



# KICTAnet

## Online Discussions

Impact of Post-Election Violence on  
ICT Organisations

eDiscussion Report

Jan 28<sup>th</sup> – Feb 2<sup>nd</sup> 2008

## **Acknowledgments**

This Online Discussion was the first one KICTAnet held this year and is specially dedicated to the many innocent Kenyans who lost their lives during the post-election violence. The discussion was particularly useful in allowing Kenyans to start sharing positively within an otherwise highly polarized, post-election environment.

Many thanks to the KICATnet members who managed to open up and share their experiences during the darkest hours of Kenyan history. Your dialogue and contributions did begin the long journey of getting Kenya back from the brink of what would have been an additional case of an African failed State.

**J. Walubengo, Moderator,  
KICTANet, Online Collaboration Programme.**

[jwalubengo@kcct.ac.ke](mailto:jwalubengo@kcct.ac.ke) or [jwalu@yahoo.com](mailto:jwalu@yahoo.com)

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## **Executive Summary**

The dawn of the Year 2008 caught many Kenyan organisations unprepared for the unprecedented post-election violence. As the chaos escalated beyond their original domains, KICTAnet felt duty bound to get involved in a small way in the search for peace and mitigating interventions.

This Online Discussion was therefore commissioned with the dual purpose of kick-starting positive dialogue about the crisis while sharing experiences and intervention methods being employed by members. The discussion had three key themes:- establishing the challenges posed by the Post-election violence, exploring various mitigating interventions and Quantifying the Impact of the Post-election violence.

The challenges occasioned by the crisis included damaged international reputation, socio-political tensions at the work-place, lost business opportunities and high levels of physical and personal insecurity. The interventions cited included using portals and other media to reconstruct the brand 'Kenya', having counselling sessions at the work-place, maintaining and introducing new e-services that reach consumers irrespective of their geographic localities.

Even though members did not get to quantify the impact in tangible terms, the message was clear that the Post-election violence had wrecked the socio-economic fabric of the nation and would take several months to reconstruct. Members had a forum and an early opportunity for dialogue that ultimately diverted the then polarising and negative energy towards a constructive engagement.

## **Introduction**

### ***Background***

The year 2008 started on an extremely sad note in Kenya as the country quickly degenerated into unprecedented post-election chaos. The citizens were getting more and more polarised as the turmoil escalated. KICTAnet members could no longer pretend to be blind to the surrounding events and chose to get involved positively by sharing experiences and contributing ideas on how to mitigate the impact of post-election violence.

### ***Program Setting & Description:***

KICTAnet forum which included ICT stakeholders from ICT Operators and Practitioners, Academia, Media, Government and Consumers presented a rich source of information and experience that could be shared as an elementary contribution towards getting the country back to its normal state. The sharing would also act as a medium to de-polarise and reduce negative energy that had threatened to start consuming the professional layers of the Kenyan society.

### ***Program Design (Data Collection, Data Processing)***

#### *Data Collection:*

The Online Discussion was structured along the following themes that were discussed electronically over a period of 1 week according to the following schedule:

- Challenges posed by the Post-election Violence on ICT organisations (2days)
  - Economical, Social, Technical Challenges.
- Current Interventions employed to overcome the Challenges (2days)
  - Short-term tactics being used to work around the challenges
  - Long-term options with regard to the challenges
- Quantifying the Impact of Post-election violence on ICT organizations (1day)
  - What is the toll per day in terms of lost business opportunity, man-hours, equipment, etc
- Way Forward and Conclusions -1day.

#### *Data Processing:*

The various contributions from the Participants were analysed and collated into a Final report. This report would act as the KICTAnet's contribution to the search for sustainable peace in Kenya.

***Aim:*** To kick-start positive dialogue about the post-election crisis while sharing experiences and intervention methods.

## ***Objectives***

The Objectives of the exercise included:

- To share the Challenges posed by the Post-election Violence on ICT organizations
- To explore the Current Interventions employed to overcome the Challenges
- To Quantify the Impact of Post-election violence on ICT organizations

## ***Main Outcomes/Deliverables***

The key outcomes of the exercise included:

1. Summarised eParticipants contributions
2. Final Report for subsequent dissemination to members and other stakeholders

## **Tools**

Online Tools (email, listserv, internet)

## ***Resources.***

Moderator (Online)

Participants (Online)

Web Resources

<http://www.usahidi.com/>

Listserv (KICTANet) archives

## **eDiscussion Proceedings (1 week Discussions)**

### ***Theme 1: What are the Challenges posed by the Post-election Violence on ICT organisations (2days)***

#### **Planned Activities**

- Discuss Economical, Social, Technical Challenges.

