



SUCCESS STORY

Women's Group Connects Elected Officials and IDPs



An internally displaced man from the Rukuini IDP camp addresses local councilors. The gutted building the background is a vivid reminder of the post-election violence.



A member of the Rural Women's Peace Link reflects on the warm welcome she received during a recent visit to the Rukuini IDP camp. Earlier visits by the RWPL were greeted with suspicion.

USAID/KENYA

The U.S. Agency for International Development's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) program in Kenya seeks to facilitate an enduring stability based on national unity. The program will assist Kenyan state and non-state actors to more fully exercise their capacities, supporting the following broad objectives:

- 1. Promote and enable broad-based recovery from the 2007–08 election-related violence, and*
- 2. Prompt steps to address the underlying causes of instability.*

September 2008 – Elected officials in Burnt Forest, near Eldoret, have been criticized for not visiting the Rukuini internally displaced persons (IDP) camp in the town. Thousands continue to languish in Rukuini and other camps as animosities between various ethnic groups prevent government officials from participating in reconciliation efforts. However, prior to the January 2008 post-election violence, ethnic communities coexisted in the region in relative peace.

The mistrust that both contributed to and resulted from Kenya's post-election violence has been a target of USAID/OTI's initial efforts in Kenya. In one of its earliest activities, OTI/Kenya worked with the Rural Women's Peace Link (RWPL) to provide practical opportunities for goal-oriented dialogue, using women and youth as key entry points.

With OTI's support, RWPL brought people together to discuss their experiences in the post-election period and identify shared interests to help re-establish Burnt Forest as a peaceful community. The activity has enabled key members on both sides of the tribal divide to come together, listen to each other's experiences, and design ways to interact and move beyond the animosity provoked by the recent violence.

Members of the RWPL, some of whom come from different ethnic backgrounds than the IDPs in Rukuini, were not welcomed during their initial visits to the camp. After the dialogues, however, they were welcomed with open arms, singing, and dancing. One RWPL member said, "I am very happy to see these Kikuyu ladies singing and dancing and accepting me. I am married to a Kalenjin, and although I was their neighbor [prior to the violence], when I first came here, they were not even willing to talk to me."

Recently, the RWPL was able to bring members of the town council to Rukuini, some of them for the first time since the post-election violence. Following a dialogue between council members and camp residents, the council's chairman said, "This visit has opened my eyes to the plight of the IDPs, my own constituents. Now that the IDPs have embraced peace, I have realized that there is hope for peaceful coexistence, and I am determined to make a difference."