

**Giving** **DIALOGUE**  
a chance



## INTRODUCTION

Pamoja for Transformation has implemented a 6-month pilot project on social transformation from April to October 2019 in Likoni Sub county in Mombasa county and Kisumu central, Kisumu Town West, and Kisumu Town East in Kisumu county. The primary target were at risk youth involved in crime and violence. The project sought to re-orienting youth to nonviolent approaches and working with relevant peace and security stakeholders to change their perception and behavior against violence and crime. The targeted youth have been mentored as responsible ambassadors of peace and security in their communities. This involved working directly with 25 at risk youth drawn from each of the counties and existing reformed gang members who had earlier been reached through previous and current interventions in Kisumu and Likoni.

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# LIFE STORIES:

## From villains to heroes

**F**or many decades, the youth in Kenya have been vulnerable to many risks. Every year, different risk factors push them to a life of crime, slowly taking them away from realizing their full potential. A good number of them look toward crime as a possible solution to the different challenges they face every day.

But a life of crime often leads to only a handful of predictable outcomes; being ostracized from society, jail sentences or in some instances, death.

It is in this light that for six months begin-

ning April 2019, Pamoja for Transformation implemented a 6-month pilot project on social transformation in two parts of the country where youths remain at great risk of getting sucked into lives of crime.

In Kisumu county, frequent cycles of violence often pegged on political cycles suck young men and women into lives of violence and crime. These individuals, although condemned by society as lost causes were the target of the project by Pamoja for Transformation through mentorship to become responsible ambassadors of peace and secure in their communities.

At 27 years of age, Franline Okungu cuts the figure of a man who willingly holds the weight of the world on his shoulders. When he looks at you, it is as if his narrow, fierce eyes are peering into a world different from yours. It is only when he starts to reflect on the journey of his life that they turn misty and tears threaten to escape and run free down his cheeks.

"I spent three years of my life in jail," Frankline says. "That was the worst period of my life."

Like many of his age mates, Frank got caught up in the fast world of crime and money that Kisumu City had to offer to desperate youths such as himself in search of a quick buck.

"I did very bad things. I killed, I maimed, I walked with rapists," he says. For him, life only had one meaning.

"We woke up every day not caring about the consequences of our actions. All we wanted to do was get money through whatever way...even if it meant hurting other people," he says.



Sadiq Mwatsumba



Frankline Okungu

couldn't have walked this journey alone.

There were key partners along the way who have and continue to shape the man he is becoming.

Key among these are law enforcement officers.

"After the trainings we realized that these youths were ready for change. All they needed was someone to point them in the right direction," this is what Pamoja did for them," Otieno Kabisayi, a chief in Kisumu's Nyalenda area says.

Local law enforcement has been a crucial link in steering youth clear from violence. And Sadiq Mwatsumba has been part of this journey for close to six years now.

"I have been on a journey of training the young men and their parents to look to personal development and shun crime. Many of them, more than 50 have changed and turned their lives around. Some have gone into business, started their families and become more responsible citizens,"

Mwatsumba says.

Some of those who have benefitted from his engagements are the father and son pair of Bakari and his son Hamisi. A few months ago, the two men, living under the same roof were not seeing eye to eye.

"I'd get home and he'd get out," Hamisi's father says. "But after attending some seminars by Pamoja for Transformation, we have we started interacting well."

Hasmisi says change has been one of the most difficult, but most important choices he has made in his life.

"Before these engagements, I used to sit at the maskanis, steal goats and slaughter them

## No longer afraid

Each time he walks the streets of Kisumu, he remains afraid of seeing someone from his past life. A father he stabbed for a phone or wallet. A mother he beat up for her bag. Or a man he stabbed just to prove a point.

"But I thank God all that is in my past," he says. "I am now like a new man."

Frankline and 25 other men and women in Kisumu have over the past six months been part of the Promoting Peace and Security Through Dialogue Project in Kisumu, a region that has historically suffered from weak governance systems, historical injustices, ethno politics and economic inequalities.

"I would not have done a lot of the bad things I did if I had only started talking to people about what I was going through," he says. "Opening up to peers has helped shape who I have become."

