ochieng, is 20 and just getting used to the role of family breadwinner. When he and his mother arrived in Busia, life was hard.

"We knew no one in Busia but just decided to try our luck here," he says.

Achieng and her son feel discouraged about voting again, but currently they are trying to do their best in the situation they find themselves in.

Ochieng works in a barber shop while his mother works on farms.



Displacement/the injustices Extraordinary Heroes



Cut off from ARVs

Lorna Nyambura felt as if the ground had been pulled away from under her when she saw her green grocery kiosk at Rumuruti in Laikipia West in ruins.

She had been living with HIV, the virus that causes Aids, for 10 years and it did not seem to bother her. As long as she had some money to live on and get medicine from the government health centre, life was tolerable. The violence in the aftermath of the 2007 elections changed all that.

She had to start afresh -- fighting for life, searching for antiretroviral drugs and battling stigma among the new friends wherever she would settle.

The strain of it all would put the 38-year-old mother of four into a depression that paralysed one side of her body for months.

Eight years before, her husband had divorced her claiming that she was practising witchcraft. Her husband later died of Aids-related complications, among them depression and shock. Her in-laws then sent her away from their home.

Her children, all of them school going, depend on her for their upkeep and education costs.

After the outbreak of violence in January, Nyambura's relatives hosted her at Kiandere in Nyeri municipality.

At first, she had trouble getting anti-retroviral treatment or counseling. Later, the Kenya Network of Women with HIV/Aids (Kenwa) offices in Nyeri town, some 15 kilometres away, helped her with food, drugs and counseling for a few days before referring her to the Nyeri Provincial General Hospital. Drugs and counseling are free at the hospital.

Nyambura's friends took of her four children to her other relatives in Kiharu, Murang'a District, 80 kilometres away.

Her eldest daughter, 17, is one of the brightest students at Kabare Secondary School while her youngest, 8 is in Standard Two.

Nyambura later joined other women at local HIV/Aids groups who receive regular relief food and counseling services.

She hopes that the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission will address the issue of land, ethnicity and equality to avoid a repeat of the disruptive violence witnessed in after the 2007 elections.

Nyambura wishes the Government would compensate her for lost business so that she can start another business to sustain her and see her children through school.

The Government should also buy land in places where internally placed persons can settle instead of coercing them to return the homes from where they were uprooted.

Nyambura is only one of many HIV positive people whose treatment and care was severely disrupted by the post-election turmoil.

Kenya Red Cross Society Nyeri Branch Chairman, David Mwangi says they received about 80 women who were HIV positive, eight men and four children in need of care. The patients were later referred to Nyeri Provincial General Hospital.

Kenwa Nyeri branch coordinator Francis Muiruri says over 200 people living with HIV/Aids passed through his office for help after the violence. They generally had no ARVs to continue with their dose treatment. Anti-retroviral therapy is only effective if the patient takes the prescribed medicine regularly without taking a break.

Kenwa is still caring for some 40 women who are HIV positive. Seven children were referred to Nyeri Provincial General Hospital while several of them were provided with bus fare back to take them to their home in Kitale after they agreed to voluntary relocation.



Uprooted and troubled

As Rose Adhiambo and her family stand outside her small mud-walled room near Kisian Township along the Kisumu-Busia road, much of what has happened to them seems like a bad dream.

Adhiambo was flushed out of her Naivasha home when violence broke out in the aftermath of the 2007 elections, narrowly escaping from the jaws of death. In fleeing, she lost everything of what she and her husband had painstakingly put aside as savings from their quarry business. Sensing danger, she bundled her children -- aged between 24 and one year -- into the compound of the Naivasha Prison where others fleeing troubled parts of the town were seeking refuge.

In the melee, her eldest son disappeared without a trace. Her youngest child would die soon thereafter following a short illness.

After three weeks at the camp, Rose secured transport for herself and her seven other children to Kisumu, where she had originally come from. The bus was so crammed that her husband, Alex Ajul, could not find space on it and had to remain. Besides the discomfort of cramped travel, Rose also lost some of her prized belongings -- clothes, foodstuff and blankets -- most of them donations.

It was a journey fraught with difficulty as youth barricaded sections of the road to prevent access or charge tolls on those they let through.

In Kisumu, where Adhiambo and other returnees were going, there was no shelter. They were exposed to the vagaries of the weather until a neighbour offered Adhiambo and her children a place to stay at a petrol station by the roadside. The shade of a nearby tree serves as the family kitchen.

Even before she could plan to build a house for her family, misfortune struck again. Adhiambo and three

of her youngest children were taken ill after a bout of vomiting and diarrhea.

One-year-old Elvy Atela died at Chulaimbo Hospital where they were being treated. Ajul has since joined his family as they grapple with how to build a temporary but more accommodating shelter. There is a shortage of building materials, especially grass for thatching the roof, since any other material is out of the reach of the Ajul family.

Adhiambo has more pressing problems on her mind. Her family's food reserves are dwindling and she does not know where she will find more to feed her children.

Food aside, the children's education also continues to suffer. One of her children, Usher Odhiambo sat his primary school leaving examinations at Kabati Primary School in Naivasha in 2007. He has not joined secondary school for lack of fees.

Adhiambo's seven-year-old and the only daughter, who is confined to a wheelchair. Things were beginning to look up for the family's only daughter when they were in Naivasha. She, together with her younger brother had been taken in by an organisation. As she received physiotherapy treatment to help her regain use of her limbs, her brother attended nursery school.

Naivasha holds both hope and terror for this family -- while Ajul believes that his fortune lies in the flower-growing town where he has lived since 1978, it has no place in Adhiambo's plans.

"I'd rather concentrate on agriculture back here at home than go back to Naivasha," she says.

