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[Kenya: Women's Group Converts SLDF Fighters Into Peacemakers](#)

Mathews Ndanyi

14 March 2011

More than 300 former members of the Sabao Land Defence Force in Mt Elgon have been rehabilitated and turned into peace makers who are now helping to unite communities in the region.

The former militiamen were rehabilitated under a programme implemented by the Rural Women Peace Network in collaboration with the government.

Chairperson of the network Rosemary Cheptai said the rehabilitation has managed to unite both perpetrators and victims, who are now jointly participating in the peace, reconciliation and reconstruction initiatives.

The perpetrators were released from jail after the violence that killed more than 700 people. "Those involved in this initiative include widows whose husbands were killed during the violence and youth who were members of the SLDF among others who have all gone through counselling and training to accept the past, forgive each other and build a better future," said Cheptai.

The rehabilitated groups have now jointly began implementing income generating activities to enable them earn a living and keep off from activities which hinder development.

Cheptai said it had taken the group more than one year to convince the perpetrators and the victims to work together because the effects of the chaos were far reaching. "The youth were not easily accepted back in the community and in fact there was too much fear when they returned from jail. However we moved in very fast to counsel members of the community and the youth so that they positively embraced each other," she said.

Cheptai said there was need for accelerated efforts to address land and human rights abuses which led to the violence.

The SLDF was formed by youth in the name of fighting for their land rights. They turned against their own community killing and maiming people until the military was sent in to stop them.

Almost all development activities in the region including education, healthcare, agriculture and business were paralysed as the rag tag militia group unleashed the violence displacing thousands of people from the homes.

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