



The Impact of Postelection Violence on Street Vendors and Informal Traders in Kenya as of January 18, 2008

On December 27, 2007, street vendors and informal traders – alongside millions of other Kenyan citizens – voted to elect their leaders against a backdrop of election pledges made by presidential, parliamentary, and civic candidates to improve their lives. Yet, a flawed electoral process, which drew calls for an independent investigation and a revote, plunged the country into violence and chaos. The ensuing political, economic, and social crisis has severely affected the lives and livelihoods of informal workers in Kenya, particularly street vendors.

This report focuses on the impact of the postelection violence on members of one of UUSC's program partners, the Kenya National Alliance of Street Vendors and Informal Traders (KENASVIT), from late December 2007 to January 10, 2008. It is based on briefings given by officials from various urban alliances by phone. (To date, UUSC has not been able to visit the various urban alliances in order to assess the situation. However, a UUSC delegation arrived in Kenya on January 20 to meet with UUSC partners and observe the effects of the crisis firsthand.)

REPORTS FROM THE VARIOUS URBAN ALLIANCES

The impact of the postelection violence on KENASVIT members has been severe in the cities of Eldoret, Kisumu, Nairobi, Nakuru, Migori, and Mombasa. Effects include displacement from their homes, displacement from trading sites, ethnic animosity, injury and loss of life, loss of property, reduced income, and stagnation of KENASVIT, Urban Alliance, and the activities of other grassroots groups. The Machakos alliance has been least affected.

Eldoret Urban Alliance (ELASVIT)

Eldoret city was the site of some of the worst scenes of violence. A great deal of property was destroyed or stolen, and many lives were lost. Many street vendors have been affected.

The Eldoret Alliance has lost three members. The former chairman of ELASVIT was killed in skirmishes. Two members were killed on their way home from work. Many members of ELASVIT were temporarily displaced from their homes, but have since returned. Having lost their merchandise and household property to looters and arsonists, many of them are beginning life from scratch. Also,

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many street vendors' children are unlikely to resume school on time due to lack of school supplies and homelessness.

Tensions are still very high as people await the verdict from the [Orange Democratic Movement](#) (Opposition Leader Raila Odinga's party). Some displaced members are staying at the Eldoret show ground. Business is slow, and traders are opening their businesses late and closing early due to the prevailing insecurity.

Contact among association members is difficult because most cannot be reached by phone. Consequently, urban alliance activities have stalled.

Kisumu Urban Alliance (KASVIT)

Kisumu is one of the worst-affected cities in Kenya. Members of KASVIT in Kisumu have had to bear the effects of severe postelection violence. According to KASVIT officials, some traders were injured and others may have lost their lives. Many vendors lost their property and wares when shops that served as their stores were burned down. Some of their wares were stolen.

Price for foodstuffs has gone up, as well as the price of other merchandise that street vendors sell. Traders from other communities such as Kikuyu and Kisii have left Kisumu. A number of local street vendors have been displaced from their vending sites, with some displaced vendors staying at police camps. Communications have broken down due to looting and vandalism at centers for the mobile-phone companies Safaricom and Celtel. Street vendors are unable to get access to their savings because all banks have closed due to security concerns.

There is very little business due to the heavy military and police presence in the city, which scares away customers. Traders open business late and close early. Transportation restrictions have affected customer movement, and prices for available goods have become prohibitive to both customers and street vendors. Most of the established businesses have been destroyed, triggering an unemployment crisis in the city and causing many affected workers to turn to street vending. Finally, Kisumu Urban Alliance activities have stalled, pending resumption of peace in the city.

Machakos Urban Alliance (MASVIT)

Machakos city has been relatively calm. All but two MASVIT members report no problems among their colleagues. The only two affected members had gone to Nairobi to collect their merchandise and lost their goods during skirmishes. The situation is calm, although business is slow due to restricted transportation. However, MASVIT members are optimistic that the situation in the country will improve soon. The alliance is continuing with activities as usual.

Migori Urban Alliance

Migori Urban Alliance members are slowly resuming business after devastating skirmishes that left 4 of its members dead and 20 injured, displaced, and

impoverished. Communications breakdowns in the Nyanza Region seriously affected food supply in Migori. Street vendors and market traders are unable to travel to various centers to collect merchandise because the limited road transport that is available is very expensive, contributing to the high price of food commodities. About 500 traders in Migori are living at the police camp. The alliance secretary was housing one of the displaced persons.

