

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to those who supported the Ugunja Women's Bike Project. Thanks to our generous donors, we raised over \$12,000 for the project.

Ugunja Women's Bike Project Highlights

A Cooperative Project Takes Shape

Project Activities

Planning starts

- Feb 2006: Charles Ogada, a volunteer from UCRC, plans with Stephanie Mancini, Joe Mancini and other TWC staff to start Ugunja Women's Bike Project at UCRC as a concrete expression of the new UCRC-TWC partnership
- Mar 2006: Back in Ugunja, Kenya, Charles meets with other UCRC staff including Rose Ong'ech and Sylvia Wambare, as well as Julian van Mossel-Forrester and Sarah Anderson (volunteers from TWC) to plan the Bike Project
- Summer 2006: Katherine Bitzer and Noel Belcourt, volunteers from TWC arrived in Ugunja from Kitchener and joined the Bike Project planning group
- September 2006: Rose Ong'ech and Sylvia Wambare from UCRC head to TWC. A group of 10 volunteers begin meeting to create a grassroots plan to raise awareness of and generate support for the Bike Project in Kitchener-Waterloo.
- Calvin Presbyterian Church partners with The Working Centre to assist in

generating support for the Ugunja Women's Bike Project.

The project gets rolling

- In October 2006 UCRC pilots the Ugunja Women's Bike Project. Nine women sign up to learn bike mechanics and repair.
- In December 2006 Ugunja holds its first ever bike assembly and bike race competition – for women! The Ugunja Women's Bike Project team organize the competition as part of the popular annual Youth Peace Week activities. Six individuals participated in the bike mechanics and repair competition and eight women took to the field school to race. Katherine Bitzer sends an email from Ugunja, saying "It was a fun and exhilarating event. The women took off with determination and zeal and broke through one of many inequalities present in this region."
- In January 2007 the Bike Project committee purchases 18 locally available female friendly bikes and five children's bikes

- In March 2007 the Ugunja Women's Bike Project participates in Women's Day activities in a local city. As Noel Belcourt writes in an email from Ugunja "The interest at the event was overwhelming and the excitement for the project has spilled out into almost the entire district and even into neighbouring districts...."

- In April 2007 the Ugunja Women's Bike Project holds two week-long bike camps for girls. Over 70 young girls participated in the camp that combined bike activities with education on goals, girl's rights, and reproductive health.



- In June 2007, UCRC and The Working Centre organize parallel bike rides in their communities to celebrate the Ugunja Women's Bike Project
- In fall 2007 UCRC trains 17 Community Health Workers (15 of whom are women) to use the Bike Project bikes for their outreach work. These volunteers provide health services for people in villages where health clinics are unavailable. These bikes assist workers providing education and medication for HIV, malaria, malnutrition, and water-borne diseases.
- In January 2008 UCRC prepares phase two of Ugunja Women's Bike Project, where bikes will be offered as microfinance assets for women. Through putting aside less than 50 cents a day women will save towards their own bike. After saving just under half the cost of the bike (about \$40), women will access a loan for the remaining \$40 and receive their bike. By paying back their loan over time, the women will provide the financing for future women to access loans for bikes.



Ugunja Women's Bike Project

Achievements

- 18 female-friendly bikes and five children's bikes purchased in Ugunja
- Nine women receive training as bike mechanics, with six continuing training beyond initial two month program
- A women's bike mechanic shop in Ugunja town
- 70 girls participated in two one week bike camps where they learned and practised bike riding. The bike camp was used as a forum to hold activities and discussions with topics relevant

to the girls including health and girls' rights.

- Women and girls responded enthusiastically to concept of women riding bikes, with parents encouraging their girls by allowing them to leave their day-time chores at home for a week to participate in the bike camp.
- 17 Community Health Workers (15 women and two men) received bike riding training and access to the Ugunja Women's Bike Project bikes for health outreach visits to families in remote rural areas
- UCRC began a microfinance program with a local women's group to provide loans for women to purchase their own bikes, as a way of expanding the Ugunja Women's Bike Project and promoting project sustainability.