#### **Contributions: Day 1&2 of 6- Challenges**

##### **J. Walubengo, (Moderator).**

He welcomed members and asked them to engage positively around the crisis stalking the country. He said that one way of doing so was to share experiences, impacts and how each organization or individual was coping with the challenges occasioned. He added that the overall aim was to enable members to learn from each other while emphasizing the impact the crises continued to have on ICT organisations. Finally, he posted the 1-week discussion program for member's perusal and action.

##### **Bill Kagai (Mediacorp)**

Bill felt strongly that given the prevailing circumstances, KICTAnet should move from policy oriented discussions to actual engagement on the ground. A key role that KICTAnet could possibly play was ensuring that the facts on the ground were being reported accurately in the ICT media and possibly to strengthen those who were using ICTs to help solve this problem. He gave [www.usahidi.com](http://www.usahidi.com) as one good example of how ICTs were being used positively in the continuing chaos.

##### **Brian Longwe (TESPOK)**

Brian agreed with the 'action-oriented' suggestion from Bill but added that this could still run in parallel with 'policy-oriented' activities. He mention that KICTAnet was part of a small group of ICT stakeholders that was putting together a campaign to use ICTs to contribute towards the healing and peace process while at the same time improving the country's image by providing a window into the good things that were happening instead of focusing on the negative.

He said that one of the major challenges that this campaign had considered was the availability of fresh content and especially authentic content that came directly from people or organisations living or dealing with the realities of life in the midst of this crisis.

He concluded that this kind of discussion would go a great length in generating invaluable content that could be captured and displayed to help the healing process and make some steps towards redeeming the country's image. He promised to share the concept paper the group was working on in the course of the deliberations.

**Bill Kagai (Mediacorp)**

Bill clarified that he was not opposed to the electronic discussion per se. He just felt that it was high time that things moved a notch higher by engaging actively with the problem rather than just discussing it passively. He cited the case of Red Cross who had send out signals that they were overwhelmed with logistics in reaching those in need of aid. He challenged KICTAnet community to help out in mapping the affected geographic regions, developing databases of resources versus populations affected amongst other action-oriented activities.

**J. Walubengo, (Moderator).**

Following Bill's clarifications, Walubengo asked members to find sufficient strength to proceed with the discussion – inspite of the worsening situation in the country. He said that the prevailing circumstances called for dialogue and sharing ideas would be one step in the right direction He then contributed on the Challenges theme based on his place of as shown below:

*Economical Challenges:* Student turn-out had reduced drastically compared to previous years. Evening classes were most affected and some faced outright cancellation.

*Social Challenges:* Employees who previously interacted freely and respected each others political alignment were now sub-consciously avoiding each others company based on suspected tribal lines. In addition, Office reporting and closing hours remained unpredictable – depending on the latest rumour and/or fact.

*Technical Challenges:* none so far.

**Alex Gakuru (Consumer Society)**

Alex said that the previous week they were assessing the psychological consequences the crisis was having on consumers with regard to email and blog posts. It turned out that some users were "aligning" their views on e-mail senders whom they perceived (or imagined?) to be of the same or "friendly" tribes. His conclusion was that Listers were not tribal, yet the stress, politics and media had forced them to seek tribal alignments

Next, they had discussed tensions at the workplace. Telkom Kenya was their case study and they learnt that the staff there was extremely divided. He wished companies would hold extra parties to lessen the rising tensions at work. He said that one of the Listers on the 'dot.KeUsers' posted a very positive message saying that their Human Resource department had held an organization-wide counseling session and suggested that other organizations can do the same.

He said that at such trying moments, Information and Communications Consumer protection was ever more necessary. The challenge being that there was the need to protect the rights of the people to know or be informed (i.e. fighting against the ban on live broadcasts, SMS filtering, etc) while on the other hand there was need to have a responsible media.



**Bernard Mwenda (Afsat)**

Bernard said that he knew for a fact that their distributors (ISPs) in Kenya were recording very low sales for this time of the year compared to previous years. They had also experienced some accounts being deactivated, mostly from the Hospitality industry. He added that hotels were amongst the worst hit at that time and they expected very little business from the sector. He said that it was high time Kenyan professionals from all walks came out and did something about the situation which was clearly getting out of hand.