Adhiambo, like many other people who lost their all in the violence that rocked Kenya in early 2008 wants a neutral Truth, justice and Reconciliation Commission to bring those responsible for violations to receive their just deserts.

Displaced in the city

Children dodge the tattered clothes and plastic bags that litter the dusty playground as they chase a ball, skip rope and engage in numerous pastimes. Close by, the makeshift structures woven from torn polythene papers stand as the last defence against the elements. This is home for many internally displaced persons, where up to 10 families share a single stove.

People who were displaced from urban areas are often an afterthought in the bigger resettlement programme. The camp in Nairobi's Huruma Estate is one such forgotten place.

"The manner in which IDPs are identified tends to exclude urban populations, most of whom have the same needs as those in the camps," says Margaret Karanja. She is worried that she could miss out on government compensation for IDPs because of being in an urban setting.

As the government ratchets up resettlement in Rift Valley, where the highest number of people was displaced from their homes, there are anxieties that resettling urban IDPs – considered the easier task – could be relegated to the back burner.

Lucy Wambui, another urban IDP, says she has not had a decent meal in three months. She says all the organizations that used to provide IDPs with basic necessities have withdrawn their help and only visiting the camp once in a while.

Seated inside a tent, she picks up her baby from a mattress on the ground, and begins to suckle the infant as he whimpers hungrily.

"I just want a few iron sheets to put up a house for my family, and then we can start from there," Wambui adds, staring outside her tent where a pot is boiling with maize and beans stands on a stove.



Ten families share that stove and cook in turns.

Margaret has to wait for her turn to cook. Her tent is anything but spacious. With a dirty plastic mat covering the floor, a padlocked metal trunk, some plastic pails and containers stashed under a bed and several mattresses spread on the floor.

Dorine Achieng of the Dada Na Mama charity, says that the situation is beyond the control of relief organisations. They do not have money to buy what the IDPs need.

"We have been engaging them in weaving baskets and children wear, which they could sell for money."

Wambui believes that all is not lost.

"Though we were initially left out of the resettlement exercise and have continued to live in misery, what we have seen recently is impressive," she says in reference to inventory taking at the camp.

Karanja insists that the case of urban IDPs is quite different from that of those from the Rift Valley, who were given first priority in the resettlement exercise. She adds that unlike most IDPs in Rift Valley, they did not flee to IDP camps, but instead sought refuge at the chiefs' camps that later turned out to be their place of abode.

Return? Out of the question

Ruth Muriuki, 32, lost everything she had accumulated in her home at Nairobi's Mathare North area when the crisis over the disputed elections erupted. She sought refuge among her relations who live in Kakuret slums in Kieni East Division but life has turned sour.

She is one of over 300 internally displaced persons who could not return home under the government's resettlement plan, Operation *Rudi Nyumbani*.

"How can I return to Nairobi and I was just a tenant? All my property burnt. At first, I thought this was heaven when I found the area was peaceful. I wanted to settle here, but life is proving more difficult and I don't know who to turn to now," she says as she soothes her two-year-old son, Vincent Muthoni.

Her husband, Peter, and their three children are among the many IDPs in this village. They have over-stayed their welcome.

Kieni Division in Nyeri North District is in the throes of a famine, as are many other neighbouring areas in Central Province. Farmers in the area have not harvested any food in the past two years. Dams and rivers have started to dry up and the cattle are dying.

Until April 2008, the food supply at the household level was stable but the low production per unit area suggested that a shortage was on the cards -- especially when the short rains crop performed poorly.

The influx of internally displaced persons increased the already high demand for food and spiked prices. The high cost of farm inputs has reduced productivity and undermined efforts to assure food security.

Mr A. M. Kanampiu is the Director of Agriculture in Central Province. He knows the food situation like the

back of his hand, and has put much of his knowledge in a report to the provincial land and crop management department. In it, he says, that relief food would be required in Nyeri North and South, Murang'a North, Thika, Nyandarua South and North districts which were hardest hit by drought.

Counting on the food requirement based on annual consumption of one bag of maize, half a bag of beans and six kilogrammes of cooking fat per head, there are about 215,512 who need about 1.3 million bags of maize and beans in the next six months. Nyeri North District is hardest hit. Some 150,000 of its residents are staring starvation in the face. Thika District has about 40,000 people in need of relief food.

In Nyandarua South, of the 18,000 affected, 470 secondary schools students while over 16,000 in Nyeri south district in divisions like Nyeri Municipality, Mukurwe-ini, Othaya and Tetu having over 10,000 people who urgently need relief food.

This season is unlikely to improve the food stocks as most farmers could not afford fertilizer, whose prices nearly doubled from the previous year. Farmers have therefore use less fertilizer than is recommended or none at all. These coping mechanisms force a decline in maize yields. Vegetables are available, but prices are steep. Rice production has already suffered a 20 per cent decline because of the rice blast disease. A fifth of all the farmers in Central Province could not afford to plant beans on time. Wheat yields are expected to fall below average.

"There is need to survey the number of people in the vulnerable groups including IDPs, farmers who had total crop failure, HIV/Aids patients, the displaced, orphans and the aged who may require relief food supplies. This should be applicable both in rural



and also urban centers in the province,” Kanampiu caution in his report.

The old, people infected with HIV and Aids, the disabled, IDPs and their school-going children, as well as those squatting on land in the villages and on roadsides, have made the food shortage that much more grave than it would ordinarily have been.

The food stocks held by five Government’s National Cereal and Produce Board (NCPB) depots is not impressive either; the six depots which include Nyahururu, Ol Kalou, and Maragua, Thika, Kipipiri, Kiganjo and Kirinyaga depots have no enough stocks with depots like Kiganjo, Kipipiri, and Maragua having less than 10 bags of maize and beans.

