



WORLD ELDER ABUSE AWARENESS DAY (WEAAD) REPORT 15TH JUNE 2009

BACKGROUND:

HELPAGE KENYA

HelpAge Kenya is a national charitable organization and an affiliate member of HelpAge International. HelpAge Kenya (HAK) was founded in 1982 as a non-profit making community based charity NGO. HelpAge Kenya is registered with the NGO Coordination Board as a National NGO; it is also a member organization of the National NGO Council. For the last 25 years since inception, HelpAge Kenya has dedicated its efforts to improving the quality of life and prospects of the disadvantaged older persons in Kenya, so that they live their remaining years in dignity within their own community.

HelpAge Kenya is working in Kisii Central and Nyamira Districts of Nyanza province implementing an Older Persons Rights Advocacy program. The Focus is to alleviate violence against older women through advocacy. The program targets to build the capacity of older men and women on their rights.

The United Nations International Plan of Action adopted by all countries in Madrid, April 2002, clearly recognizes the importance of addressing and preventing abuse and neglect of older adults and puts it in the framework of the Universal Human Rights.



*Some of the invited guests during the WEAAD celebrations-
Nyansakia Primary School Grounds*

HelpAge Kenya is dedicated to supporting and implementing the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA). As part of HAK awareness agenda, we together with other stakeholders marked World Elder Abuse Awareness Day on June 15, 2009. This project was in partnership and collaboration with interested individuals, agencies, organizations, NGO's, governments and corporations.

WORLD ELDER ABUSE AWARENESS DAY

World Elder Abuse Awareness Day is celebrated globally on June 15th. On this day all stakeholders interested in promoting rights of older persons don elements in purple color to symbolize the struggle for elimination of abuse against older persons. The theme for this year's celebration was adopted from the INPEA global campaign. The theme was: *"My World.... Your World....Our World-Free of Elder Abuse!"*

This day was initiated by the International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (INPEA) who recognizes the significance of Elder Abuse as a public health and human rights issue. In their report *Missing Voices* coordinated with the World Health Organization - INPEA states that *"The challenge for us all is not only to listen to what has been said, but to believe and act upon it"*.

In addition, they stress that the single most important thing needed to stop abuse is to empower older people to be really in charge of their lives, rather than become passively dependent on others. The key here is that those of us who are offering assistance, perhaps especially with everyday tasks such as washing and eating, take the time to attend and listen to the older person so that we provide assistance respectfully when **they** want it and in the way that they choose.



Some of the community members who attended WEAAD listening keenly to speeches.

Elder abuse is a serious problem across the globe but is still under acknowledged and largely under-reported. The reported cases are usually ignored and are not looked at in the light of abuse and discrimination. In Kenya, older people particularly older women are increasingly at risk of physical violence related to cultural beliefs and accusations of witchcraft. The accusations usually lead to violence, psychological abuse and intimidation, banishment from homes and communities, isolation and in extreme cases murder. Older persons especially women, in Gucha, Kisii and Nyamira face a bleak future and live in fear. They are accused of witchcraft and suffer death, physical, emotional and social trauma.

Cases of older people especially older women being attacked and killed have been reported over years in isolation in some parts of Kenya mainly in the greater Kisii region. In 2008 alone about 30 older persons were killed on suspicion and allegations of witchcraft in the then Marani Division of Kisii Central District. Of these 25 were women. Other cases have been reported in Suneka and Gucha Districts. In February 2009 5 older persons aged over 60 years were killed on witchcraft suspicion, four of them were older women. One other woman was rescued in Kiogoro Division by the police in the same month.

WEAAD PLANNING

WEAAD started with setting up a planning committee. The committee involved various stakeholders that HAK has interacted with in implementing its program in Kisii and Nyamira. The partners include government agencies: The Ministry of Internal Security and Provincial Administration, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Development and local church leaders, Women Leaders, representatives of older persons (Gusii HelpAge Society), HAK trained OCM members and Paralegals and a HelpAge Field Officer.

The WEAAD planning committee met once every week on Wednesday in the months of May and June 2009 at the Kegogi Chiefs Office. In total the committee met 7 times. The committee learnt on the operations of HAK and the rationale of marking WEAAD within the Kegogi community. Every meeting reviewed the practical steps to ensure success of marking WEAAD.

During the initial committee meeting, the members were sensitized and introduced to the origin of WEAAD and why HelpAge Kenya marks it in partnership with other stakeholders working in the ageing sector. The committee identified various avenues through which the message will be passed to attract interest of older persons and other community members to participate.

WEAAD 15TH JUNE 2009

There were over 2000 people attending WEAAD 2009 celebrated at Nyansakia Primary School Grounds, near the kegogi Chief's Camp, Marani Division of Kisii Central District. The numbers were largely of older women and men and other community members. Among the people who attended are older persons and youth leaders from Nyamira and Kisii Central District, local leaders (councilors, women and church leaders), Provincial Administration and Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Development officials, Gusii HelpAge Society leaders, Representatives of the Rotary Club of Kisii, Media and representative of the local Member of Parliament.

The day started with planting of symbolic trees by partners. The aim was to link older persons, youth, community leaders and other partners in planting for change in the way we view older persons in our community. The trees will be cared for by the community in showing solidarity with older persons and caring for them and reporting abuses for action to the authorities.

There was an entertainment galore which includes youth drama, music and recitals by older persons. The entertainment was theme filled as it addressed itself to the abuses on older persons, morale and hope giving interludes and cohesion building dances. The fact that both youth and older persons participated cheerfully indicated that constant communication and contact can change negative perceptions on older persons

Church Leader and elderly person Pastor Manani quoted extensively from the bible and invoked Gusii culture in urging the youth to desist from harming older persons and disinheriting them. He asked the youth to respect age and instead of victimizing them seek to learn from them as they have a rich source of information that can help them and build better and stronger communities.

