



Consultative meeting between Disability Agenda Kenya, a community group, and officers of the Kenya Police Service on addressing peaceful implementation of corona prevention directives.

How AfriNov Helped To Push For Social Justice During Covid 19 Pandemic

By Walter Otieno.

Since the outbreak of Corona virus pandemic in Kenya, we heard from many grassroots groups we work with that there has been a stark increase of police brutality. The Kenyan government introduced measures with the goal of stopping the virus from spreading. The problem is that police officers often use excessive force to enforce these directives. We are not alone in these observations.

The Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC) reported increased rates of human rights, economic and social rights violations by

police and state agencies. KHRC documented 10 deaths and 67 cases of human rights abuse caused by police officers since the beginning of the pandemic. The Independent Policing Oversight Authority (IPOA) documented 87 complaints against police officers that were reported. The complaints range from death, shootings, harassment, assaults resulting to serious injuries, robbery, inhuman treatment, and sexual assault.

Police brutality was a big problem in Kenya before the pandemic, but the Covid-19 crisis made matters worse. In response to this, AfriNov and its partners started

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Kenya Police Service, officers in a consultative meeting with Disability Agenda Kenya, a community group, min Kisumu, Kenya

supporting grassroots campaigns against police brutality in various parts of Kenya. In North Rift, Monicah, the program officer supported a campaign that stopped police brutality in Langas slums. In Nairobi, AfriNov trained Community Resource persons (CRPs) led by Beatrice Atieno the program Officer, worked with young artists to raise awareness of police brutality through drawings and messaging on walls.

In Kisumu, AfriNov supported the establishment of a community-led partnership campaign together with regional police and Boda Boda (motorcycle taxi) riders. This campaign was led by Disability Agenda Kenya (DAK), a community-based organization advocating for the rights of people living with disabilities which was trained by AfriNov on nonviolent campaigning.

AfriNov helped DAK in analysing the issue of police brutality in the area and found that most often Boda Boda riders are affected by arbitrary arrest and police harrassment. Many times, the police brutality would be met with retaliation from the riders, which makes the situation even more difficult. DAK campaigners met with the Boda Boda riders to talk about the issue and decided to launch the “Don’t arrest, give mask” campaign.

The goal of the campaign was to improve the relationship between the police and the community, and more so to stop the police from arresting people working in the informal sector for not wearing facemasks.

After meeting the police commander and the Boda Boda riders separately, DAK and AfriNov managed to convince both the boda boda riders and some police officers to meet in a safe space to discuss their concerns. After the conversation, moderated by AfriNov field team, the police promised that they would continue to work with the team to find solutions to stop the police brutality. The police and Boda Boda leaders reached a consensus on the role of the police in enforcing the containment measures. Boda Boda riders agreed that they would adhere to containment measures. Both sides also decided to continue meeting in the future to building a working relationship to avoid further conflict. During the meeting, police inspector Omondi said: “We are all brothers and sisters of our parents; we are only separated by our professions. Let us co-exist peacefully”.

AfriNov supported DAK in carrying out these activities by providing advice, training, paying small amounts to campaigners so that they can travel for the campaign activities and moderating the discussions.

Since this meeting, DAK, the boda boda riders and other community members reported that the police brutality has decreased significantly. Disability Agenda Kenya and local communities continue to work closely with the police service in Kisumu to ensure peaceful enforcement of containment measures.

Helping a grassroots group spread live-saving Covid-19 messages in the slums of Kisumu, Kenya

By Walter Otieno

The Covid-19 pandemic is having a devastating effect on poor Kenyan communities. Schools were closed for a long time and access to health services are very limited in many Kenyan communities. Kenyans living in poor slum areas are more vulnerable to contracting the Coronavirus, because they live in densely populated areas, lack sanitary facilities and access to water. Most people cannot afford buying facemask, which the government is now asking everyone to wear in public. Many people also cannot afford soap or to stay at home, because they somehow need to make a living. Another key problem in fighting the

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AfriNov has been receiving many worrying calls from the various grassroots groups we work with. Many groups asked us to help them spread live-saving messages to their communities. In Kisumu County, we collaborated with a local group called “Winam Bethany” and helped them reach out to the Gonda Community, a slum setup in Kisumu with a population of 14,545 people.

AfriNov helped the group to plan a community outreach campaign in order to boost the messaging campaign by local authorities. The messages were in line with government directives on COVID-19 prevention that encourages hand sanitization, proper use of facemask, staying at home and observing social distancing. In close collaboration with the local health and administrative authorities, members of Winam Bethany moved door-to-door reaching out to families and sharing

key information about how to prevent the Coronavirus from spreading.

The team also distributed fliers with child-friendly messages and pictures, which explain what the virus is and how to stop it from spreading in the congested slum areas. Our friends from Winam Bethany also reminded everyone how to properly wash their hands, how to wear facemasks and how to maintain social distance to others.