Phyllis Nyawira, 70, sits outside her one-bedroom grass-thatched house in Kieni peeling potatoes she will boil for her children. She travelled the 500 kilometres from Kipkelion in Kericho to Kieni at the height of the violence arising from the 2007 elections. Even with all of Kieni’s hunger and problems, Nyawira sees the possibility of turning it into home for herself and her three children if she could receive an

allocation of land. Returning to Kipkelion is far from her mind – unless there is compensation for her loss and a visible guarantee of security. Theirs is a story of justice waiting to be done.

Zipporah Wanjiru was uprooted from her home at Cheptais in Mt Elgon District and moved to Kyandongo refugee camp in Uganda. She is not ready to return home.

She was ejected from her home on December 31, 2007 and spent a week at Lwakhakha in Bungoma District before fleeing to Uganda.

Wanjiru insists that those who attacked her were her neighbours whom she knew well and fears that they could attack her again.

The mother of four had married in Mt Elgon, a place she had called home for 20 years -- only to be kicked out because of her ethnicity.

One woman's story of determination

Every day at 6 am, Mary Awiti hurriedly leaves her grass-thatched, mud-walled house while her children are still asleep, walks briskly through the dry vegetation to a the mining site located a kilometre away and goes straight into the 50-metre deep tunnel where other women are already prospecting for gold.

From inside the tunnel at Mikeyi site, Awiti and other miners sing hymns, spiritual songs and popular ones as they dig into the earth's belly with hoes.

Awiti started coming to the mines to work for money to feed her family. The 32-year-old single mother had left Naivasha, where she worked as a casual labourer on a flower farm on a mercy truck offered by Migori residents with little else but her household goods, Sh200 and her three children in tow.

"I did not know how I was going to get home because there was a transport crisis. I attempted to wave down a few motorists but they did not stop for me," she says.

Awiti and her children spent a night on a shop pavement. Lady Luck would smile on her the following day when she got a lift from a truck driver headed to Muhuru Beach on the shores of Lake Victoria.

It was at the neighbouring Macalder mines in Nyatike that Awiti met some of her relatives, most of whom she had last seen 10 years before.

"It was a big sigh to be among my relatives. I was now away from the deafening gunshots and fear of the unknown," she remembers, as her two-year-old girl plays on her lap.

At 10 am, the miners take a 20-minute break to eat porridge served by local women who receive their pay every month from the Lakeside Mining Co-operative Society.

The society had collapsed in 1974 due to poor management but it was revived in 2000 after a local community-based organization, the Lake Region Community Development Programme, intervened. The organization seeks to improve land and human productivity and to help develop and nurture skills among women and youth.



"Our programmes are geared towards promoting the management and conservation of local resources," says Odhiambo Opiyo, the programme director. "What has affected the local miners most is poor pay. Middlemen come here in powerful vehicles to buy a gramme of gold at only Sh700. They later sell this at Sh10, 000," he adds. "We want to reduce the risks in mining. We have trained the miners on safe prospecting. Dangers of suffocation in the tunnel are now limited due to sufficient air circulation," he says.

Due to the rising deaths of parents and guardians in Nyatike from HIV/Aids and mining related health



diseases have been claiming a rising number of parents and guardians. An estimated 4,000 orphans who have dropped out of schools are now working as child labourers.

Girls are married off early or hired to work as housemaids. A few have been re-admitted to school through the efforts of government agencies and non-governmental organisations. Another miner, Janet Adhiambo, 45, handles mercury with her bare hands, old 37-year- mining consultant Joshua Owino says doing so is dangerous."

Although there are more hands working at the mines, the buyers who fled in the wake of the violence that followed the disputed elections have not returned. Now Nyatike residents are stuck with the minerals they have laboured to get in their homes. Since mining attracted the strongest and ablest of the community's people, little time and energy goes to food production. Many deserted their farms several years ago to concentrate on mining. With the gold no longer bringing in the money, residents have to depend on relief food whenever disasters such as floods occur.

Even as the prospects appear grim, Awiti is determined to dig on. "I want to use my energy to plough the trenches for minerals. Proceeds from whatever minerals I stumble on will enable me to feed and educate my children," she says as sweat rolls down her face.

Although Nyatike constituency is adjacent to Lake Victoria, many of its residents are abandoning fishing due to harassment and arrests by the Tanzanian and Ugandan authorities over alleged trespass.

Asked if she would return to Naivasha, Awiti looks up at the sky before the tears welling in her eyes overwhelm her.

"Any person who went through what I witnessed there can never go back. I swear never to return." With that, she picks her hoe and without a word of goodbye, disappears into the Macalder mines.

The dilemma of violence survivors

*Edith Kanana is one of the hundreds of women who sought help at the Nairobi Women's Hospital after their sexuality and dignity were violated during the post-election violence.

"It has been tough, some days I feel like my old self, but there are those days I feel a heavy sense of depression. I was pregnant when I was gang-raped and consequently miscarried," says the 36-year-old mother of four.

"I was infected with a sexually transmitted disease. The doctor said that chances of me getting another child are very low."

The infection was so bad that a foul smelling liquid was constantly flowing from her private parts as well as a persistent itch that would cause painful soars.

Another survivor,*Jane Wanga knows that problem all too well, "Having taken time before going to the hospital for lack of money, I didn't know where to start. Mine became a serious case of chronic infection."

"When I couldn't bear it any longer, I confided in a neighbour. Incidentally, she had the same problem but fortunately for her, she was under medication."

Through this friend, Jane found her way to the Kenyatta National Hospital's Gender Violence Recovery Centre. Many women who had been sexually assaulted were receiving treatment and care at the centre.

Hers is not a peculiar problem; scores of women found themselves in the same predicament. Could Kenya's solution to a history of impunity on sexual offences and human rights violations finally come to an end

in the form of the proposed recommendations, by the Commission of Inquiry into the post-Election Violence?