**Gilda Odera (Skyweb Technologies Ltd & Skyweb-Evans Ltd)**

Gilda joined by saying that she happened to wear two hats- an ISP and Call Centre. She claimed that saying that the Industry was affected would be a huge understatement. Unlike Bernard Mwenda who said the situation "was getting out of hand" she would say it did get out of hand several weeks ago!

And like many other businesses in the ICT sector, the ISPs have not been spared. She added that the unrest in various parts of the country had necessitated the closure of several businesses such as cyber cafes and even offices that use the Internet. Revenues flows from such areas have scaled down quite substantially.

The outsourcing industry had taken a bigger hit, especially those of serving International clients. Some have lost contracts, some have seen suspension of work being sent to Kenya while others have simply lost golden opportunities to run their pilot tests with potential clients who were being very cautious (and we cannot blame them) to send their work to Kenya having seen the news coverage on CNN, BBC amongst other television stations.

She said that it had taken them the last two and a half years to generate an interest in Kenya as an off-shore outsourcing destination. And just over a month ago, this year was showing promising growth for the BPO industry. Today they were seeing a totally different scenario unless all this negative headline-making chaos was stopped. And even then, she concluded, it would still take time recover.

## ***Theme 2- Current Interventions employed to overcome the challenges(2 days)***

### Planned Activities

- Discuss Short-term tactics being used to work around the challenges
- Discuss Long-term options with regard to the challenges

### **Contributions: Day 3&4 of 6:- The Interventions**

#### **J. Walubengo, (Moderator).**

Walubengo had earlier introduced the second theme with minimal reactions. He thanked the initial contributors and urged the others to contribute and consider the issues at a National level. What for example were the impacts and intervention for the following categories of ICT organisations:

1. Mobile Operators (In the early days of the fracas I had bought a scratch card worth 250KSH for twice the price, 500KSH - black market rates)
2. BPO projects (What could be happening at Kencall and others?)
3. ICT Board (with World Bank threatening to hold back funds, what happens to the Infrastructure projects that were to provide Bandwidth to BPOs and Academia?)
4. Media (how are they coping with the live transmission ban?)
6. ISPs, ASPs, Cybercafes (any impacts)
7. Our members in the region Uganda, Rwanda & Tanzania (any impacts?)

#### **Michael Joseph (Safaricom)**

Michael was said that we were dealing a major crisis which seemed to grow every day with no-one seemingly concerned enough to stop it.

With regard to the scratch card prices, he said that the problem was, and is still to some extent, the disruption of our supply lines due to the violence and the closing of the banking network for more than 10 days. In a, mostly, informal economy, he said, the impact of lengthy bank closures would have a significant impact on the economy and is even outlawed in some countries. The problem is that stocks are kept to a minimum due to cash flow and security problems. So if there was a minor blip this would lead to significant shortages. He said that they were looking for alternative solutions to deal with the problem.

He said that at one point Safaricom had to become a 'bank' by collecting billions of shillings in cash (and storing them in their vaults) from dealers in order to get the supply process going. Fortunately they never experienced severe disruption to their network infrastructure except for some areas in Western Kenya due to the inability to get diesel fuel to some key sites.

He added that another threat worth mentioning was the ever increasing hostile hate SMSs which were circulating after the elections and continued to do so He said that they were considering introducing a filtering system which will hopefully stop some of them, but they do realize that the communications networks are vital in times of unrest and if they were forced to close down part of their network to stop these hate messages, the impact could be felt even more widely and may even introduce panic. He concluded that there was need to guard our freedom but we should also act responsibly to protect that freedom.

**Edith Adera (IDRC)**

Edith said that pertinent and interesting issues had been raised that needed further discussions, namely, effects of the ban visa viz possible censorship of content by Safaricom. In the current situation of the live-media ban the only "live" coverage was informal networks and under these circumstances 'SMS' came in very handy, because people were able to move "live" news quickly to family, relatives and friends. She said it was worrying to hear Michael (Safaricom) taut censorship of 'SMS' content since it raises several issues such as:

- Is there infringement of personal rights in reading people's sums content to determine which is suitable to censor?
- Who makes this decision?
- Should we feel exposed?

In addition to discussing these issues, she strongly felt that we (as KICTAnet) needed to do something practical to support those suffering.

**Michael Joseph (Safaricom)**

Michael responded that on the SMS issue, they would NOT be censoring or reading any messages but propose to have a filter that could block messages that contained unacceptable words. He said nothing had been decided yet, but the newly installed Intelligent Network platform had this blocking facility. He added that they were committed to responsible marketing and this included setting up systems to block pornography, etc. He appreciated that this raised important issues and they would consult widely before deciding on anything.

