

Kisumu Peace Festival 2011



From 4th – 6th August 2011 Kisumu hosted its very first Peace Festival. Initiator of the Festival is Serge de la Rey, a Civil Peace Service (CPS) advisor from the German Association for Development Cooperation (AGEH) working with the Kisumu based NGO Support for Tropical Initiatives in Poverty Alleviation STIPA. The idea, born in

October 2009, was well-received – or so it seemed, but the road to implementation was going to be long and rocky.

Why a Peace Festival in Kisumu?

Kisumu as a city – and therefore its citizens – have a reputation of being violent. Shortly after Serge de la Rey's arrival in Kisumu in September 2009 there were some Matatu touts in a side road outside the city centre blocking his way to work by burning some tyres. The following day the *Daily Nation* wrote: 'Kisumu is burning'.

Yet again, Kenyans will have thought, not knowing that most of Kisumu did not even know of any demonstration. Of course it cannot be denied that throughout the Post-Election



Violence there were some youths willing to cause mayhem for a few hundred shillings, also in Kisumu. So these youths would need employment but with Kisumu having a reputation of burning businesses no investor would want to come and set up a business in Kisumu. There had to be a way of how one could change the Kenyan people's perception of Kisumu and break the vicious circle of "Unemployment – idleness – violence - investors leaving – more unemployment – etc." Kisumu had to be portrayed nationwide as a

Kisumu, 16. January 2008 Picture: AP peaceful city.

The idea was to involve the whole city, to advertise peace in a big way, to organise an event which was going to be free for everybody and the business people of Kisumu should be involved by financing the event. After all it was their businesses which went up in flames during the PEV and they too would benefit from a peaceful election in 2012.

The Trial Version



Pictures by Serge de la Rey

In December 2009 we wanted to have a peace week which meant to have just banners with peace messages hoisted all over the city. It took two months' effort to get only five banners sponsored which were hoisted in Kisumu City from 29.12.09 – 5.1.10. The writing was on the wall: fund-raising within the business community was going to be very difficult.

In 2010 the peace festival was in limbo. The nation was waiting for the referendum on the new constitution and if accepted the election date would then be moved to August. The idea for the peace festival was however, to coincide with elections so we waited for the outcome of the referendum. The new constitution was embraced by a majority of Kenyans and the first

Kisumu Peace Festival was therefore set for August 2011.

Planning of the Event

Uwe Bergmeier, the CPS/AGEH-Coordinator based in Nairobi suggested, that we as STIPA should not go it alone but for reasons of wider acceptance we should network with other like-minded organisations and in February 2011 the newly assembled steering



The KPF Steering Committee

committee of the Kisumu Peace Festival held its first meeting. The committee looked as follows: Support for Tropical Initiatives in Poverty Alleviation (STIPA), represented by Serge de la Rey, the Community Initiative Action Group Kenya (CIAG-K), represented by Joseph Owuondo, the District Peace Committee (DPC), represented by Dominic Ouma Odipo, the Youth Reconciliation Forum of Kenya (YOREF-K), represented by Dennis Menya and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS), which

offered us their intern Hannah Clifford from England. Verena Swardt, who had organised similar events before, was named as the manager of the festival. During the planning months the committee was joined by Hiren Mehta, a young businessman representing the Asian Community and Michael Pundo from the Department of Culture.

A marriage of such individual partners is never easy so we spent some weeks working out a Framework of Cooperation which laid down the roles, rights and duties of all the partners.

This alone would not help us organising such a big event. There was nothing the team could have built on; everything had to be created from scratch. Except for Hannah Clifford and Verena Swardt all team members had other duties within their relevant organisations so it was up to the two ladies to lay the groundwork. First of all we needed a concept



paper. The initial idea had to be put in writing, the suggested activities had to be worked out in detail and a budget for the whole event had to be calculated. We also needed a logo which would symbolise the event. Thanks to Verena's creativity the Kisumu Peace Festival now has this logo: the colours blue and white are the colours of Kisumu. The boat symbolises Lake Victoria and the two different faces represent the diversity of the people of Kisumu who have one thing in common: together they make Kenya.

As foreseen the search for sponsors was very difficult. The first sponsor was the German Embassy. The German Embassy has other projects running in Kisumu and the ambassador, Her Excellency Ms Margit Hellwig-Boette, was very supportive of the idea to have a peace festival in Kisumu. This was a first success and now we knew that, together with the input of the Civil Peace Service, the festival was going to take place somewhere somehow. However, to make the event happen as planned we needed many, many more sponsors; in May we had to decide that the festival had to be shortened from four to three days.

We needed more indirect support. We needed to have a 'star' as our guest of honour for

our opening ceremony; we wanted the Prime Minister, The Rt. Hon. Raila Odinga, to open the Kisumu Peace Festival. After several attempts to get hold of the PM through various channels it was again thanks to the German Ambassador that we finally received confirmation from the office of the Prime Minister: Raila was going to come! Now we not only knew that our search for sponsors would be successful but also that the Kisumu Peace Festival would get the media attention we wanted.

In the following weeks Verena visited Nairobi a number of times and eventually we had the Alliance Française, the British Council, the GIZ, the Harber Charitable Foundation and the UNESCO on board. Moreover, we also got support from local organisations and businesses, namely Equator Bottlers, the Imperial Hotel Kisumu, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga Foundation, the Kenya Red Cross, Kibos Sugar, Kituo Cha Sheria and United Millers. In addition we also received many donations from individual well-wishers. The Kisumu Peace Festival 2011 could go ahead as planned. By now it was mid-July – three weeks to go ‘til the opening ceremony.