Traders are operating under fear of attack. Many traders lost property to looting or arson. The main wholesaler shops were vandalized, and the few standing shops are selling products at very high prices. Association activities have stalled pending resumption of peace in the city, though tensions are still high.

Mombasa Alliance (MUSTA)

The impact of postelection violence in Mombasa has been severe on MUSTA members. Violence was more severe in areas such as Likoni and Changamwe, where kiosks were vandalized. In Kisauni, kiosks were burned. In Likoni, ferry kiosks were vandalized, and the construction of stalls for vendors has stalled. Street traders in Mombasa Island did not suffer substantial property loss, but are now faced with the threat of eviction by the Mombasa Municipal Council. Many traders lost their property, and some were injured in the fighting.

Street vendors are not optimistic about the resumption of normal business activities. The security has deteriorated drastically, and people are struggling to protect themselves and their property. The contested appointment of a vice president from the Akamba community has provoked hostility towards members of the Akamba community in Mombasa.

Street vendors' incomes have declined substantially because they have to open late and close early due to the insecurity. Access to merchandise is difficult because wholesalers are staying open for a very short time.

Nairobi Urban Alliance (NISCOF)

The situation in Nairobi is difficult for street vendors and informal traders. The chairman of the alliance said operations at the alliance office had stalled because staff and officials have not been reporting for duty. A cloud of uncertainty and apprehensiveness hangs over the city. Many members of NISCOF have been affected by the insecurity. Accessing merchandise is difficult because of gangs who demand protection fees. Ethnic hostility has flared among the land officials who oversee matters related to members' vending space, the impact of which will likely take time to resolve. Some NISCOF members have been displaced from their trading sites.

Urban alliance activities and projects like the Savings and Credit (SACCO) activities have stalled. Some NISCOF partners are also seriously affected by the postelection violence.

Street vendors have lost property through robbery and displacement from their homes. Cases of sexual harassment, sexual violence, and rape have been reported. Many children will not be able to resume school on time due to

homelessness and loss of school supplies. The cost of doing business has increased because street vendors must pay protection fees to gangs in order to work.

Although there are no reported cases of members who have lost their lives or been injured, it is believed that some NISCOF members could have been injured or killed. Many street vendors reside in the slum areas of Kibera, Kiambu, and Mathare, which experienced heavy looting and fighting. Most of the displaced members are staying in camps for security. The alliance office is preparing a detailed report on the situation in Nairobi.

Nakuru Urban Alliance (NASTHA)

The situation of street vendors in Nakuru is similar to that of most other KENASVIT affiliates. In Nakuru, some street vendors were evicted from their vending sites by a gang based in the central province. Some members of two of NASTHA's new affiliates based in Kaptembwa and Kwa Rhonda were displaced from their homes and are now living at the Holy Cross Church and the Ask show ground.

Several members lost property to robbery and arson. Many members of NASTHA are living on very low incomes due to the insecurity and long periods of closure. They open business late and close early. Many street vendors are unable to repay money that they borrowed from lending institutions and individuals. Street vendors are having problems paying the daily market fees charged by the Municipal Council. Business is generally slow because many customers are choosing to purchase foodstuffs. However, life is slowly returning to normal. The chairperson of NASTHA is working with the local administration and the Municipal Council to address the situation.

Summary

In summary, the impact of the postelection violence has been severe on all alliances, except Machakos. Some KENASVIT members have been displaced from their homes, displaced from their trading sites, suffered ethnic animosity, and experienced loss of life or injury and loss of property due to robbery or arson. Many KENASVIT members are operating on low incomes due to: reduced working hours, loss of business capital and stock, low customer turnout due to fear and insecurity, heavy military and police presence that also dampens customer turnout, the high cost of merchandise due to the destruction of established businesses, difficulty using public transportation to collect wares, and difficulty getting access to bank accounts.

In general, alliance activities have stalled. Communication with members is difficult. Meetings are not taking place because members are still scattered. KENASVIT activities have been affected in a similar way.

The situation is changing rapidly, but, as of this writing, it seems to be following a very worrying trend.