

The Isaiah Trust

Newsletter: Spring 2008

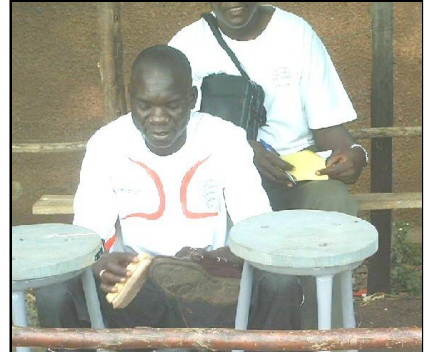
www.isaiahtrust.org

Trouble in Kenya

Many of you will have read about the problems experienced in Kenya, and in the Kisumu region in particular since the elections in December. The work of the Trust, with the street children of Kisumu and Kitale has suffered problems as a result of the violence and disputes that arose from the constitutional crisis and quickly spread into tribal and criminal conflict. Happily, most people have come through the conflict unscathed, although there have been casualties.

One of our street workers, Timothy, a Kikuyu, was forced to flee his home and business and leave Kisumu. Some of the street boys and girls who attended our programs also met with trouble, including one boy, Nicholas (pictured above learning a trade at the resource centre in Kondele) who was killed by a street mob and a girl who was caught in cross fire and was injured by a rubber bullet.

In this Newsletter we have tried to give an unedited account of the problems and how they have affected the work of the Trust.



A view from the Streets

To most Kenyans a happy new year, 2008, proved to be very unpredictable and elusive. This was as a result of election results which the main opposition party, ODM, claimed was rigged by the ruling party PNU. As a result, the country was plunged into an abyss of violence, death and destruction never before seen in post-independence Kenya!

Violence struck!

The moment the president was sworn in, violence struck the streets of most towns, particularly in Western Kenya, which is an opposition stronghold. Kisumu (the hot bed of violence), Eldoret, Kakamega, Nairobi and other towns were all badly affected. On the night of 31st Dec 2007, tribes that were pro-government became targets of the ensuing violence.

The country has experienced a large number of internally displaced people. Families have been broken down by reason of tribal animosity. Women and children have suffered most! Widows and orphans with nowhere to go are scattered all over the country, many in camps, having been chased from their homes and land. Their memories have been scarred and it will take time and a lot of effort to heal them. From the beginning of the year, properties and businesses in Kisumu were destroyed, shops looted and set ablaze!



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Town Hope Centre

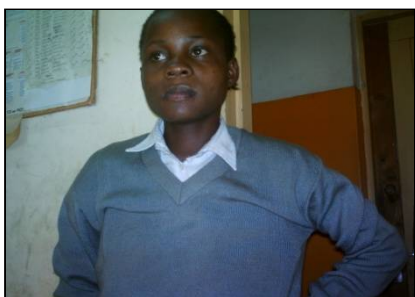
Most Isaiah Trust programs are located in Kisumu town on the shores of Lake Victoria. The rehab home is located in the outskirts of town at Kibos. The home became a safe haven for the children and workers. Bonfires were lit on most roads. Kibos market was not spared. Illegal road blocks were erected beside burning tyres and guarded by infuriated youths who forcefully demanded money from pedestrians. Many vehicles were set ablaze! Gangs of marauding criminals broke into houses even in broad daylight.

Our street outreach program in town has been directly affected by the violence. Most of the street children got caught up in the daily running battles between the police and the protesters. Some became casualties of the violence. When shops were looted in town, some bigger street boys and children became involved in the 'shopping spree'. The streets have become increasingly unpredictable and ominous over the past two months before the signing of the power-sharing agreement on 28th Feb 2008. In most occasions it would take only five minutes for violence to flare up in town. Our key street workers, Paul James, Edwin and Paul Onyango would engage with the children during peaceful spells.



Kondele Hope Centre

Kondele is a 10min drive from the town centre. Two meeting centres operate in this location- a youth resource centre and a children's drop-in centre. Kondele was part of the epicenter of the post-election violence. Many houses here went up in flames. Many motor vehicles were also reduced to empty shells. The owner of the grand Kimwa Hotel died of a heart attack after learning that his building has been vandalized and burnt! Many children at Kondele come from the slums of Obunga, Manyatta and Nyawita. The children bore the brunt of the violence. Some became displaced, their parents and guardians died in the ensuing skirmishes. Schools remained closed to the disadvantage of those whom we had enrolled in the Education Program



"felled by a stray bullet"

Many of the children in schools now lack basic necessities like food and school uniform. This is an area where the Isaiah Trust needs can come in, to prevent an influx of children begging for food on the streets. One of the girls we support in the education program, Mercy Owuor, (left) was injured by a rubber bullet while fleeing the police-protesters on her way from school. She was taken to hospital by the Red Cross. A fellow pupil did not survive but was felled by a stray bullet.