The formation of an objective international tribunal that acknowledges that sexual crimes in times of political instability constitute genocidal or war crimes, could deliver much-needed justice.

For many women, life is still far removed from the reality, as they knew. As they struggle to piece together the broken pieces of their lives, it's again business as usual for most Kenyans.

Eunice Ruhi, a counsellor at the KNH Casualty Department explains what it has been like to treat and support survivors of sexual assault. "We have encouraged them, supported them and shown them why it is important to continue with follow-up sessions. Experiences such as these require consistent attention," the counsellor explains. KNH, which has three catchment departments for sexual violence cases, has continued to assess progress made by these survivors. These are the Causality Department, the Youth Clinic and the Patient Support Centre.

Sadly, cases of sexual violence keep rising.

"The number of sexual violence cases have increased from 461 to 570, that is without including the ones associated with post-election violence," explains the matron in charge of the Patient Support Unit, Elizabeth Mukhisa.

"Cases associated with the violence are treated differently. We have done the best we can to support the survivors through their healing process."

Women who were assaulted during the political upheaval have had many health problems including reproductive health.

"We have taken them through the post-rape care, which involves intense treatment and counseling.

In addition, the care is useful in the legal process because the documentation can form part of the medical report when giving evidence in the pursuit of justice," Mukhisa adds.

"They have been treated for chronic infections because some didn't come to the hospital when the incident happened; there have been follow-ups to clear vaginal infections."

Although the physical evidence of a reproductive health problem may have been cleared by an antibiotic drug, the women have psychological problems that affect the status of their reproductive wellbeing.

"Some women still fear men, and this affects relationships. Others have low libido, which is a challenge to a couple," says another counselor, Eunice Ruhi.

Mukhisa concurs with her, "There are others who would want to start a new relationship but the stigma associated with surviving rape continues to overshadow them."

In order to heal the wounds that these women still have, KNH has continued to offer support through group therapy. "We started with 32 women, two of whom had become pregnant out of the incident but dropped out of our sessions along the way. One young woman died

and now we have 15 women who continually come for support," says Mukhisa.

In addition, she says most of the women who do not attend, went to their rural homes, while others have to attend to their places of work which has made it difficult for them to come to the clinic.

There is a social worker who is in charge of this group of women.

"They are all from Kibera slums, one of the areas which had the highest cases of sexual abuse during the political instability. We have tried to keep the link between the hospital and them open because we know that they still need help," adds Mukhisa.

Ruhi says that it takes time and a lot of effort to help survivors of rape to recover a sense of what they were before the assault.

"The survivors of gender-based violence have had to live with those memories and physical discomfort due to infections," explains Millicent Obaso.

"They have had to struggle with abandonment, where mainly the male partner finds it hard to continue living with a woman who was raped, and the stigma ... the list is endless."

She therefore adds that this nature of follow-ups can heal the deep wounds survivors of sexual assault will have to live with for the rest of their lives, "it provides a sense of closure to such an unfortunate past."

Finding common ground

How Kibera women are healing society after election violence

Jane Anyango recalls the first meeting of her group, summoned within two hours, which attracted more than 200 women from different ethnicities and political persuasions.

It was mid January 2008 and the bloodletting, general insecurity and social uncertainty in Nairobi's Kibera slums was beginning to take hold.

Kibera, whose population stands at close to a million people, is in Lang'ata Constituency – home to 2007 presidential elections challenger Raila Odinga. It is here that his supporters, unhappy with the dispute over the results of the election, erupted into spontaneous act of violence, inviting a heavy police response.

What had seemed like an episode of brutality from the police and local youth became a permanent fixture of life in Kibera.

That first meeting, which formed the Kibera Women for Peace and Fairness group, was the slum dwellers' way of taking matters in hand. They have met every Saturday since at the District Commissioner's office to share their experiences during the week, telling stories that capture the importance of co-existence.

"We opted for a homegrown solution. We made a decision to sweep our own house instead of someone coming from far to clean it for us," says Anyango.

Although Kibera is the apple of many a philanthropist's eye, at its time of crisis where blood flowed in the trenches, women lay hurting from rape and many others

were nursing injuries or sleeping in the cold because their homes were destroyed or taken over, there weren't too many Good Samaritans.

The women agreed to dress in T-shirts with the colours and symbols of the political party they supported. In those edgy days, it was meant as a statement about political tolerance in a time of strife, but could have so easily been misread for arrogance or insensitivity.

"We also try to narrow people's mistakes down to individuals and not tribes or political parties as a way of fostering peace and reconciliation among the residents," says Anyango, who is the group's chairperson.

During the International Women's Day, on March 8, the group, working with the International Medical Camps, visited the hotspots where violence had become the currency of life, to talk with the youth and negotiate a detente.

Calm has since returned to Kibera, but the women know that the work of peace is never quite done. Their meetings are still attended with religiosity because of the activities they have chosen to take up.

There is no shortage of activities to engage in -- a choir sings songs aimed at reconciling people and encouraging harmonious co-existence between them; four women's football teams have been formed and there are plans to offer loans for business start-ups.

Another nine football teams are being assembled so that each of Kibera's 13 villages has its own women's team.

Even with little money the group raises, its members – most of whom are unemployed -- are determined to use it to create opportunities for generating income.

“We intend to offer the women merry-go-round loans,” says Anyango in reference to the system of pooling funds and lending them to members on a rotational basis. “Once they pick up, we plan to help the women relocate to their rural homes given the existing hardships in the slums,” she adds.

As the years go by, many of the older women would like to return to their rural homes where the pace of life is not as frenetic as in a city slum. They are forced to continue with the rat race because they lack funds to make a fresh start in places where life is at a quieter, more comfortable pace.

For the younger women, hopes of self-advancement that seemed dashed only months ago are coming alive again as the group explores ways of offering training opportunities to members who scored good grades in school.