Gusii HelpAge Society Secretary Mr. Benjamin Ombwori thanked HelpAge Kenya for considering undertaking the program in Kisii as it will respond to empowering senior citizens who are hopeless. He said with the training from HelpAge Kenya older persons in the area have become more aware of their rights and willing to work together to promote their welfare.

In his address the Kisii HelpAge Society Chairman, Mr. Arnold Rasugu said it is shaming for youth to lynch older persons on mere suspicion whereas this older persons have contributed to their wellbeing. He said that the society will recruit older persons in the whole of Kisii to form a strong movement to change negative perceptions on older persons. He asked the political leadership to commit themselves to promoting rights and welfare of older persons through setting aside part of the development funds to cater for interests of senior citizens.

In his address Mr. Douglas Arege, a Field Officer with HelpAge Kenya highlighted various global efforts to stop elder abuse globally. He indicated that elder abuse takes place globally in different forms but it is hugely under reported in Africa. He urged older persons to raise their voices together and stand against abuse of older persons. He guided the participants in reciting a declaration and promise to do what they can to stop abuse of senior citizens. He noted that we all will age and we would not wish to be treated badly.

HelpAge Kenya Program Officer, Ms. Marion Ouma made an overview of the organization and the different projects that it is currently involved in countrywide. She then emphasized on the UNIFEM program currently running in Kisii and Nyamira. She gave an overview of the program on: alleviating violence against older women through advocacy and how it fits to World Elder Abuse Awareness Day. She emphasized the role of families and community members in alleviating abuse of older persons in the community and in Kenya She emphasized the need for the integration of older persons in key decision making within all sectors.

In his media brief, the HelpAge Kenya Chief Executive, Mr. Gerald Walterfang noted that ageing comes with challenges, among the abuses faced by older persons he said, included sexual harassment, rape, torture, neglect and lack of healthcare support. He said that in Kisii the abuse has assumed a cultural dimension where elderly persons are linked to and are synonymous with witchcraft as has been witnessed in Kisii on several occasions. He said that this is connected to their age and physical appearance as a result of the ageing process. Due to this older persons in Kisii have been uprooted from their homes, disenfranchised and subjected to living in fear whereas others have lost lives and property. He decried lynching of older men and women Kisii as alarming.

The Chief Executive called on concerted efforts by all stakeholders: government, civil society organizations, corporate organizations, individuals, older persons themselves and communities in creating awareness and educating the public on rights of older persons as enshrined in the Kenyan constitution, UN declaration on Human Rights and other global frameworks to which Kenya is a signatory. He said in marking WEAAD, which was first marked in 2006 HelpAge Kenya is supporting efforts of the United Nations International Plan of Action on ageing which recognizes elder abuse as a public health and human rights issue. He noted that active media participation is central to success in public awareness.

The WEAAD was graced by Mr. James Gitau the DO, Marani Division who represented the Kisii Central DC, Mr. Benjamin Njoroge. In his speech he talked of the need of the community members to protect and care for older persons. He cautioned youth not to involve themselves in unlawful acts like drug abuse and lynching of older persons on mere suspicion. The DC asked the community members to adhere to the law and warned that the Witchcraft Act puts responsibility on citizens to address any problems relating to witchcraft. The DC welcomed all guests from neighboring Districts who attended and thanked them for their exceptional interest in stemming elder abuse. The DC underscored the importance of the church and other organized groups in talking against unlawful acts like lynching of suspected witches. He asked the youth to involve themselves with positive acts and income generating activities to empower themselves and also take care of older persons in the community. He directed all chiefs to act quickly on intelligence to rescue older persons facing threats and apprehend any perpetrators of human rights abuses.



The Chief Guest Marani DO Mr. James Gitau giving his speech

He appreciated HAK in its work with older persons especially at this time where the challenges of ageing are becoming more and more. He emphasized the need for communities to recognize the role of older persons especially as caregivers and teachers of culture and social norms. He requested HAK to expand its program and cover the whole of Kisii because abuse of older persons took place in all the Gusii Districts. He noted that with entry of HAK there has been debate and discussion on older persons rights and older persons have been empowered to stand up for their rights.

Ben Mogaka, a member of Rotary Club of Kisii who represented the local Member of Parliament, Hon Richard Onyonka gave an impression to the participants on the need to preserve cultural values of respect to the old. He noted that the government has put interest in making lives of older persons better by providing funding in the current financial year 2009/2010. He urged local M.Ps to set aside funds to cater for interests of older persons. He noted that with other leaders he will champion for the setting up of a campaign to give special treatment to older persons in banking halls, transport and healthcare facilities.

In Her closing remarks Marion Ouma, thanked all the participants, stakeholders, partners, committee members and most specially the older persons for making the day a success. The Area Chief Vincent Bosire appreciated efforts by HAK to mark the day in his location and providing the necessary support to make the day successful.



Older women from Matongo Women Group perform a traditional song

FUTURE PROSPECTS

HelpAge Kenya underscores the fact that there is need for greater awareness, sensitization and empowerment of older persons and the communities they live in. That elder abuse in Kisii in the form of lynching is what catches the eye; it is only a tip of the iceberg. It underlines great danger and precarious conditions in which older persons exist in Kisii.



A local leader joins women dancers in a jig to send “abuse way” from the community

HelpAge Kenya will continue its work in Kisii and hopes for more partnerships to reach un-reached areas. Already there have been positive indicators with formation of an older persons society to help continue the debate and work of promoting older persons rights among the Kisii. HelpAge Kenya will undertake vigorous media and public campaigns to have the community members and opinion leaders address themselves to issues of older persons.