The Resource Centre was also affected by the violence though not directly by where it is located. One of the trainees, Muturi, has been living in fear for his life in camps established for Internally Displaced Persons at Kondele Police Station. It is painful to see him suffer in the camp. Despite the violence, training programs have continued at the Resource Centre. Two young men lost their lives, Nicholas and Victor. They were burnt alive when their neighbour raised an alarm claiming that Nicholas had stolen her mobile phone. The young man was brutally beaten by a mob and forced to name his accomplice. The dying boy named his friend Victor! Bleeding, Victor was later tied on a tyre, dowsed with gasoline and set ablaze. He died pleading for mercy! It landed on deaf ears determined to kill! His friend later met a similar fate!

These deaths occurred because of the state of lawlessness which the country has experienced.



Kibos and Mamboleo Rehabilitation Centres

Some children who stay with us in the rehabilitation centres had been visiting their family homelands before the post-election violence erupted, staying with grand parents or relatives as part of their re-integration. These villages away from the main towns did not experience significant skirmishes. However, food and transport costs tripled, which really affected some children coming back. Public transport was scarce. Many transporters feared to put their vehicles on the road because of security risks. Most commodities are, even now, too expensive to afford.

In the beginning of skirmishes we feared for our lives and property because houses were set ablaze in our neighborhood. Later on criminal gangs became so indiscriminate in their house-breaking sprees. They have been taking advantage of the political situation and the prevailing confusion in the country. We had threats against the house by gangs who said that they were going to come and take everything we had. Thankfully they never returned.

Some of the emergency measures which we took were to employ an extra day-time security guard and to buy a two-way communication radio for the night security guard. We moved with the children to the village in Bungoma (approximately 3 hours drive from Kisumu, where Moses family home is located) where the situation was more peaceful. It really helped them to forget the violence in town.



These pictures show the violence and destruction in Town, with a car showroom destroyed (above left), the supermarket and buildings in the Wedco Centre looted and burned, and the Safaricom mobile phone shop (below left) completely emptied by violent mobs.



Simply moving around Kisumu has become difficult, as gangs set up road blocks, demanding payments to allow pedestrians and vehicles through.

Thankfully for the Trust, Moses is recognised by many and the work of the Trust is known. So far, we have been spared much of the pain.



Kitale – Street Program, Rehabilitation Centre and Farm

In Kitale, the Trust has a street children program and rehabilitation centre, as well as a large farm, providing food for the many different programs and centres.

The Sabaot Land Defence Force, a tribal militia group found in the Mount Elgon forest, took advantage of the current situation in the country to cause fear and destruction in surrounding area including Tranzoia District where Kitale is located. They have laid a claim on a large area in the district. This has directly caused fear to most farmers. Most farmers are now displaced. Almost half of them did not harvest their crops.

The Trust does all of its farming in Kitale. The next farming season is dangerously passing by (land should be prepared in January and seeds sown in March, ready for the April rains) and the prospect of farming is now bleak. If half of the farmers have left their farms, then food will be scarce and expensive. The Trust sold off the surplus from last year's harvest at a premium, in the hope of farming again this year, but we are waiting to see how the situation turns out. It would be foolish to begin farming, only for the land to be taken by a militia.

With a lot of tension on the streets of Kitale town, meeting with the children in a group became a security concern. It had to be done carefully. Most street children in Kitale are Turkanas from Lodwar (Turkanas). They do live in Kipsongo slums. The local militia might try to dislodge them from there. Some of the Turkanas might try to relocate courtesy of NGOs. This might affect the children whom Vincent stays with (At most 2 of them). They might relocate with their guardians though that might not happen.

In Conclusion

Many of the programs run by the Trust have been disrupted due to the problems. People have been forced to flee their homes and leave Kisumu simply because they came from the wrong tribe. Gangs have taken advantage of the situation to loot shops and destroy homes and businesses. It will take a lot to rebuild it.

The Isaiah Trust remains one hundred percent committed to working with the poorest children of Kisumu. Regrettably, as a result of this indiscriminate violence, there will be many more children without homes or families. Children whose only hope is the love and care of organisations like the Isaiah Trust.

Whilst our funds are modest, we will contribute all that we can to rebuilding the town and encouraging the people to live in peace with each other, irrespective of colour, tribe or political affiliation.

A huge thank you to everyone who has sent messages of support and concern over the past few weeks. Your encouragement is touching and hugely appreciated.

We hope that the current peace agreement will hold, and that we can again focus on helping these poorest of children to achieve dignity & purpose in their lives and a hope for the future.

