

Rural Youths bring Socio-Economic Development

By Carrie Ndoka

ILAMAIYO- Indigenous Laikipia Masaai Integrated Youth Group

Is located in Dol Dol township of Mukogodo, 254 KM away from Nairobi, 64 KM from Nanyuki, Laikipia district, Rift Valley province. Mukogodo is a rocky terrain on the north eastern edge of Laikipia plateau.

The inhabitants are 70% Samburu and 30% Masaai, pastoralists, numbering about 24,000 identifying themselves by different clans.

The tarmac road ends at the junction leading to Dol Dol from Nanyuki town and the next 64KM to the village is on rough, dirt road that transverse several seasonal rivers. One has to overcome getting stuck or sinking in the soft sandy track when it rains and patiently waiting for the waters to subside to cross the flooded bridgeless rivers.



ILAMAIYO facilitating a community development workshop

The vegetation include various species of acacia trees, stunted on slopes but fully grown along the main laagers. *Bondo* or candelabra trees are present with a sprinkling of *suja*– wild vegetables.

Water is a scarce resource. Electricity is unheard of. Public transport is irregular costing \$4 per person to reach the nearest town, Nanyuki.

During drought the only green vegetation is *Opuntia spp cacti* weed that is causing great harm to man and animals. There is no active agricultural activity taking place since rain is scarce and the soil is unfavorable. Temperatures go as high as 30 degrees during the day with no cloud cover and low of 19 degrees at night.

ILAMAIYO means an organized lion hunt in Maa.

Upgrading Cultural Practices

Cultural practices are very strong and they affect all aspect of their existence. Age-sets grouping amongst men circumcised at the same period are plainly visible as they interact and

socialize amongst themselves and no one can dare impose themselves on the wrong group. The cohesion work well during periods of hardship such as drought where it becomes relatively

easier to endure. Delicate matters where a man is unable to conceive can easily be solved by a member of your age-set subject to holding a private assembly by



The rocky vast plains of Mukogodo

Volume 1, Issue 1

16th January 2007

Inside this issue:

Changing cultural practices	2
Educating the girl child	2
Humor from the village	2
Economic Development	3
Land Issues	3
Give us wings	3
Give us wings	4

Changing cultural practices

the end of it a willing surrogate father is availed. Children sired will be identified as yours.

Women on the other hand can mingle and relate with each other regardless of age as inevitably being a polygamous community, co-wives can be 40 years younger. Uncircumcised women are looked down upon as dirty and are regarded as outcasts.

Youth leaders together with interested organizations have been campaigning against Female Genital Cutting, encountering hostile and tough resistance especially from the older generation.

Educating the girl child

Poor performance in education is largely due to lack of enough skilled teachers (being a hardship area, not many are willing to work there), apathy towards education and inadequate infrastructures especially boarding facilities. Pupils have to often cover a distance of over 15KM on foot risking attacks from dangerous wild animals, crossing flooded

The alternative rite of passage where girls' aged 14-18 undergo counseling and training on life skills and acquire certificates instead of the cutting; has been implemented without much success. The pressure on the girl and her family of becoming isolated and losing identity in the closely knit community often forces majority of the girls involved in the alternative rite to secretly undergo circumcision, hence compounding the problem.

Youth leaders are currently working to develop a more acceptable rite of passage for the girls by incorporating

rivers during rainy seasons and contend with hunger during the harsh drought seasons on a daily basis to reach the nearest schools .

Poverty and cultural practices have encouraged the parents to disregard girls' education as they are mostly regarded as potential wives and child bearers.

Humor from the village

Ole Pasha a strapping young Samburu decides to go to Nairobi to seek employment. Unfortunately, he gets involved in a road accident, badly injured is admitted in hospital . Ole Merinyi and Ole Saraiyo his fellow *waranis* go to see him.

"Oh! Oh! Oh! Ole Pasha my brother!" exclaimed Ole Merinyi holding his head in his hands.

"What have they done to you?" Using his penknife, he swiftly cuts off the drip supplying blood to Ole Pasha.

"How can they limit blood for you?" "Luckily I was carrying a gourd of fresh cow blood. Here, drink to your satisfaction". Ole Saraiyo concludes.

Fresh cow blood is a delicacy amongst the Masaai.**



Women and girls singing and dancing

thoughts and ideas of stakeholders in the community: elders, religious leaders, government, schools, parents and the girls involved.**

The perception is gradually changing as the number of girls completing secondary education is gradually increasing due to the efforts of ILAMAIYO, community leaders and catholic missionaries who are encouraging investment in girls' education.