Frankline's resilient is admirable. But he

**I would not have done a lot of the bad things I did if I had only started talking to people about what I was going through.**

— Frankline Okungu

here. We also used to steal phones and sell them. This was a no go zone," Hamisi says.

Mwatsumba too has benefited somewhat.

"My involvement with the community through Pamoja for Transformation led to me being made the assistant chief of my area. Through my work, I have got the community to trust me," he says.

But it wasn't easy getting youth off crime in both Likoni and Kisumu.

## More needs to be done

Michael Situma, the Officer Commanding Station at Kassagam Police Station in Kisumu remembers the challenges they underwent.

"It wasn't easy because many still resist changing. Particularly in drug dens, the general feeling was that we were approaching the youth with bad intentions," Situma says. "Eventually, through the work of intermediaries such as Pamoja, they got to trust us."

The chief says what appealed most to the young men was the introduction of new ideas to the youth.

"They could network, talk to each other and derive strength in the fact that they were facing the same issues in life. This gave them hope," he says.

The effects of this, the chief says, has been a noticeable reduction of crime in his area of jurisdiction.

Another bump in the road to attaining peace has been the constant transfers of police officers involved in the project.

"Many of our colleagues with knowledge about the area are being transferred. This is slowing us down. It is almost like wasting manpower. Officers who have been trained are transferred to departments that are not in line with their trainings. But these are things that will be dealt with slowly," Kanila Veronica, a Police Constable at Kondele Police Station.

These positive changes have not been felt in Kisumu only.

Six months ago, 40-year-old Wanjiku Kamau was a worried woman. She worried endlessly over the safety and associations of

her daughter Mariam who bears such a striking resemblance to her that the two could pass for siblings.

But underneath the looks and the now cordial relationship between mother and child lies a tale of sorrow and one that almost broke Wanjiku's back.

"My daughter was almost getting lost, but now she is back on track," Wanjiku says.

"Initially I didn't know what to do with my life, but now at least I have learnt skills that I can use to grow myself as a person," Mariam says.

And the dangers are many. She could easily have got herself into a life of crime like so many of her peers.

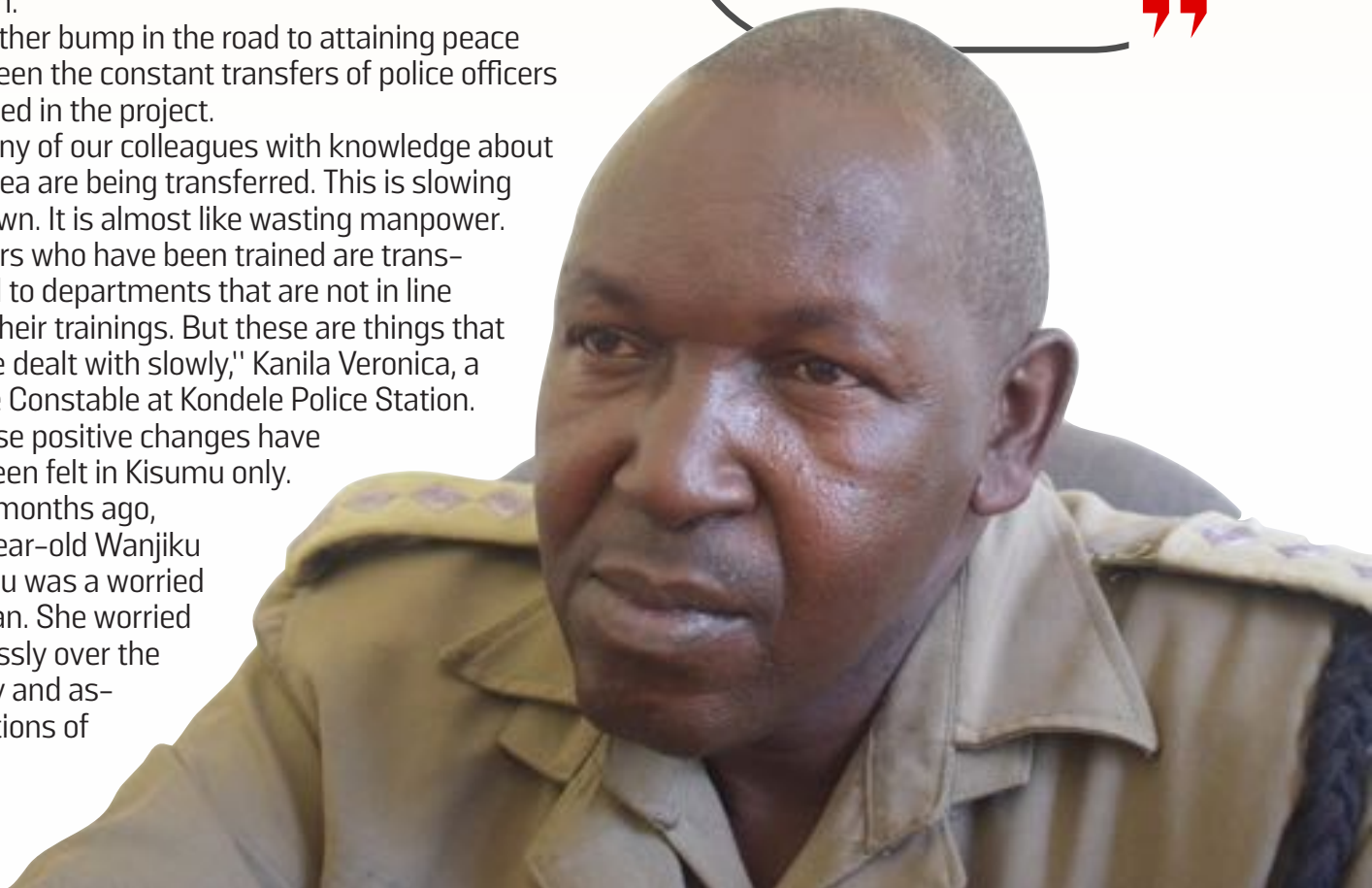
"We have so many gangs in Likoni. It is easy for one to join one if they are idle," she says.

