Women’s Situation Room: A unique type of response mechanism in elections

The women’s movement in Kenya, with support from UN Women and UNDP, set up a unique kind of election observer and response mechanism known as the Women’s Situation Room in the just-concluded elections.

The Women’s Situation Room places emphasis on peaceful elections and helps respond to electoral incidents through real-time interventions. It promotes women and youth’s effective participation in electoral processes in Africa. It has been used in three other African countries – Liberia, Senegal and Sierra Leone - since its inception in 2011.

In Kenya, the Women’s Situation Room was located in Nairobi and constituted a team of local Eminent Persons supported by Eminent Women from Tanzania, Uganda, Nigeria and Liberia.

It had a network of 500 local observers on the ground who would relay information on any incidents from the field to the Situation room. A team of analysts would verify and analyze the information before passing it on to the

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Upcoming Events

- 2 April World Autism Awareness Day
- 4 April International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action
- 7 April World Health Day
- 7 April International Day of Reflection on the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda
- 22 April International Mother Earth Day
- 23 April World Book and Copyright Day
- 25 April World Malaria Day
School kids cast their vote against violence in Kenya

You are coming with us,” the police officer says as he hauls the man out of the house, his wife crying hysterically behind them. Their daughter was kept home from school to do housework — an illegal form of child abuse—but at home. While her mother is out, her father sexually assaults her.

“Stop, please stop,” the child begs, quietly at first, then louder and louder until she can do no more than just scream. Two men who live nearby come into the room to find the two struggling on the floor. They pull the father off his daughter, attack him, and then bring a police officer to take him away. The girl sits shaking, wide-eyed and fearful. Her father does not look back as he is led off in one direction, while she is taken in another, to the hospital to receive medical care.

This is a scene being performed by school children in a short play competition, and the applause that fills the hall when it concludes testifies that it will be hard to beat. As the play unfolds, the 700-strong audience is packed into the school auditorium, some leaning in through doors and windows to catch a glimpse of the play. They are captivated.

The children in white and blue uniforms wince in collective unison at the violence being portrayed on the stage before them then cheer together as justice is served.

As the curtains drop, the audience murmurs in hushed tones, the grim

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A team of telephone operators at work as soon as the Women Situation Room toll-free number went live a few days before the March 4th elections. Election monitors and the general public used the number to report election-related incidents from all over Kenya. (© UN Women)

A team of Eminent Women who would then seek interventions from the police, the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) or political parties and other relevant decision makers.

The Women’s Situation Room recorded over 554 incidents, which included cases of insecurity and some form of violence. There were leaflets threatening some people; voter complaints; cases of obstruction of observers from accessing polling centres; and several post-election complaints. Through this early warning and early response mechanism, the Women’s Situation Room managed to resolve all the cases it received before they escalated to bigger problems.

Some of the VIPs who visited the Women’s Situation Room include Ambassadors and High Commissioners from Norway, Finland, Denmark, USA, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. The African Union (AU) Observer mission led by Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma and the European Union Observer delegation also paid a visit and signed the peace cloth. Female candidates, both successful and unsuccessful also came to show solidarity with the other women of Kenya.

More than 700 children packed into the auditorium at the Kinyanjui Road Primary School in Kawangware, Kenya, to watch and take part in an interactive series of plays addressing domestic violence. (© UN Women/Felix Eldridge)

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subject matter is disturbing but not altogether unfamiliar to their lives. Kinyanjui Road School Headmaster Christopher Muguti says it is a story he is sadly familiar with: “More than once we’ve had cases of girls being abused by their fathers. You find children not performing academically, not playing with others. They are traumatized and they can’t work — you know something is wrong.”

The Primary School is located in the Kawangware informal settlement area, a sprawling multi-ethnic community in the west of Nairobi, Kenya. When Muguti took over the top job in 2008, the school and the community were in the grip of turmoil following the country’s disputed national elections of December 2007.

“In 2008, a number of children transferred to other schools because they were afraid they’d be [ethnically] targeted. Even a few teachers left the school, and half of our students remained at home for three months, too scared to come to school,” added Muguti.

In the post election violence of 2007/08, supporters of different candidates turned on one another, violence swept much of the country, and many people were killed.

In Kawangware, scores were injured and property was destroyed. Today, the school has undergone a revamp, and boasts of colourful buildings, lush lawns, and a huge new hall. However, many children at the school still face poverty and other challenges outside the school gates.

Mary Aluel and Eugene Kwizera, both 14 years old, are members of the Kinyanjui Road School’s Kings and Queens for Change club. Eugene recently won an essay competition run by the Gender Violence Recovery Centre (GVRC), which also organized the theatre competition. Eugene’s essay argued passionately for domestic violence and child abuse to be dealt with publicly and become a top priority.