“Some of our members have grades B and C - that could qualify them for self-sponsored degree programmes in Kenyan universities,” explains Anyango.

The struggle for a better and more dignified life is fuelled by the indignity of depending on charity. The women are unhappy with the way local and international organisations manage the distribution of relief – be it food or other items of comfort food, but that displeasure is inspiring a spirit among the women to stand on their own feet and run their lives.



Cottage turns IDP camp

Sister Freda Cottage Hospital is not designed to tolerate discomfort.

Built with the savings of a career nurse, it places great stock in personal attention and comfort for a small, manageable number of patients and their visitors.

That is just the kind of facility Sr Freda Nyanga set out to establish when she left the privately-run Mt Elgon Hospital in Kitale after 14 years.

Now in her mid 60s, Sr Nyanga recalls the distraught residents pouring in droves. They were hungry, fatigued and helpless. Some – especially the women and children -- arrived on foot, while others rode bicycles and donkey carts.

As the crisis over the 2007 election results turned violent, she knew what she had to do. "I could not turn them away since they had already entered my compound and found it the only safe haven," she says.

She had no option but to embrace them and let them stay hoping that all their tribulations would end soon. Her lean staff was overwhelmed by the increasing number of IDPs. She also had to go the extra mile to provide food and accommodation. Her pharmacy soon ran out of stock while the sanitation and sewerage system at the cottage became overstretched. However, she was not alone. Well-wishers touched by the plight of the displaced persons came to give support. Naomi Nyongesa came in to give spiritual guidance and counseling to the victims.

"It was not easy to win the confidence of the IDPs and make them accept that they had to go back to their homes to continue with their lives," says Sr Freda. When the Trans Nzoia District Commissioner Francis Mutie visited the facility recently, he was impressed by the

arrangement to have the willing IDPs move back to their farms.

Apart from promising that those who return to their homes would receive security, the DC also said the government would step in to review feeding programmes for the IDPs from time to time.

Still, Sr Nyanga is stuck with more than 100 abandoned children. She has established the Malaika Feeding Project for the children but malnutrition is still a major challenge for the institution.

A nursery school has been set up for the children but the staff is not adequate.

Among the displaced at the institution are two children, Moses and Jacqueline Atoti. Moses was rescued from a maize plantation when he was a week old and brought to the cottage.

Jacqueline Atoti was rescued from the Kipsongo slums in Kitale town.

A deaf and dumb woman is also a guest at the cottage, along with her jigger-infested child.

Kinyoro councillor Kisiangani says the woman, believed to be from his ward, is safer at the cottage as she has been repeatedly raped and sexually abused. She has given birth to 13 children, three of whom have survived.

At the cottage, the displaced receive free dental, optical and VCT services. Dr Rob Henry Schein from the USA led a team of missionaries for a one-week eye clinic where more than 500 people were treated.

The team responded to the plight of Trans Nzoia residents of by extending their services to the residents of West Pokot and Narok districts.

Slum women care for displaced children

Amid the sweltering noon heat and the putrefying stench of raw sewage, a middle-aged man lurches along an alley in a drunken stupor.

He halts momentarily to gaze at two children wading in murky trenches with naïve bliss. In a daze, he throws his hands resignedly and staggers across the road and eventually disappears into the tin shanties that are Nairobi's Korogocho slums.

At the heart of the slum, lives Margaret Agot, a widowed mother of nine. She is a social worker in the slums where she takes voluntary care of orphans and people infected with HIV. Her husband died six years ago, leaving her to single-handedly raise their nine children, all of whom live with her.

They are not the only children she has to mother, though. She has taken in four more children whose parents were displaced in the chaos that followed the 2007 elections.

Her foster children are aged between four and 13 and are all in school. Just how does she manage to fend for all these children?

"I normally wash other people's clothes at a fee - but I have become asthmatic of late due to continuous exposure to cold water," she says as she draws in a long sigh.

"But I have no other option lest the children go hungry," she says as she glances at a pile of clothes outside her two-roomed house where she lives with the children. "I have to wash all these to ensure there is supper today," she says.

Several shanties away, Florence Nyangweso, 69, is humming a solemn tune outside her one-roomed house, which she shares, with four of her adopted children.

The childless widow takes care of the children aged between four and 13 years.



"I take them as my own since their mother died five years ago," she says.

Despite her age, Mama Were, as neighbours know her, possesses an uncannily sharp memory.

She still remembers the day five years ago when her bed-ridden neighbour died of a HIV/Aids- related ailment.

"I had to take them in naturally for they had no place else to go," she says with a smile that conceals the gravity of her struggles.

Mama Were's trying moment comes when the children are at home on holiday from school. "They are given lunch at school but when they are here, the burden becomes too much," she says, adding that she relies on well-wishers' generosity in such times.

Nevertheless, the adoptive parents are full of praise for African Network for the Prevention and Protection Against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN), a non-government organization fighting for the rights of children.

The organization has linked over 100 families in Korogocho to micro-finance institutions to assist them start income-generating activities.

The organisation's programme director, Ms Susan Chege, says the they advocate foster care rather than adoption in children's homes.

"We try to convince prospective foster parents to adopt orphaned and vulnerable children in their homes, from where we can find ways to help them," she says.

It never stops puzzling Chege that the poor, with all their limitations, are willing to adopt children. "We plan to recruit middle and upper class families and to enlighten them on the need to foster the over 2.4 million orphaned and vulnerable children in Kenya." The child rights organisation says there are over 600 foster families in Korogocho alone. But with the rapid rise in food prices and essential commodities, foster parents are facing tough times.

"If we don't take it upon ourselves to take care of these needy children, they may end up in the streets and cause problems for us all," says Chege.

Despite the hard economic times and the many problems associated with slum life, the women assiduously strive to provide for their foster children.