**Mike Eldon (Symphony)**

Mike shared that the previous day, the Institute of Human Resource Management had held a half day workshop on reconciliation and healing in the workplace. He added that there was so much the ICT community could do to assist such as in logistics, communications, etc. He supported the view that the KICTAnet community could focus on for example, finding out the Needs of the IDPs and matching them with Offers from the NGOs. He said he was working with KIF and Civil society groups on a project to mount an e-marketplace of 'Needs' viz a vis 'Offers' and hoped KICTAnet would get involved as well.

**Bill Kagai (Mediacorp)**

Bill supported Mike's idea on ICT based logistical support. He suggested that footage from the media showing destructive behaviour could be used as evidence for arrest as well as in court. He added that Safaricom or other mobile operators could broadcast special SMS messages that would discourage wanton destruction of ICT and other resources.

**Brian Longwe**

Brian said that the current Communications Act covered such offenses and ought to be enforced to the maximum. He however, proposed that in the next revision of the Communications Act, higher penalties should be placed upon those who deliberately damage or interfere with communications infrastructure of licensed operators.

**Eunice Mueni Kariuki (Kenya ICT Board)**

Eunice said that indeed there is a lot that ICT community could do to support humanitarian activities as described by Mike Eldon. In that regard, she said, she could report that The Kenya ICT Board and the BPO & CC Association were working on an initiative that would provide a solution.

To this end, she said, several presentations had already been made to potential target users, beneficiaries and sponsors. Some details of the concepts would be shared during the KIF - ICT Board Luncheon the following day.

**J. Walubengo, (Moderator).**

Walubengo appreciated the very interesting and captivating experiences from both M Joseph (Safaricom) and Gilda (BPO/ISP). He commented that Edith's (IDRC) tangent of thought from M. Joseph contribution treaded through the murky area between censorship and freedom and may require a whole new Discussion session on its own later.

He said that Bill's (Mediacorp) and Mike's (Symphony) comments prepared members for the day's theme. He added that the idea of HR Counseling within organisations was indeed a frank and bold step towards admitting that there was a problem that needed to be addressed.

Finally, he said that the idea of mobile operators broadcasting special SMS reminding citizens of their liability in wanton destruction of property was timely and probably TV broadcast could also adopt a name and shame approach to the destruction as opposed to the 'celebrated' view of destruction currently playing out on our electronic broadcasts.

**Leonard Mware (Maseno University)**

Leonard felt that Service providers needed to deliver on their services especially during times of unrest. He said that during the early days of the skirmishes, surfing the internet at home was made possible by the mobile operators. Unfortunately Safaricom did not deliver well on their data services in several instances.

He said that for the technically inclined, the problem was that Safaricom had a very large voice customer base and the way the system works, preference was automatically given to voice as opposed to data. Their competitor, Celtel was better off but as their numbers also begin to increase, their data service was also beginning to misbehave. Leonard suggested that both Safaricom and Celtel must re-dimension their networks and possibly 'hard wire' dedicated timeslots or channels for their growing data customer base. He concluded that without these guarantees, the operators would have shut-out one avenue for intervention during times of crises.

**Leonard Mware (Maseno University)**

In addition, Leonard said eLearning approaches could go a long way in providing educational services in situations where movement is curtailed by insecurity. Students would not for example need to travel to the clash-hit regions in for example Western part of the country in order to access University Education. With eLearning, they could earn their degrees irrespective of their current physical or geographical locations.

**Dorcas Muthoni (OpenWorld Ltd)**

Dorcas supported Leonard's position and said she believed that in the long-term, e-learning will be extremely instrumental in expanding opportunities for education for everyone.

Through education, we could open up our children and young people to see a large myriad of economic opportunities away from traditional means such as small scale farming and manning matatu (taxi) terminus amongst others. E-learning, particularly in secondary school and polytechnic levels could go a long way in achieving such education goals. She concluded that developing those minds to think out of the box will be key to ensuring education practically transforms our society.

## ***Theme 3 – Quantifying the Impact of Post-Election Violence-1day***

### **Planned Activities**

- What is the toll per day in terms of lost business opportunity, man-hours, equipment, etc?