Her mother though has one thing to thank for this.

"In the past six Mariam and myself have been taken through a training that has made us better

**It wasn't easy because many still resist changing. Particularly in drug dens, the general feeling was that we were approaching the youth with bad intentions.**

— Michael Situma







people," she says. "I am now a better mother and she a better daughter."

The two of them went through the Promoting Peace and Security Through Dialogue Project project by Pamoja for transformation

## Hurdles along the way

The noticeable change in the youth who went through this program was not easy to attain.

There were challenges along the way. The biggest was the lack of trust.

"We saw the police as enemies. We never thought we could sit side by side and share ideas," Clifford Juma, a boda boda rider in Kisumu says. "Police were our enemies, but they no longer are."

Now, Clifford and many of his boda boda peers have become partners to the policemen and women of Nyalenda, where they operate from.

"We organized a series of activities between them and the police just to show them the humanness in each other," Evans Otieno, a programme officer with Pamoja for Transformation says.

"They had open day forums where they each

could talk about their issues and they had activities between the two groups," Evans says, one of the most popular was football matches pitting a team of the riders against a police team.

"At the end of the matches they realized that there was something good in each of them," Evans says. "There was no need for animosity."

The lack of trust didn't come from law enforcement only. Even their once close friends turned on them.

"We have friends who are still involved in crime. Every day they wake up waiting for us to go back to the base and join them. They do not believe that we have changed," Frankline, who now uses his time to mentor street children and get them off the streets through talent competitions, says.

"But we are determined to let this happen. All we need is more support...a little push to get us to where we want to be," he says.

## Walking into a crime free future

For Frank, the ideal place would be to see a Kisumu free of idle street children who are easily convinced to get into crime. Clifford now believes the ground has been set to further foster rela-



tions between boda boda riders and the police.

"This can only mean that Kisumu will be more peaceful," Clifford says.

Hundreds of Kilometres away in Likoni, Wanjiku's wish is that many more parents can be involved in the program.

"If this happens, our daughters will not be walking the streets and our sons will not be lost to violence and gangs," she says.

The past six months have been an eye opener to the close to 50 youth who were involved in the program.

"We can only wish that the program intensifies to save our youth," the chief says.