"They rely entirely on me, my helplessness notwithstanding," says Mama Were as her ever-present smile slowly creases into lines of thought.

"God demands that you love your neighbour," she says, lifting her old Bible.

Never say die

St Camillus Community Youth Project's workshop stands defiantly in the midst of in Kisumu's Kondele slum in stolid defiance of the events that have transpired in the past year.

Patricia Okech, and the other 11 members of the project received a Sh300,000 loan from the Youth Enterprise Fund to buy three more sewing machines and rent space to provide skills training for young people.

"We wanted to use the funds for the project's sustainability and expansion," Okech says. That vision would be cut short when a group of youth volunteers at the project demanded a share of it, saying it was 'free money' from the government.

She recalls the day the youth she had been training confronted her at the workshop to demand money from her in October 2007.

So far, the group has trained 70 young people in tailoring, art design and dressmaking in the past two years. But the project's goals and those of the beneficiaries have not always been in tandem.

Okech says that the youths accosted them in the shop threatening to torch the building if they did not get their handouts in cash.

Okech knew the threats were not idle and parted with KSh60,000.

As Okech and her friends were wrecking their brains on how to recover the funds and begin repaying the loan, violence erupted in the aftermath of the 2007 elections. Looters sacked Okech's shop in Kisumu's Manyatta Estate and took away property valued over KSh40,000 and then torched it.



Three years ago, Okech resigned from her job as a project manager with a Kisumu-based non-governmental organisation. She had only served in the position for a year before she set out to start an organisation to help orphans and disadvantaged youths

Drawing its membership mainly from the sprawling Kondele and Manyatta slums, St Camillus seeks to help orphans and disadvantaged youths in the community through skill development and empowerment.

While some members have jobs, the unemployed work on the project full time. They meet regularly to review progress and plan for the organization's activities.

Many young people from low-income and informal settlements who have dropped out of school prematurely and are susceptible to drugs, teenage pregnancies and infection with HIV and Aids.

"I felt that there were no organisations in Kisumu that were directly helping the youths to develop their potential. If there were, they were doing very little," says Okech.

The project makes clothes, necklaces and drawings. "We make quality and affordable handiworks to maintain our customers," says Okech.

Only six months after the double setback, Okech and the project are back into business. Almost 75 per cent of the loan they took in 2007 has been repaid.

Okech and her group have earned recognition as one of the two most successful projects in Kisumu that benefited from the Youth Fund. They have been receiving a stream of visitors from the ministry of gender and youth affairs and other interested groups who want to learn from them.

Their determination to succeed has seen them rise like a phoenix out of the ashes of the post election violence.

Gender minister Esther Murugi was so moved by the group's efforts that she offered it a year's sponsorship.

The pioneers of St Camillus project have set their sights on establishing a vocational training centre in Kisumu town to cater for 70 youth a year.

"We are planning to create an environment where youths can resist all manner of provocation, fear and balkanisation into ethnic blocs," Okech says.

"The Youth Fund is ideal and came at the right time but the government should pick on serious officers to administer it," she says.

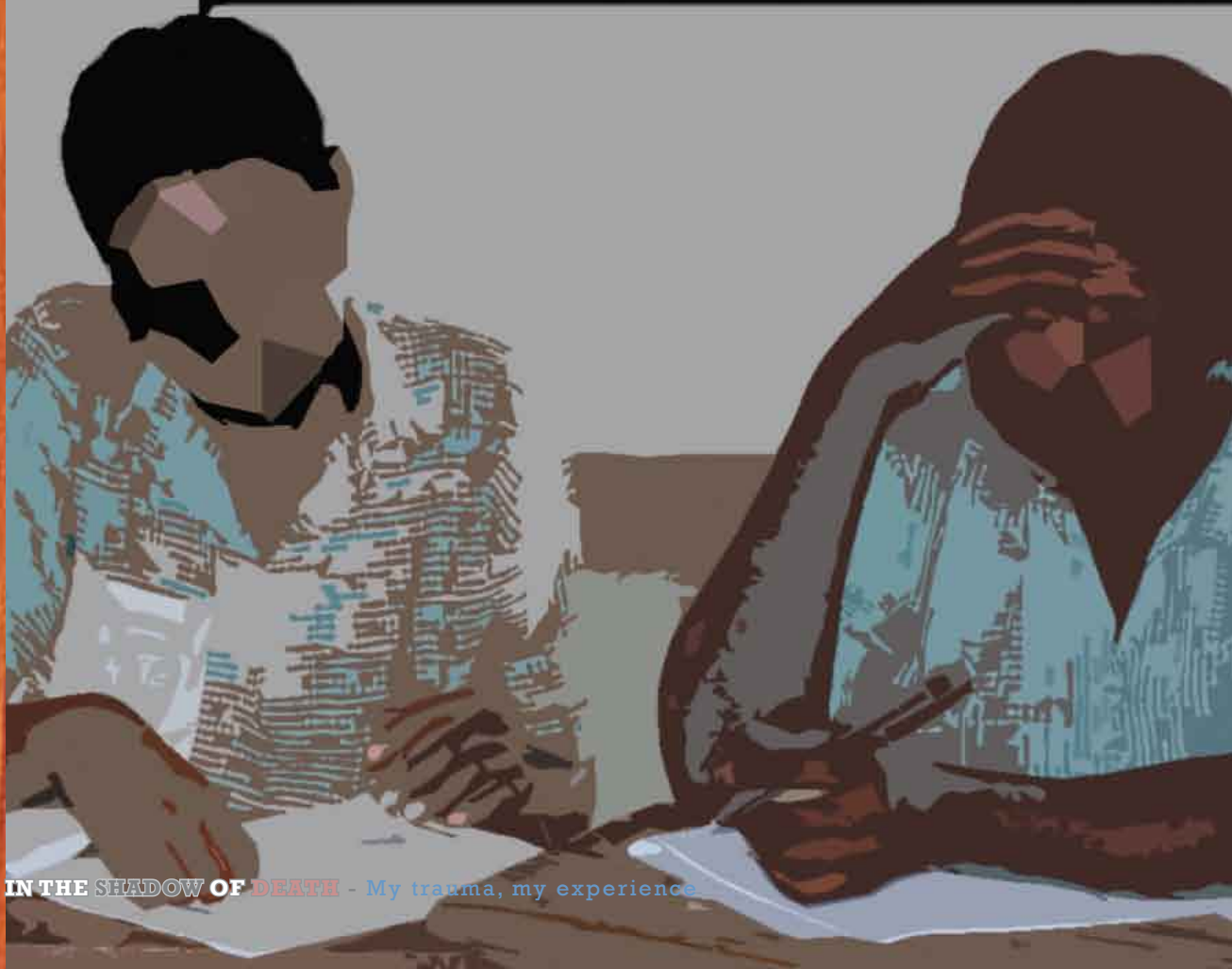
In addition, she says that the government needs to thoroughly train the youths on fund and project management before releasing the money to their accounts.