“The community needs to know that abuse is not character-building — it can destroy a child’s future,” he says. “People try to hide these cases, but if they see authorities will support them, then they will report the crime.”

In the winning play, a key role was played by the local chief, a source of traditional authority, whose leadership in ensuring justice through formal channels was instrumental. Mary says the play showed young people what to do if subjected to abuse: “If someone came to me, I would report it to an older person, and if they hesitated, I’d go straight to the police.”

In the aftermath of the 2007 election, the GVRC handled 653 cases of violence, including 523 cases of rape. In the lead-up to the 4 March elections, the GVRC, in collaboration with UN Women, promoted the provision of health, legal and other services across the country in case of any violence.

A Gender Violence Hotline was launched for GVRC to provide immediate medical and psychosocial support to any victims of violence. The services to be offered included collecting evidence, providing medical expert witnesses, and completing a post-rape care form, which is admissible in court. So far this year, the GVRC has run awareness-raising events in schools and communities across the country, like those at the Kinyanjui Road School.

“The children in places like Kawangware are learning to speak out against violence,” says Wangechi Grace, the GVRC’s Executive Director. “It’s every Kenyan’s responsibility to ensure peaceful elections. We must nurture our children from a very young age to be patriots and to learn the value of peace and participation in the development of their country.”
UNV and the University of Nairobi hold training on Youth Volunteering

The UN Volunteers enjoyed the training with many terming it as ‘going beyond expectations’ in helping them understand youth volunteering. Mary Ondiek, one of the participants, observed:

“… The training went beyond what I expected. Not only did I get information on how to do my assignment better, I got practical information on how to engage youth, to understand the global view of UNV on youth volunteering, and was inspired by stories from people who have already done it.”

The training involved various professionals in the volunteer sector including VSO Jitolee’s Carol Kiangura who facilitated the main session on Youth Mobilization in Volunteering for Peace and Development, while University of Nairobi’s Johnson Kinyua led discussions on volunteering within universities and among students.

UNV’s Dmitry Frischin and George Oloo also facilitated sessions, while Gender Specialist Tina Stoum, herself an international UNV with the UNDP country office facilitated discussions on gender mainstreaming within youth volunteer projects. UNV Peace Monitor in Nairobi Jeremiah Mzee and UNV Youth Community Mobilizer with UNHCR at the Dadaab Refugee Camp Tomoya Soejima, shared their experiences with colleagues.

On the last day of the training, the UN Volunteers had a unique opportunity to apply their knowledge with a visit to Nairobi’s Mathare informal settlement area, a place that has previously experienced violence, where they interacted with young people involved in volunteering for peace.

UNV partnered with the University of Nairobi to hold a three-day training for UN Volunteers involved in working with young people to enlighten them on how to effectively encourage youth volunteerism within their assignments.

Held in Nairobi, the training was funded by UNV’s Capacity Development & Learning Facility (CDLF).

The training brought together about twenty UN Volunteers from duty stations across the country, to be given practical skills and share experiences on youth volunteering, zeroing in on the role of youth volunteers in contributing to peace.

The group included several UN Volunteer peace monitors already working in different parts of the country and seven new youth volunteers who had just been recruited to support UNDP’s peaceful elections interventions through the Get Informed, Get Involved project supported by UNV. Other participants were from UN Women, UNHCR, UNEP and UN-Habitat.

Speaking at the opening and closing of the training, UNDP Country Director Maria-Threase Keating underlined the important role that UN Volunteers were playing to ensure peaceful elections, and lauded their concerted effort to involve young people in UNV programmes.

University of Nairobi’s Johnson Kinyua expressed satisfaction at the partnership between the two and called for continued involvement to support volunteering programmes within the university and nationally, among other academic institutions.
“Coordination can save our lives,” says Turkana village elder

Village elders in the Turkana region of northwest Kenya have expressed optimism about a project aimed at strengthening resilience to natural disasters by providing alternative coping mechanisms, saying that the area’s natural resources are not being used efficiently.

“Our community has quite a number of potential forms of livelihood,” said Ekadeli Ibei of the Lokirima Livestock Marketing Association, speaking to a humanitarian team conducting a survey in the area. “We are tired of being labeled ‘a community in disaster’.

Turkana County is richly endowed, including with minerals and fertile lands.

“We are pastoralists. We can scout longer distances. The quality of meat from our livestock is considered among the best and fetches better prices across the border — a major cause of the frequent cattle raids and insecurity in our border areas,” he said.

The village elder added that better coordination was essential to improving the area’s prospects.

“Livelihoods can only be enhanced if we work together — the community, partners, Government and all other stakeholders — to ensure that the support provided really meets the actual needs on the ground,” Mr. Ibei stressed. “Coordination can save our lives. This is what is missing in this area.”