The following letter from Aggrey Omondi, Executive Director of the UCRC, describes the situation in western Kenya where political violence broke out recently. The letter clearly depicts the realities, challenges, and initiatives that community development groups face in western Kenya. The Ugunja Women's Bike Project is one example of the many projects underway in Kenya that help to build peace and stability in the region.



Ugunja Community Resource Centre
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Dear Friends,

Thank you for your ongoing support and prayers. There is good news to report. The violence has had far-reaching effects, but normalcy is slowly returning. The Ugunja market is back to normal, and traffic is reappearing on the streets. UCRC has continued to contract trucks to carry food and supplies to Ugunja and the surrounding communities from Nairobi. Of the approximately 114 people initially sheltered at the Siaya District Police Station, 60 people have returned to their communities to begin rebuilding their lives.

But we still have a great deal of work to do. Much has been speculated about the causes of the ongoing civil violence in Kenya. With the perspective of more than two decades of experience in community work, my own view is that the root problems are not tribalism, and not even politics (which has only been an inciting spark), but rather, a long history of trenchant poverty and the once-simmering, now boiling desperation of a generation of Kenyan youths who have been denied basic life opportunities. The primary perpetrators of the ongoing violence and unrest are ambitious young men, aged 15 to 35, with nowhere to go thanks to a soaring unemployment rate. Their anger has seethed at the surface for a long time. The post-election fracas has merely provided an opportunity for tensions to explode, and the aggression by youth has been carried out in an effort to gain attention to their "cause," which, truth be told, is a thoroughly just one: economic opportunity, the ability to lead a life of purpose, the ability to provide for one's family.

For this reason, the solution to the crisis lies not in combating tribal enmity or perhaps even in bringing our country's political feuding leaders to a peaceful compromise. Rather, at the local level at least, we believe the solution requires addressing the deep-seated and psychologically debilitating material needs of our young people. This work has taken two main forms.

First, together with local community leaders and nationally-recognized peace activists, Ugunja Community Resource Centre has formed committees in our catchment area to address youths' concerns, to allow for the constructive rather than destructive venting of frustrations, and to discuss ways to move forward and achieve peace and justice. Thus far, these committees have been established in six constituencies: three in Siaya District and three in Kisumu, with a total of 70 committee members. In this work, UCRC adamantly stresses that the key to success is having local leaders serve as committee members, who in turn help to promote the leadership among youths that their community has lacked.

Second, UCRC has begun to directly support youths who lack income-generating opportunities and have, out of desperation, gotten involved in ongoing criminal activities. An association has been formed to provide small capital for small business revitalization. To date, the association has been a success; it meets twice-weekly, and the participants are developing business plans and capital budgets of roughly Ksh 1,000 each (USD 15). This program has already helped to decrease tensions and improve day-to-day security.

The emphatic position of UCRC is that there are no "good guys" and "bad guys" in this situation. The police, for example, have been widely villainized, but we must also show them compassion. The police have been traumatized. They were never prepared for the level of violence and chaos that has taken place. They have been enormously provoked and are totally, totally drained. They've received no time off, little to eat, no time for sleep, and have not seen their families in weeks. UCRC is working with the police in Kisumu to reduce the impulse to shoot civilians. One police officer told me, "Before you came we spent 1000 bullets, now we have not spent one."

Medical relief remains a central part of our role as a rapid response unit. St. Paul's Health Centre is extremely stretched right now. Ministry of Health facilities are understaffed and under-equipped, and as a result St. Paul's has received a great increase in patients. The importance of community health work right now is huge, and medicine and food needs continue to be critical.

What our community is experiencing now is unprecedented. Everyone is suffering and crying out for something to be done. Unhappiness, distrust, and traumatization are high. The past few weeks have taught us that the greatest and hardest work lies at the community level more so than the national level, because it is here—in the villages—that peace, compromise, and reconciliation are needed most.

We at Ugunja Community Resource Centre thank you for your relief assistance and support; we assure you that we are being as resourceful and conservative as possible, so as to stretch your generosity as far as possible. With trust in your continued solidarity, I have faith that our community of Ugunja—and Kenya as a whole—will emerge from this trial stronger and more united.

Yours faithfully,

Aggrey Omondi
Executive Director, Ugunja Community Resource Centre