"It is not surprising that many recipients of the fund thought that it was a grant meant to be distributed to the members," says Okech.

Currently, the St Camillus project employs eight people, six of whom had been trained at the start of the project. The two-year old youth group hopes to expand and become a model across the country.

Justice and Reconciliation

Healing



Healing starts at school

The smiles on their faces are the only uniform they wear as they enter their classrooms. One could easily mistake them for village boys on a market day. These are Kenya's internally displaced students in Eldoret.

Paul Ngethe, the principal of the temporary school, says it is difficult to instill discipline in pupils when they cannot be differentiated from non-learners.

"I wish we had the money to buy them uniform for them to look like other school children, but it's beyond our means," he laments.

Visitors drop in every now, disrupting learning. Most pupils sit on the floor when writing their assignments. Poor behaviour and absenteeism are common in the school, some of the teenage girls are suspected to engage in part-time prostitution. A large number of girls have also dropped out of school.

The Kenya Red Cross Society opened the school early this year to take in the 2,500 pupils who did not have anywhere to learn.

The pupils have endured harsh conditions such as flooded classrooms for months.

Internally displaced persons complain of lack of government support for their children's learning centres. Ng'ethe is concerned that pupils who sat for national examinations were ill prepared for the practical tests as they had no laboratory equipment.

"Getting textbooks and past papers for revision was a problem and yet these students were supposed to compete with other candidates across the country," he laments.

Six government-employed teachers and 25 volunteers have been assisting the pupils. The teachers employed

by teachers Service Commission have since reported back to their schools while some of the volunteer teachers are discouraged because they have not been paid for months.

Over 40 candidates registered for their Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education at the Eldoret show ground IDP school. The Muli Organization, a non-governmental organisation, paid Sh128,000 as fees to the Kenya National Examinations Council so that no student at the school would be barred from sitting their final examination.

Most of these pupils were left behind to continue with their education as the parents returned to their farms following the launch of Operation Rudi Nyumbani. The students still depend on well-wishers for food and other necessities.

Their big number and their parents' inability to afford school fees has hindered their integration into other schools. The secondary section has a population of 318 students. Ten students are currently sharing a single book.

Ann Njogu, a student, thanks organisations like Red Cross Society of Kenya and United Nations children Fund (Unicef) for setting up the school. Were it not for their support, she says, most students would have dropped out of school. Njogu says she is not discouraged by the long distance and the muddy roads to and from school. "We would wish the school was converted into a boarding facility to ease the burden of trekking to school, but this will not prevent us from achieving our dreams," she says.

The school has started to incorporate other children from the rest of the community as part of reconciliation efforts.



Waiting for justice

Githurai, a dusty township precariously straddling Nairobi and Thika districts, is a busy, frenetic place that offers anonymity and functionality in its numerous unplanned structures, itinerant trader stalls and small businesses to serve its growing population.

From her tiny shop, the sign is still fresh with paint, Alice Ng'ang'a peers hopefully through the window wire mesh as a customer approaches.

Retail business is a struggle in a place with so many shops, but the 56-year-old mother of 14 would rather this than countenance returning to her four-acre farm in Burnt Forest, near Eldoret.

Crammed in a two-bedroom house with ablutions shared with four other families, it is a far cry from the space and comfort of rural Burnt Forest, but she would rather this any day.

Her last visit to Burnt Forest, during which she stayed for a month waiting in vain for compensation, has embittered her: "We are not going back until justice is done. We lost property worth millions of shillings but we are yet to receive any of the much talked about compensation package from the government," she says, recalling the violence that saw over 600,000 people displaced from their homes.

"I decided to come back and take care of my family.

Ng'ang'a's former home lies in ruins. She says her neighbours are grazing the animals they took from her on her land.

Even as the second phase in the ongoing resettlement programme moves into its final stages, most IDPs have yet to receive the help they need to restart their lives.

Ng'ang'a was a successful businesswoman trading in farm produce in Burnt Forest. Her farm would generate Sh18,000 during peak season.

When her home and all that she owned was torched in the January 2008 violence, she and her family sought refuge in a relative's home in Githurai.

Her husband, a retired veterinary doctor, helped her set up a mini shop and rent a house. "Reconciliation and forgiveness is crucial to our return," Ng'ang'a says. "But it must have the support of all politicians and all communities to become a reality."

"We are told that we now have peace and that we should return home but what are we going back to? Can the government give me some money to buy a cow, maybe some goats and help provide building materials for me to put up a home for my family to enable me to build my life again?" she asks.

The government pays Sh10,000 for each household head in family assistance funds and an additional Sh25,000 for shelter support. Those resettled also take home a month's rations, along with a kitchen kit. Women's predicament is worse than meets the eye. In the absence of special measures to assist women, the majority have been forced into odd jobs to fend for their families.