This community representative was consulted as part of a baseline survey by OCHA and humanitarian partners for a US$6.1 million project aimed at strengthening human security in border communities in Turkana. The project is funded by the UN Human Security Trust Fund and will be implemented in Turkana Central and Loima Districts over a three-year period. It aims to help people cope with natural disasters through support for livelihoods, food security, education and healthcare.

People in Kalokol, closer to Lake Turkana, agreed that the Turkana area is not making full use of its natural resources.

“The potential in the fishing industry is enormous,” said Akira Allia of the Kamugengiro Women Group in Kalokool. “We have some of the best fish species in the country. The fishing company has remained dormant for years and we lack proper market structures, fishing equipment and skills to support productive trade. Middlemen from other towns are exploiting us.”

Members of Riam Riam Turkana, an NGO consortium, added that there were water resources in the region.

“Even our local women and young children are able to dig with their bare hands and tap water for their households,” said one. “We are sure with proper technical expertise we can do better.”

The survey findings were presented at a stakeholders’ forum in Turkana on 12 February. Partners involved in the project include the UNDP, FAO, WHO, IOM UNICEF and ILO.

Since consolidated humanitarian programming is being phased out in Kenya, OCHA will seek to transfer its coordination role to another agency after 2013.
World Radio Day highlights the importance of Community Radios in Kenya

UNESCO, UNDP and UNIC joined hands with national media stakeholders, community radios and civil society in celebrating World Radio Day in Kenya. The celebration was organized as a national forum of community radios, reflecting on the radio medium’s central role in development.

The celebration took place at the site of the oldest community radio station known as Mangelete, in Kenya, from 13 to 14 February in Mtito Andei and Voi. The two-day event highlighted the role of community radio as a platform for local communities to address current and anticipated issues that affect the very fabric of their society.

The event consisted of series of workshops on new media and ICT, sustainability of community radio operations, and the production of civic education radio programming. It also covered the issues of responsive election reporting and the importance of inter-tribal dialogue in promoting peace and democracy.

A highlight of the celebrations was the launch of “Media Coverage of the Mombasa Republican Council Monitoring Report” and “The Voice for Peace and Democracy Campaign”, in preparation for the elections in Kenya, leading up to the International Day of Democracy on 15 September. During this event, the Media Council of Kenya delivered a keynote address followed by a message conveyed by the Director General of UNESCO. UN Radio Kiswahili programming was also introduced to the Taita Taveta County Journalist Association.

As the lead UN Agency in celebrating World Radio Day, the UNESCO Regional Office for Eastern Africa, provided an opportunity to community radios to reach out to their audiences and neighbouring communities in the world by using new media and ICTs.

Sandra Paul (27), from a local youth group described community radio as “a medium that carries our voice and we want our leaders to listen and discuss policies in developing our communities. Everyone is key in promoting peace and development.”

Ester Bole (30), a volunteer working at the local community radio station expressed that “we have the responsibility to provide our community with information and knowledge so that people can make informed decisions in taking ownership of their lives. We also pay attention to the language that we use and incorporate songs with messages in bringing people together, to empower our own communities.”

World Radio Day celebrates the radio medium to improve international cooperation among broadcasters and encourage decision makers to create and provide access to information. Radio has embraced the digital revolution to expand its power and reach. It is still the prominent medium that can carry any message to any place at any time even without electricity, providing a lifeline of information that can save lives.
Kenya commemorates World Cancer Day

Kenya joined the rest of the world in marking this year’s World Cancer Day under the global theme “Dispel Damaging Myths and Misconceptions about Cancer”.

A media briefing was organized and attended by senior Government officials, development partners and various civil society groups. The guest of honor was the Minister for Public Health & Sanitation, Hon. Beth Mugo. The occasion was also graced by the Minister of Medical Services, Hon. Prof. Peter Anyang Nyong’o and the WHO Country Representative, Dr. Custodia Mandlhate.

In his remarks, Hon. Anyang Nyong’o recounted the strides that Kenya has made towards addressing cancer. These include the development of the Cancer Prevention and Control Act, the National Cancer Prevention and Control Strategy and the draft Cancer Treatment Guidelines. He reiterated the Government’s commitment to ensure access to quality care for cancer patients.

In her keynote address, the Minister for Public Health and Sanitation, Hon. Beth Mugo, represented by the Director for Public Health and Sanitation, Dr Sharif, reported that over 28,500 new cases of cancer are diagnosed each year in the country, with 22,100 (78%) of these dying each year as most of them are diagnosed at a late stage. Hon. Mugo called upon the media to inform and educate the public on cancer. She added: “by having a population that is well informed, we will have won the battle against cancer by half since over 40% of cancers are preventable and knowledge is power”. She emphasized the need for a multi-sectoral approach in tackling cancer as it was not just a health issue.

