



SUCCESS STORY

Youth Unite for Reconciliation in Keses



Representatives of the Rural Women's Peace Link hand over the peace torch to members of the Wareng Youth for Peace and Development Initiative, who will lead the way to reconciliation in Keses.

“The Initiative will not die; we shall embrace the challenge and take charge of our destiny.”

—Fred Yego, Chairman,
Wareng Youth for Peace
and Development

May 2009 – During the post-election turmoil that engulfed Kenya in January 2008, Keses, in the Rift Valley, became the epicenter of violence and destruction. Several people were killed, houses were burned, and hundreds were displaced. The area was left reeling from the effects of the violence long after relative calm had returned to the rest of the country.

Initial efforts by William Tarus, the Kenyan Government's administrator in the area, to bring the communities together for reconciliation were unsuccessful. Several dialogue meetings were called over a span of eight months, but the turnout was so poor that Mr. Tarus nearly abandoned the process altogether. Youth shunned the meetings for fear of being arrested, and residents of the affected communities were too suspicious of their neighbors to come together and talk.

However, all this changed when the Rural Women's Peace Link (RWPL), a group dedicated to community mobilization, became involved.

With support from USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives, RWPL was able to break through the distrust. And after only 15 meetings, the Wareng Youth for Peace and Development Initiative was formed to take over peace-building efforts in the area.

“Our objective is to ensure peaceful co-existence regardless of our political and tribal affiliation,” said Fred Yego, the chairman of the nascent group. “We want to take responsibility for our lives and not leave it to the politicians. We have been misused for [too] long and we have decided enough is enough.”

Notably, the Wareng Youth for Peace and Development Initiative is composed of youths from each of the communities in Keses: Kalenjin, Kikuyu, Luhya, and Kisii—groups that, only a short time ago, were at loggerheads.

The Kenyan Government, through the local administrator, has provided office space for the Wareng group's use, and OTI has provided a small grant so the group can continue its peace initiatives and income-generating activities.

Members of the RWPL experienced a great moment when they passed the peace torch to the Wareng group's young peacemakers at a celebratory ceremony. It was the symbolic beginning of a new chapter in Keses, as local youths resolved to stand out as the generation that would not only bring positive change to the region but also model peace to the country.