



# Berichte und Impressionen

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## PIONEERING CHANGE IN THE MAASAI COMMUNITIES

### WOMEN IN MPUAI-TALEK VILLAGE

When I set out to interview various households in Mpuai, Econosphere Projects' current area of operation- I expected the men would be the ones with the details and capacity to respond to our questionnaire. In a community that is still traditional and patriarchal, Maasai men do call the shots in their homes however I discovered it is the women who run the homes. At best the men could only talk about the livestock, shrinking grazing fields and wildlife-human conflicts, the women on the other hand were able to respond to questions touching on their day to day activities, their hardships as well as their achievements however little. The men did not mention the scarcity of clean water and firewood/ cooking fuel; poor kerosene lighting for their homes; and inadequate healthcare/ medical facilities.

One of the women interviewees told us that the reason for this was that the men hardly spent much time in the homes save for the nights and therefore did not experience the these constraints or have to deal with them. Even the nights are not a sure thing considering the fact that during the dry spell in the first half of the year, the men would spend nights out in the cold grazing their livestock in the restricted reserve and conservancy fields; and in the last half they spend nights in the tourist lodges, cultural villages and game reserves working as game drivers, hotel staff and entertainers to cash in on the tourist boom. In short the women and children bear the brunt of the burden of living in this hardship region and especially at a time when the community is slowly shifting from their past nomadic lifestyle to more permanent settlements.

The shift from a nomadic pastoralist system to more permanent settlements means increased enrollment in schools; engagement in wage/salaried employment; growth of commercial centers; need for medical facilities and adoption of land tenure systems. The tenure systems means the community is finding it increasingly difficult to maintain large herds of livestock for lack of where to graze them. Their traditional source of income and symbol of wealth- their livestock- no longer holds. The women who stayed at home to care for the kids and the elderly now have to engage in socio-economic activities to supplement the incomes from the men. These vary from selling milk and meat from their cows; rearing poultry; being hired to build manyattas ; being hired to clean up kraals( cattle enclosures); operating mini kiosks( small retail shops) in their houses; crafting and selling bead ornaments and curios; singing and entertaining tourists in the cultural villages and even working in the tourist lodges and conservancies. Imagine this coupled up with the other household chores they have to do; fetch water over long distances, collect firewood for cooking and clean up.

Most of the investors, tourist camps and conservancies around are focusing on women self help group projects to sponsor income generating activities. Base Camp has sponsored many women to get training on bead craft as well as to form small cooperatives through which they can pool resources. The Olare Orok Conservancy was one of the donors in the Mpuai Water Borehole project. The borehole supplies water to the Talek health center, Talek and Loigero Primary schools as well as to the local community of Mpuai. Econosphere Projects, though the latest entrant in this area- as a Non Governmental Organization- has its work cut out for it, to improve the living conditions of its host community with special emphasis on women and children in individual households. What differentiates EP from the others are our approaches in addressing the varied socio-economic problems of the community. Our solutions are tailored to subsidize on projects selected by the people depending on their immediate needs; we bring in our team members and volunteers to work with the locals and train them in the process to ensure the projects are sustained and maintained long after the EP team is gone. Sustaining projects after the donors and sponsors have left has been the main challenge to the target group as well as the NGOs in this country- one that we hope EP's approach will address.

We had the successes with the footbridges in Molibany and Olare Orok ; the solar lamps are catching on as evidenced by increased demand for bigger models other than the Solux LED 50 we have been supplying; and the Bio Digester...has me scratching my head just trying to process the many requests from the households to have the next one set up in their compounds! The next 5 articles will be profiles of five households that have not only expressed interest in our subsidized projects- solar lamps, bio digester, toilets& bathrooms and water tanks- but have also proven their abilities to sustain and maintain these projects should they acquire them. It doesn't hurt that they are also able to contribute something to the solutions we offer, be it money, labor or materials They have risen up against the odds to try and better their lives as well as adjust their lifestyles in line with the changing socio economic status. Ladies and gentlemen, in my next 5 articles; I will introduce you to...the Faces of Mpuai.

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