And redemption has already started. In the same neighbourhood that Wanjiku and Mariam live in is a self-help group that has also benefited from the program by Pamoja for Transformation.

"I was a member of Siafu Gang, whose members reformed to become Shashaman Self Help Group which has more than 50 members. We participated in the

Pamoja for transformation project and I have seen it transform the lives of our members," Aisha Mohammed says.

"Now, our brothers, husbands and fathers have a better relationship not just with us, but also with law enforcement," Aisha says.

From her business premise in the once volatile Nyalenda Slums, Triza Mware believes she has lived off the benefits of the enhanced dialogue between the youths and police.

"I live in Nyalenda slum and I can say crime levels have reduced since our youth started being engaged in this project," Triza says. "As a person I have learnt so many strategies on how to dialogue in case we have a problem and how we can report to the police."

For Triza, continuous success will mean constant engagement between the youth and police officers. This, she says, will keep peace alive.



Triza Mware

**I have been a member of Shashaman Self Help Group which has more than 50 members. We participated in the Pamoja for transformation project and I have seen it transform the lives of our members.**

**— Aisha Mohammed**



## TESTIMONIALS:



**Josiah Omondi** – *Transformed youth*

I was a member of a group called China. Pamoja approached our group and organized a training. From there I saw the light and saw the need to transform myself. I left the gang and began my business and looking after my family. I have seen a lot of changes. I have found personal peace. Most of the time I was away, hired by politicians to do dirty jobs. Transformation is not an overnight journey. It is a long process."



**Agnes Odawo** – *Deputy Officer Commanding Station, Kassagam Police Station*

We still have a large number who have not been reached yet. There is a lot of ignorance of the process of law among the young people. The next phase should address some of these. You need to embrace more of us. The more police involved the better it will be. Most of us have changed how we relate with youths, especially bod boda drivers. I was personally able to understand them so my engagement with them has changed.



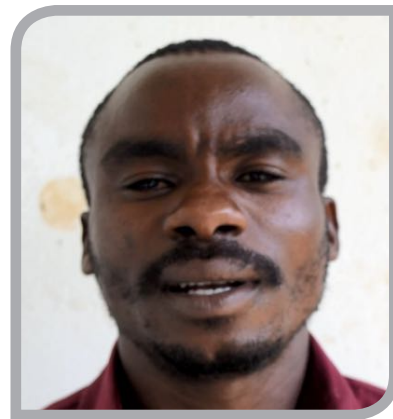
**Wanjiku Kamau** – *Beneficiary of mentorship programme*

My daughter never listened to me. She used to ignore all the life lessons I was giving her. Now she listens to advise."



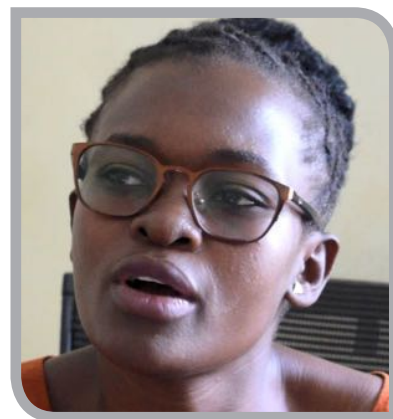
**Mariam Kamau** – *Transformed Youth*

"I couldn't solve my issues. I could not even approach my mother whenever I had any issues. I used to get solutions elsewhere. Now I can relate with my mother. My wish is that these trainings continue so that we can reach more people."



**Frankline Okungu** – *Transformed Youth*

"I was ready to kill, I beat up people, I was a bad man. I have served time for my crimes. Now I want to save lives and help bring up a generation free of violence and hate."



**Veronica Kanila** – *Police Constable, Kondele Police Station.*

"Now the youths have opened up and we get to understand them. They are now free and can talk about issues that previously they could not. Some of them feared the police because they said the police targeted the youth."



**Suleiman Sultan** – *Volunteer, Pamoja for Transformation.*

"We have come a long way with the youth. We have worked with them progressively to the point that they can now trust us. We have had dialogues unofficially until they got to understand and trust us. After this we brought parents and their children together and also brought some trust between the society and law enforcement."





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