AfriNov supported the team in planning the activities and paying for their transport and in some cases AfriNov provided washable facemasks, liquid soap. AfriNov also helped in printing the information fliers that were all given out during the group’s action. In total, Winam Bethany CBO, was able to reach 100 households with information fliers on COVID-19 prevention. The community group also distributed 89 rewashable facemasks, liquid soap, and information fliers to vulnerable households in Gonda slum community.



Boniface Opondo of Winam Bethany group leads other members of the group in distributing liquid soap after sensitization of hand washing and use of face mask



Community members in Kayole, Nairobi Kenya lining up at a water selling point during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Fighting for Water Access Using Creative Arts in Kayole, Nairobi

By Beatrice Atieno

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Communities in informal settlements in Kenya suffer from the lack of basic public services and facilities despite their great need in these poor and vulnerable communities. In Kayole, a slum in Nairobi Kenya, the community has for a long term experienced perennial water shortages.

When the Covid 19 pandemic started in Nairobi, the need for this essential service greatly increased. How you can wash your hands without water was the big question across the community. Devoted Youth Foundation, a local youth serving organization, partnered with AfriNov to address this grave concern. The youth group had been trained by AfriNov to undertake nonviolent campaigns on social injustices in their community.

With small financial support from AfriNov to carry out the nonviolent campaign and raise awareness on the COVID-19 pandemic. The youth group found a way to utilize their creative talent for the good of their community.

The youth group wanted the local community and especially leaders to act. They therefore decided to look for strategic locations for their artwork to have the biggest visual impact. The artwork also addressed other social justice issues such as police harassment within the community.

The artwork used different messages and pictures that were easy to understand. The community group received permission from local authorities and owners to draw and write messages on walls across the community.

The art campaign by the youth group was very successful. Local politicians and leaders could not ignore the strong messages. They invited the youths to present their demands. Soon after, the water access was restored. Residents can now access water twice a week- Wednesdays and Thursdays. A first victory, but the group is not giving up yet and has teamed up with other groups such as Al-Qamar Community Social Justice Center, to launch a bigger campaign to ensure a lasting solution to the water shortage

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problem.

Most importantly, the campaign continues to play the important role of raising awareness among residents and youth to observe the government directives in preventing COVID-19. This has led to improved change of attitude among most community members who initially assumed that the virus was a hoax.



Wall artwork in Kayole community campaigning for action on water shortage and hand hygiene in managing the COVID-10 pandemic.

AfriNov Ending An Aid Corruption Scheme in Nairobi, Kenya

By Beatrice Atieno

Grassroot community groups that are trained on nonviolent ways of identifying and addressing social injustices, are better placed to peacefully safeguard their communities' wellbeing and development. An empowered community is timely in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic where help and assistance should reach the most vulnerable and needy in society. However, that is not always the case, because we have a lot of corruption in our country.

In Nairobi, AfriNov supported grassroots organizations like Venus Education Medical Center- VEMC, to launch a campaign against a corrupted Covid19 aid distribution scheme by local officials. Community members reported to VEMC that local authorities were handing out Covid 19 relief aid along tribal lines and that government subsidies were being misused. AfriNov advised the group and helped members to gather necessary evidence. VEMC interviewed 150 residents and learnt that in total 121 vulnerable

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Local residents and community administration in partnership with AfriNov engaging in discussions on nonviolent ways of identifying and addressing social injustices safeguard their communities' wellbeing and development.



families were to receive Covid 19 cash fund from the government. The group also found out that 34 out of the 121 received funds only because they were related to the area chief. A further 24 families were well off and still received the funds. 10 others were not area residents yet still received the funds. Only 47 needy families were fairly identified.

The campaigners shared their survey report with the Deputy County Commissioner and made recommendations on how the distribution should be handled more transparently and fairly. The Deputy Commissioner was very grateful for the information and acted on all the recommendations. He also promised to work closely with VEMC in the future.

Following this nonviolent action by VEMC, other development partners like World Food Program- WFP, started physically verifying their aid delivery services. They also found some mismatch of names and contacts. Some of the beneficiaries were relatives to those who were compiling the list yet they did not qualify to get the relief aid. Other people on the list were deceased while many others were not even aware that they had been listed to benefit from the relief aid.

Authorities together with the community

created a new list through a more transparent way and 1200 needy people were identified for consideration. This corruption would never have been discovered without the bold nonviolent action by VEMC.

“Through the training and support from AfriNov, the community is empowered to identify gaps, identify injustices and peacefully mobilize residents to non-violently address issues”, shared VEMC chairperson, Volence Oloo. “This is clear departure from previous periods where the youth and residents did not know how to build positive relations with leaders. They would respond to issues violently to the disadvantage of the community”.

In pursuing strong relationship with their elected officials, holding them accountable and solving injustices non-violently, the community continues to enjoy increasing opportunities for their wellbeing. It is through such initiatives that 46 young people of Blue Estate in Maziwa area got opportunities to work in the government funded beautification and environmental conservation initiative popularly known as *Kazi Mtaani* (Work in Communities). VEMC hopes to continue to promote nonviolence and AfriNov will continue to support the group in this important work.

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