The Festival

Thursday, 4th August was the day of the opening of the KPF by the Rt. Hon. Raila Odinga.



He was accompanied by the German Ambassador, Her Excellency Ms Margit Hellwig-Boette, the Mayor of Kisumu, His Worship Mr Samuel Okello and by many members of parliament and local dignitaries. We had made a meticulous plan for the opening ceremony but what we had not anticipated was that the PM and his entourage would arrive half an hour early at the Jomo Kenyatta Grounds. This was

Mayor Okello, Ambassador Hellwig-Boette, Prime Minister Odinga

preachers from the Christian and the Muslim community were nowhere to be seen. We



were phoning, pushing our religious leaders to run, and we were searching the Kenyatta Grounds for anybody who looked Christian, Muslim or just somehow religious. Eventually we found an elderly reverend from the ACK who had unexpectedly the chance to use his strong voice to pray in front of the PM and a crowd of about seven thousand people. He was followed by the soft voices of a Sikh and a member of the Hindu community.

The Rt. Hon. Raila Odinga

Prayers were followed by verses, dances and songs by individuals such as young Brigit Nyambura (9) or groups like the Kochia Dancers from Homa Bay. After the artists it was time for the politicians to grab the microphone, many of them praising 'our' Raila as the next President. Her Excellency Hellwig-Boette then reminded everybody that this event was about peace and not a pre-mature election rally but these were intelligent words many of the audience did not want to hear. They wanted Raila and when he finally started to talk the crowd was absolutely thrilled.



Winyo, a well-known singer from Nairobi, ended the day with his soft voice and soothing melodies.

The conclusion after the first day was that the idea of advertising Kisumu had worked out: on Friday we had the Kisumu Peace Festival under the key word *Unity* on the front page of the *Daily Nation*!

For Friday 5th August we had planned a number of activities. We had tents erected all over the Jomo Kenyatta Grounds where organisations could present themselves and/or offer workshops which were free to the public. The diversity could not have been any bigger: in one tent *Kituo Cha Sheria* offered free legal advice to anybody who needed it, *Alliance Française* offered an introductory lesson into the French language, the *Yawa Dancers* held a dance workshop and *Braama Kumaris* introduced meditation as a way to find inner peace. For the *British Council* the Kisumu Peace Festival was a first step to get back into Kisumu after they had left the city a few years ago. There was of course also something for the younger audience: we had invited *Storymoja* to work with the children on their book *In the Land of the Kitchen*. The 'kitchen' stands for a country and the parable shows the effects that tribalism can have on a country. On the main stage we had national heavy-weights such as *Onyango Alemo* and *Makadem* and of course local favourites like the *Yawa Dancers* and *June Rapsha*.



The happy participants of the rally

Meanwhile there was a Boda-Boda Rally taking place on the sportsground. Boda-Boda races are common in Kisumu so we wanted our rally to be different. The Boda-Bodas did not cycle alone but they had to carry a female passenger. Together they had to master several obstacles, answer questions at some checkpoints and the winners were those who worked best together as a team. Although there were only three main prizes to be won (bicycles and food vouchers) none of the participants went home empty-

handed as every rider and passenger got 1kg of sugar and 1kg of ugali.

At the Kisumu Hotel there were two other events concurrently taking place: an Inter-Religious Dialogue (IRD) and the Peace Forum. Ingo Stang, also from CPS/AGEH and working with Nairobi-based Chemchemi Ya Ukweli, had invited the leaders from all religions present in Kisumu: the Bahais, Christians, Hindus, Ismails, Muslims and the Sikhs. It was notable that all religions were present, despite the IRD taking place on a Friday in the first week of Ramadan!



The IRD Conference

The Peace Forum, sponsored by the German International Cooperation (GIZ), brought together about 200 participants from many different organisations that were given a chance to exchange views and discuss strategies for the election year 2012. This Peace Forum shall have an impact beyond the Peace Festival as the resolutions of the participants will be developed and implemented in the months to come.

For Saturday, the last day of the Peace Festival, we had planned a youth football tournament organised by the Kisumu Youth Football Association (KYFA). Each team had to consist of 5 boys, 4 girls and 2 special-needs children. The winning team was not just the one with most points but also the one which showed most support within their team.



Apart from football the people had again the opportunity to participate in various workshops or simply enjoy the fantastic music from the main stage.



Dola Kabarry
anyway to give way to *Dola Kabarry*.

During the Closing Ceremony the prize-giving took place and the resolutions of the IRD and the Peace Forum from the previous day were read out to the people of Kisumu. The crowd knew that their darling *Dola Kabarry* was going to be the last performer of the Kisumu Peace Festival 2011. Our guest speaker for the ceremony, *Mary Onyango* of the *National Cohesion and Integration Commission* managed to please the crowd by addressing them in Luo but had to cut her speech short

Conclusion

The first Kisumu Peace Festival is history. We must thank God that this festival successfully took place in bright sunshine and without any major accidents or incidents – even more so as we managed to mobilise around 20'000 people on these three days. The team has achieved much but we also have learnt a lot from this first festival. Many things we will do again in the same way but many things we will change to make the Kisumu Peace Festival 2012 an even bigger event. The beginning for an annual peace festival in Kisumu has been made and the size of the event has shown to all current and potential future donors that we are a serious and reliable partner. As Equator Bottlers (Coca Cola) have written to us: *It was an honour working with you.*

This is not simply praise – it is a challenge for the future!

Serge de la Rey

Kisumu, 13.9.2011