The WHO Country Representative, Dr. Custodia Mandlhate noted that “an estimated 12.4% of the African Region’s 804 million inhabitants will develop cancer before the age of 75. The risk increases with age; hence 90% of cancer cases will occur after the age of 40, so if we act now we can save about 100,000 lives annually by 2020”.

She pointed out that up to 40% of cancer can be prevented and a significant proportion can be cured if diagnosed early and given appropriate treatment in time. She congratulated the Government of Kenya for having a Cancer Prevention and Control Act, and the National Cancer Prevention and Control Strategy in place.

Japanese Government Representative tours projects in North Western Kenya

The Japanese Government through one of its top officials from their Embassy in Kenya visited Kakuma in North Western Kenya to assess various Japan funded projects that IOM has been implementing in the region since 2009.

The principal objective of the field visit on 18 February 2013 by Mihoko Sakai, Researcher/Advisor of the Economic Cooperation Division at the Embassy was to provide a better understanding of the projects funded by the Japanese Government, show achievements of the project and provide ideas for future collaboration. This was the first ever field visit by the donor in Northern Kenya.

Some of the projects she visited in Lodwar included the fish market and processing unit and the basketry shed for women. In Kakuma, Ms. Mihoko Sakai toured various projects namely the Vocational Training and Peace centres, a treated water borehole, a car wash and Kakuma Radio station.

During her interactions with recipients Ms. Sakai lauded the projects and the positive impact on the people of Kakuma. She also stressed the need for sustainability. “I basically think IOM activities have been well adopted in the local communities and would like to thank IOM for its work,” she noted.

When asked about which projects impressed her most: “The car wash place, FM radio station and borehole projects were just amazing! People at these projects displayed their commitment towards making the projects succeed. Their managerial skills were also impressive.”

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She beseeched the recipients to ensure that their projects are sustainable enough and serve the people intended. “I hope they can have some independent way of thinking that they themselves need to be drivers of their own projects,” she concluded.

The Government of Japan has in the past four years extended millions in funding to support IOM humanitarian services for migrants, host communities, returnees and internally displaced people in East and the Horn of Africa. In

Kenya, IOM has been implementing initiatives touching on health, livelihood activities, peace and psychosocial support in Dadaab, Garissa, Kakuma and its environs, and Kapenguria.

The initiatives are meant to help both the refugees and members of the host community cope with effects of the 2011 Horn of Africa drought and also build their resilience. In Eldoret IOM through funding from the Japanese Government implemented the *Shelter and Livelihood for Peace and Reconciliation project* following the 2007/08 post-election violence.

The funding was disbursed through the *Japan Supplementary Budget* and the *Japan Peace Building Fund*.

In December 2012, the Japanese Ambassador to Kenya, H.E Toshihisa Takata lauded the work of IOM and pointed out that “the Government of Japan wishes to continue with its cooperation with IOM in its various programmes and activities”.

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**UNOPS Procurement Devolution Assessment**

The United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) has been nominated the interim chair of the Sub Working Group on Public Procurement Reform (SWGPPR); officially formed under Kenya’s Public Financial Management Development Partners group.

This comes in light of the joint needs assessment conducted by Treasury and UNOPS on Public Procurement Devolution. The assessment was aimed at tackling key technical and management issues pertaining to devolution of public procurement in Kenya and developing recommendations to further strengthen the Government procurement system.

The assessment was conducted at both the national and county levels and concluded in October 2012. Presentations were made to various Government ministries and oversight bodies, including the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission, Kenya National Audit Office, the Transition Authority, the United Nations Kenya Country Team, donors and other...
stakeholders. The final report was issued in January 2013, and has been accepted and endorsed by the Government of Kenya and the development partners. The recommendations of this report form the basis for all public procurement reform discussions with the Government through the Sub Working Group (SWG).

The development partners for the SWG, which include the World Bank, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), African Development Bank (AfDB) and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), have been working closely with the Kenya Government to implement procurement reforms over the years. The SWG is expected to provide more coordinated assistance to the Government in an area that is crucial for efficient and effective public financial management.

The Public Financial Management Development Partners group has been supporting the Ministry of Finance on a number of Public Financial Management Reforms in order to enhance accountability and transparency in its public finance systems. Among many other areas, the reform agenda aims to strengthen public procurement.

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This Newsletter is compiled by the UN Communications Group in Kenya (UNCG) designed and edited by the United Nations Information Centre, Nairobi.

For more information contact: UNCG Chair,
P. O. Box 67578-00100 Nairobi, Kenya.
Tel: 020-76221102, E-mail: nairobi.unic@unon.org

United Nations Information Centre Nairobi @unicnairobi