

**ADVOCACYNET 359**  
**Monday March 8, 2021**

## Kenyan Artistry Lightens Pandemic Gloom

[Sign up for Sister Artists 2](#) to made an animal quilt from Kenyan embroidery!



Kenya's spectacular wildlife has emerged in brilliant color from two of Nairobi's most forbidding informal urban settlements, Kangemi and Kibera.

Forty-one women from Kangemi and Kibera have used embroidery to recognize a species. Now, on the occasion of International Women's Day, we are seeking quilters to turn their squares into art quilts that will be exhibited in the US and auctioned. Profits will be invested back in the Kenyan artists.

The competition starts today (March 8) at 12.30 pm Eastern Standard Time (EST) and is open to any quilter from the Global North and South. Submissions will be accepted in the order they are received. Please follow the instructions [on this web page](#) and [email us for more information](#).

This project is a sequel to [Sister Artists 1](#), which raised over \$7,000 for survivors of gender-based violence in Mali last year. The new initiative was suggested by Stella Makena and Caren Mbayaki (photos below), two community leaders in Kibera and Kangemi who told their story for [The Woman's World Quilt](#) in 2019.

The Kenyan animal squares were made at the height of the pandemic and participants agreed that training and stitching together – while observing restrictions – had helped to alleviate the stress and anxiety.

“This is a time when some of us are going through depression,” wrote Lydia Awino, an artist from Kangemi. “Coming together gives us a platform to share with friends and knitting keeps our minds busy too.”

Ms Mbayaki also noted that her team had formed a self-help association, further illustrating the benefits of group stitching. Members hope their new organization will advocate for better services in their sorely-pressed community.

Profiles of the artists, which have been [uploaded to the AP site](#), describe the devastating impact of the pandemic on women in under-served urban areas. Ms Mbayaki herself is a single mother who cares for two children and sick parents.

But at the same time, many of the artists have stepped up their volunteering during the pandemic. Cecilia Marigi (top photo) works with street children and prostitutes.

AP covers all costs of embroidery projects (including prizes for the best designs) on the understanding that the stitching will form the first phase of a sustained program to build skills, earn money and strengthen organizations.

Participants have embraced this approach with enthusiasm, and Sister Artists 2 promises to be no exception.

The artists in Nairobi are already hard at work on the next phase. Both groups are describing their experience with COVID-19 through embroidery. The Kangemi members will then make animal squares for tote bags in the US. The Kibera group is developing a pilot project to help poor families use vermiculture and composting.

AP's work with the two Nairobi groups is managed from the US by three Peace Fellows – [Abby Hack](#) from the University of Illinois; and [Delaney Rogers](#) and [Ryan Pham](#), who are in their final year at the University of California.



***Stitching together has helped the artists deal with anxiety and depression during the pandemic. Trainings have been held in the open air and restricted to small groups to meet government requirements.***

- Interested in making a Sister Artists quilt? [Email us!](#)
- Call us at +1 202 422 2479 for more information
- [Donate to the Kangemi self-help group](#)
- Check out [past AP news bulletins](#).



***Fire Finch by Stella***



***Crocodile by Caren***



***Leopard by Imisa***



***Hyena by Abigael***



***Flamingo by Agnes***



***Wildebeest by Patricia***



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