Ruth Wambui, 64, occasionally visits the Githurai chief's camp in the hope of finding relief supplies. She moved in with a relative in Nairobi after she lost all her property in Molo when the post-election violence escalated. She washes clothes in order to pay the rent for a single room in Githurai where she lives with her ailing husband and their 11 children. Her children are now enrolled in a school near her dwelling and

has no plans of going back to Molo. Githurai has so many internally displaced persons that they have organised themselves into a group. David Migwi, a former businessman in Uasin Gishu, is their chairman. "It seems that those burning and destroying property were not afraid of the police. If the government builds a home for me and helps me to restart my life, what is there to prevent the person who torched my property in the past from doing it again?" he asks.

Migwi suggests that the government should decentralise payments procedures as IDPs spend lots of money on transport travelling to their former homes to seek compensation.

Although the political leadership has reached a settlement, peace and reconciliation are yet to take root.

"Even if they deploy the military to come and guard my village and I am not at peace with my neighbour, nothing will change," Migwi says, adding that it is impractical for people who were displaced to seek out host communities for reconciliation.

The passage of the law to set up a truth, justice and reconciliation commission without sufficient public

debate could undermine the effectiveness of the process.

Ms Atsango Chesoni, a Human Rights, Governance and Gender consultant says Kenyans have had a long experience of commissions and public enquiries whose outcomes of which are never shared. "There have been numerous commissions on various issues of public concern, pertinent to the TJRC, whose findings have never been made public or when they have, never implemented."

The Rev Peter Ndung'u of the Redeemed Gospel Church in Githurai, says engaging in exclusive law making to form a truth and justice process contradicts the purpose setting up the commission. In the past, he says, exclusion at the lawmaking stage has often resulted in a process that discriminates against certain constituencies – particularly those that are not represented by the political elite.

Chesoni notes that the truth and justice process will have power to grant amnesty. "Amnesty, even if qualified, may have the effect of denying victims their right to justice."

Spit and move forward



Myra Karani's world has been turned upside down. Five years ago, the Young Women's Leadership Institute where she works as a programme officer was focused on helping women to break down the barriers that hinder them from taking up decision-making positions.

Now, all that seems so distant.

In the violent aftermath of the 2007 elections, new priorities call. In March 2008, the institute secured donor support to help distribute sanitary towels, soap, baby napkins, baby oil, disinfectant and cloths to women in camps for the Internally Displaced Persons.

The institute's members visited Molo, Nakuru, Eldoret and Nambale in Uganda to hold sessions that would empower women and foster peaceful co-existence among communities.

Days before the Jamhuri IDP camp on the outskirts of Nairobi was closed, the institute organised an all-inclusive women's football match featuring Binti Football Club and Carolina Football Club. It brought together players from various ethnic communities .

"Displaced players, who had earlier moved to live with their relatives for fear of rape and insecurity among other IDPs, helped them forget their differences." By June this year, in collaboration with the United Nations Fund for Women (UNIFEM) a project known as Positive Vibrations was launched in Kisumu and Nairobi, emphasises education and tertiary training for women and youth.

The institute has been targeting women and youth because these two groups are dissatisfied with the way political leaders have neglected to address the sensitive issues that led to loss of lives, rape and destruction of property.

Most youth and women feel betrayed by the outcome of the elections and are contemplating not voting in future.

"Given that it is women and youths who suffered most from the violence, they deserve to be trained on issues pertaining to gender, negotiations, conflict resolutions and issues on non violence to help them heal," Karani says.

She suggests that the bitterness can better be solved by 'spit and move forward' sessions that enable people to openly discuss what they underwent and agree to forge ahead in the spirit of reconciliation.

In its endeavours, the institute has lined up a number of activities expected to run from late November 2008 in a peace caravan christened – 'Vijana wana Mchoro wa Amani' (Youth have the Peace Map) -- in Nairobi's Eastlands.

Using reggae music, the institute intends to address sexual violence and to show that despite the chaos witnessed, youth still have hope.

"We are also planning a human rights festival for women and men who suffered sexual violence during the post election period before the end of the year," she says.

During the human rights festival, two football matches for players under 16 years will be played to perpetuate the peace message.

The institute is working with music artists within Nairobi as a way of fostering their talents as ambassadors of peace.

Karani reveals that in their activities youth friendly radio stations such as Koch, Ghetto, Umoja and Pamoja FM are involved to exploit their useSheng, a lingo spoken in urban centres by most youths. Following a successful 'Spit and Move Forward' activity in Eldoret, plans are under way to host a similar event in Kisumu.

The session is meant to help women vent their anger as a way of starting the healing process. "This process helps women to speak out about what they underwent and encourages others to move forward with their day to day activities," Karani adds.

Besides peace and reconciliation programmes, the institute also engages young women in training on sexuality and reproductive health rights as well as self-empowerment centering on abortion and single motherhood.

The book, *In the Shadow of Death: My trauma, my experience* is a public testimony on what the majority of women went through during the post-election violence that engulfed Kenya immediately after the Electoral Commission of Kenya announced the results for the hotly-contested presidential polls of the December 2007 General Election.

The crisis brought to the fore a number of factors that separate our society and for a long time have been ignored by successive post-independence governments: poverty, land, inequality, and tribalism, among others.

In the Shadow of Death: My trauma, my experience uses a yum-yum approach by picking major highlights of the crisis based on thematic experiences of women. Such angles include physical abuse, psychological torture, sexual violence, homelessness, widowhood, and economic woes.

Testimonies in the book end with messages of hope, achieved through individual endurance. *In the Shadow of Death: My trauma, my experience* concludes by reminding women who suffered all manner of violence in post-election times that determination and individual focus and tenacity are the main recipe for touching the sky of hope.