An educated mother is in a better position to champion for her children's education regardless of the gender and this is being witnessed at Mukogodo.**



Age-set grouping amongst men

Economic Development

ILAMAIYO has been able to diversify the economic activities from just live-stock trading to include beadwork, sand harvesting, cultural centers and dances for local and international tourists, modern bee keeping, weaved products, hides and skin.

They have been able to attract market in California, USA where money raised has been channeled to sponsor children from needy homes to access education with a special consideration to the girl child and orphans. Power generator and motorbike have been bought from the same efforts. The beautiful landscape with breath

taking sunrise and sets, vast clear starry nights, its unique rural remoteness abundant with exotic animal and bird species, the rare array of flora combined with the interesting indigenous culture is a major attraction to tourists. This has opened an income generating opportunity for the community hence the establishment of cultural centers and camping facilities.

Youth leaders are currently adapting a sustainable livestock management programme that aims at improving and advancing local breeds of livestock. Efforts of rehabilitating cattle



Beadwork for export

dips is underway to curb tick-borne diseases. Livestock are sold every 2 Thursdays a month as the prime source of income.**

Land issues

Private land owners have pushed the community of 24,000 to unfavorable terrain that is barely enough to accommodate their livestock and pastoralists' culture.

Land has become litigious and explosive issue as two colonial settlers currently own 120,000 hectares of prime land heavily secured with electric fences. The community claims that

their ancestors and great grandparents' remains are buried in that land.

The situation worsens during drought period as cattle die in hordes from starvation whereas there is plenty of grass to eat in the privately owned land. Suicide rates shoot up in these hardship periods where losing cattle is equivalent to losing value and identity as a man in the community.

“ Suicide rates shoot up in hardship periods where losing cattle is equivalent to losing value and identity”

A lot of bitterness and helplessness is being experienced since the government and concerned parties have not done much to address the issue peacefully.**

Give us wings

Opuntia spp cacti is a vicious non-native cactus that was introduced in the area by colonial settlers in 1957. Its thick and prickly growth pattern was favored for fencing however it is causing death of numerous cattle affecting the source of income for many families. It has also covered precious water sources in the arid land.

ILAMAIYO is working towards containing and eradicating the cactus menace as a community and in partnership with organizations with similar interest.

HIV/AIDS has had an impact in the community that still operates on strong traditional norms and values.



Some of ILAMAIYO 150 youth members

Articles researched and written by: Carrie Ndoka
Pictures taken by: Maina Maseeti

E-mail: cndoka@gmail.com

Carrie is a youth development consultant passionate about socio-economic development and this is one of her many initiatives.



Camels as wealth and means of transport

This newsletter has been published as an effort to highlight and share success stories from rural remote areas where youth leaders are committed to bring positive changes. By sharing, we strongly believe that they shall be appreciated for their efforts and above all get the necessary support required to sustain the achievements. Challenges are many, however, those who are ready and willing to face them squarely deserve a standing ovation and we hope that the newsletter will promote that. You are invited to send your feedback on the articles published to: cndoka@gmail.com

To get in touch with ILAMAIYO

Francis Merinyi– Programme Manager: ilamaiyo@gmail.com

Mobile: +254-726129087

Website: <http://www.ilamaiyo.org>

Give us Wings

Early forced marriages, polygamy, traditional circumcision for both sexes, moranism, unhygienic birth practices and the overall perception of sex education as taboo; are compounding the pandemic. Youth leaders are disseminating information on HIV/AIDS prevention and home based care with special focus on youth (in and out of school), circumcisers and traditional birth attendants. ILAMAIYO was the most active group in Laikipia in the fight against HIV/AIDS 2006.

Land is communally owned where the name of the head of a family is indicated on the clan's title deed. The title deed holders are men, however with the changing times and much lobbying a few clans have agreed to include the names of widowed women. The community strongly believes that woman's place is in the running of a

household and not owning of property.

Clean drinking water is so scarce that during dry season, the Morans have to dig the river beds to access water. With the increasing pollution of water by factories, foreign water-borne infections have been on the increase especially amongst children and pregnant mothers. Poor sanitation and hygiene is a cause of many skin infections, tuberculosis and trachoma. ILAMAIYO has developed programmes to highlight and train the community on the important of basic hygiene and water purification with good success.

Social degradation has mainly been caused by alcohol and substance abuse. Traditional brew, *muratina*, and chewing *khat* are affecting the community based on the number of

neglected families and HIV/AIDS infection following a research by ILAMAIYO. Massive campaign is underway to address the problem with special focus on high school youth. Poverty has introduced a new vice where school girls as young as 10 years are lured away from school by older men for sex in exchange of money. Cases of young girls infected with HIV/AIDS have been discovered and the community is working together to curb the trend.

Give us wings is ILAMAIYO's motto that invites those with similar passion to join them in bringing positive changes.



Feeding an elephant, a local attraction.