

# DAILY NATION

## Top prize for sheltering the city homeless

By NYAMBEGA GISESA engisesa@yahoo.com  
Posted Tuesday, August 2 2011 at 20:25

Two decades ago, a young lawyer ventured into a city slum, accompanied by a priest, and vowed to get residents better shelter — and she did.

Way back in 1990, Mukuru residents told her that they had lived there for so many years yet had no hope of owning a parcel of land.

On Friday morning, the tall, talkative Ms Jane Weru was received by dozens of those she struggled for.

She had just arrived at the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport from the US where she received an award for her efforts.

### **Lived as squatters**

“It never left my mind that the government system could be so inhumane to people,” she recalled. “The majority of residents in Nairobi lived as squatters.”

Ms Weru was returning home after receiving the prestigious Rockefeller Foundation Annual Innovation Award at a ceremony on July 27, in New York.

“The foundation has been following her work for many years, and we are applauding her efforts in helping the poor and vulnerable within Kenya,” Dr Judith Rodin, the President of the Rockefeller Foundation, said when presenting the award to her.

Dr Rodin said that innovation was the hallmark of Ms Weru’s career, adding that awarding innovations was not only about coming up with new products but also “new ways of organising people, processes and markets to meet today’s human needs.”

“I felt honoured when those words were said about me,” she Ms Weru. “Sharing the stage with former US President Bill Clinton, who also received the same award, was a pleasure,” she added.

The executive director of the Akiba Mashinani Trust has managed to turn helpless slum dwellers into self-empowered individuals through her non-profit organisation Akiba Mashinani Trust (AMT) that provides them with loans and financing as they strive to raise their quality of life.

It all started in 1990, when she used the experience of Slum Dwellers International to found Muungano Wa Wanavijiji, a federation of Kenyan slum dwellers.

Currently, Muungano wa Wanavijiji has over 60,000 households in 400 informal settlements nationwide.

Through it, she has been able to provide loans and help buy land and build houses for the poor, who have since moved to live in better places. AMT is the financing organ of Muungano wa Wanavijiji.

Her mother who was an orphan, raised Ms Weru in a family of 10. “She could wake up every day at 6am to open her small shop. That was our only source of livelihood,” she recalled, before warmly hugging her mother during the interview.

As part of her recognition, Rockefeller Foundation awarded her Sh9 million (\$100,000) to support her future humanitarian work.

**Another winner**

Another winner of the same award was Pakistan’s Dr Sania Nishtar — founder and president of the NGO think tank Heartfile — for her unique contributions to the field of global health.

The Rockefeller Foundation Innovation Forum brings together creative and inventive minds from the worlds of business, government, non-profit and journalism, who are innovatively providing solutions to challenges facing poor and vulnerable people around the world.

The foundation was formed in 1913 to promote the well being of people throughout the world.

<http://t.co/A3HmWVj>