### **Contributions: Day 4&5 of 6: What is the quantified toll on organisations?**

#### **J. Walubengo, (Moderator).**

Walubengo summarized the previous theme's contributions on interventions as given below and informed members that they were free to add more points:

1. Encourage balanced reporting by Media and avoid glorifying destructions, killings
2. Consider Filtering hate mails, messages, websites
3. Corporates going the extra mile (e.g mobile operator becoming banks to ensure service provision...)
4. Ensuring that basic Operator service is maintained particularly in the current environment
5. Create portals that provide linkages between the needy and their potential donors

He then invited members to attempt to quantify the loss the unrest continued to wreck on our organisations. It was noted that members did not get the time or reserve the effort required to quantify in tangible terms, the impacts identified previously

## ***Theme 4 – Way Forward and Conclusions- 1day***

### **Planned Activities**

- What are the lessons learnt?
- What can the ICT community do to accelerate 'back-to-normal' status?

### **Contributions: Day 6 of 6: What is the Quantified toll on organisations?**

#### **J. Walubengo, (Moderator).**

He thanked all those who took time to contribute on the important deliberation. He added that the day was basically set for concluding remarks. Specifically there was need to summarize the lessons learnt and what the ICT community could do to accelerate 'back-to-normal' situation

#### **Ndegwa (Media Speak Africa)**

Ndegwa said that it was true a lot has been lost and will be lost if we continued focusing on the downside. He did not want to seem to trivialize the current situation but believed that as Professionals we were called to Leadership – particularly where Politicians have failed.

He said that the crisis was a major test for the ICT community and we should use ICTs to jumpstart the country's dented socio-economic fabric. He said that it was time for the ICT players in this country to lobby the government for more support so that they can bring in the much needed Forex and create employment for those being laid off elsewhere.

In conclusion, he said that these were the pains of birth of a society and every society has undergone this kind of rites of passage from the Europeans through the Americans. He advised that we take heart, pick up the scraps, roll up our sleeves and get down to serious business.

#### **J. Walubengo, (Moderator).**

Walubengo said that his contribution on the Quantity of the Impact included the following:

1. Damaged International rating (for example the BPO, TEAMS, FLAG, SEACOM and other projects maybe affected)
2. Poisoned work-environments that now threatens the otherwise coordinated team-work within organisations. Difficult to cost in tangible values but exists nevertheless.
3. Depressed appetite for 'non-essentials'. As consumers begin to question whether they shall be alive the next day, demand for ICT related items fall down on their priority list, even though ofcourse the voice-calls/SMS sub-sector might register growth as people try to find out each other's status).

He wondered if those who attended the Kenya ICT Board/KIF luncheon could share more on the quantified Impacts.



**Alice Munyua (APC)**

Alice submitted the following points with regard to the impact the post-election violence had on the ICT organizations:

1. Human costs including loss of human life, refugees, etc and the effect on the ICT sector was the most obvious.
2. Scattered workforce, either enlisted part of the conflict or otherwise displaced.
3. Ruined Infrastructure.
4. Investors and indeed the work-force, Kenyan ICT professionals will begin to seek safer havens.
5. Organizational costs...She was sure that most if not all of the ICT related institutions were suffering from significant productivity costs in terms of the value of lost time due to the organizational diversion of employee attention from normal duties, absenteeism and reduced motivation.

## **Evaluation & Feedback**

### ***Technical***

There was excellent technical reliability with no reported incidents of technical failure.

### ***eParticipants***

During the eDiscussions, the KICTANet listserv had around 200 (two hundred) subscribers with about ten of them contributed actively to the eDiscussions.

### ***Moderation***

Given the then prevailing political tensions within the country, extra effort was made to keep members on non-partisan and impartial contributions. In addition, the one-week period required that the discussion kept focused to avoid digressions in order to complete that tasks and meet the objectives.

## **Conclusion/Lessons Learnt**

Members demonstrated a high-level of responsibility and concern for the prevailing situation in the country and actively searched for ways and methods of interventions. There was a salient message for KICTAnet to explore how they could extend their mission beyond Policy discussions by following them up with actual ICT activities on the ground.

## **Appendices:**

### ***Appendix I – Glossary & Abbreviations***

*ASP:* Application Service Providers

*BPO:* Business Process Outsourcing

*CC:* Call Center

*IDPs:* Internally Displaced Persons

*ISP:* Internet Service Provider

*FLAG:* Fiber-Optic Link Around the Globe

*KICT Board:* Kenya ICT Board

*KICTAnet:* Kenya ICT Action Network

*KIF:* Kenya ICT Federation

*Listers:* Subscribed users on a list server.

*SMS:* Short Message System (texting system)

*TEAMs:* The East African Submarine System