

IMPACT OF VIOLENCE HAS LONG TERM CONSEQUENCES FOR DISPLACED PEOPLE IN KENYA

CARE urges need to step up emergency assistance



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NAIROBI (13 January, 2008) – In the aftermath of post-election violence, CARE staff visiting camps and settlements for internally displaced people in western Kenya have found a major crisis. Thousands of individuals and families are seeking refuge in churches, police stations and schools because their homes were destroyed.



“The needs of the people who have fled their homes remain great as many camps are overstretched, crowded and in poor sanitary conditions,” says Bud Crandall, CARE Country Director for Kenya, following a visit to a slum area in Nairobi, Kenya’s capital. Official statistics indicate that approximately 100,000 people are displaced in the Rift Valley alone.

Most camps in western Kenya are hosting a significant number of small children, pregnant women, nursing mothers and elderly people, all of whom have special dietary and health needs. Many camps are overwhelmed in their ability to meet those needs.

In addition to requesting basic necessities such as plastic sheets, jerry cans for water, kitchen utensils, soap, sanitary pads and blankets, many people expressed their concern on being unable to send their children to school next week, the official start date designated by the Government of Kenya following the post-election delay.

“Our home was burned down and with it all my school books and my notes for the secondary school exam,” said 15-year-old Rispa Irungu, staying at a police station in the Burnt Forest area in western Kenya “I wish someone could help me because I do not want to miss out on my education and I want to sit for my final examination.”

Red Cross representatives in Molo also mentioned that displaced people staying in school premises would likely have to vacate as of this week when schools are due to open again. Plans are being made as to where these people might relocate, considering the scarcity of available land and safe premises.

Many people, especially women and children, expressed fear about returning to their homes, citing attacks carried out in the middle of the night and an overall feeling of insecurity. Though some have managed to return to their fields to retrieve their harvest and a few belongings, many found their property either burned down or looted.

Some people interviewed during the CARE assessment mission observed that although this is not the first time that people have been displaced from their homes after an election in Kenya, the magnitude of this displacement is much higher than in the past. Survivors are struggling to understand why this has happened to them again.

The psycho-social impact of this crisis will be felt for a long time, especially when considering that a lasting political compromise is still not in sight. It will take years to rebuild trust among neighbors at the community level.

Further, entire communities face severe economic losses. Along the road to and from western Kenya,



assessment teams saw burned shops, looting and widespread vandalism. The cost of many basic goods has quadrupled, leaving ordinary people feeling the pinch.

Residents of the huge Kibera slum in Nairobi are also deeply impacted by the violence.

“All the kiosks are burned down and few people are in the streets compared to the usual crowds that populate this area of Nairobi,” said Stephen Okello, project officer for CARE in Kibera. “There are also very few children outside. Women and children have fled to churches or safe havens in other parts of Nairobi. Since many people lost their livelihoods, they are forced to go out of Kibera to look for food and find a way to survive.”

Residents of Kibera told the CARE team that their most pressing need is food. Though some agencies are already distributing it, ensuring that the most vulnerable get is challenging as fighting often erupts and people who receive food are assaulted on their way home.”

It is critical to work with community leaders to ensure a smooth distribution of food aid; otherwise women and child-headed households may not receive the assistance they need,” said Felix Okech, CARE program manager for the Dadaab refugee camps in northeastern Kenya, currently in Nairobi to assist with internally displaced people in the capital.

In addition to food aid, Kibera residents told CARE staff that they need access to safe water, rehabilitation of community latrines and key household items such as mosquito nets, blankets, kitchen utensils and plastic sheeting. Security also remains a concern as residents are afraid of attacks in the middle of the night.