

BEADS OF **BONDAGE**



A SILENT SACRIFICE

Girl-child beading among the Samburu community has remained one of the worse silent contemporary form of sex slavery

A TOUGH LIFE

Like their counterparts in traditional societies & indigenous peoples around Africa, Samburu girls and women experience discrimination

SPEAKING FROM IGNORANCE

Young girls do not mind being beaded and turned into tools of sexual pleasure or sex slaves!



Samburu Women for Education & Environment
Development Organization (**SWEEDO**)

BEADS OF BONDAGE!

A stranger walking through the indigenous Samburu territory is bound to be attracted by the sharp way of dressing especially by women and girls. Heavy coloured beads on their necks, multicoloured bracelets on the arms, flowing blue, yellow and red attire and shoes made from car tyres complete the image of a female gender among this community that inhabit Kenya's Isiolo County, Ol Donyiro division, Kipsing location.



Beads have always been part of indigenous Samburu culture - not only for its beauty, but also for its significance in traditional ceremonies, such as the warriors' rite of passage.

The various colours of the beads among Samburu symbolize different aspects of the Samburu pastoral lifestyles.

Red - signifies bravery, strength and unity. Blue and green represent water and grass that so crucial to the health of the Samburu cattle herds. While white denotes purity and health because it's the colour of the milk that nourishes the community.

Black - symbolizes the people, colours of the gourds and the natural hardships that are part of Samburu life.

As with every indigenous community, the Samburu people have their unique culture, their strong oral traditional, passing down their history and customs through stories and riddles some which has stood the test of time while others have withered away to embrace modern civilization brought about by modern education.

One of the cultural practices that are not bound to fade away in the near future is the community's

great attachment to livestock. Importance of livestock to the community is induced to the youngsters from very early age where children are given duties like rearing or taking care of the kids when goats are driven to the grazing fields.

A big percentage of the girls born in Samburu community are not enrolled in school but take up goat rearing duties when they attain school-going age. This failure to appreciate the importance of education has greatly contributed to the entrenchment of the beading culture.

Beading, known in the local language as (Nkishoorot ee sayen) is girl-child beading practice involves engagement of girls as young as nine years by men relative. This is done by use of traditional attires popularly referred to as beads.

During the engagement, the admirer places a special necklace around the girl's neck to signify he has officially booked the young one. He follows this by bringing beads in large quantities which are also put in girl's neck as a sign of official commencement of intimate relationship though it does not lead to marriage as the two are related since they come from the same clan.

The girl's mother proceeds to build a hut called 'singira' for her daughter where the moran will have unlimited access to the minor to have sex.



The "couple" is allowed to have sexual intercourse but pregnancy is highly forbidden. In case it does happen, it has to be terminated immediately despite the high risks involved.

Girl-child beading among the Samburu community has remained one of the worse silent contemporary form of sex slavery. Beautiful beaded young girls are mostly the victim of these deep-root cultural practices among the Samburu community.

Normally, the morans who are known to reside in the forest visit the singira at night and leave before dawn. According to the community elders, beading is not an age-old tradition among the community and it has actually existed for two centuries.

The community believes it is an orientation towards preparation for marriage, a way to discourage many girls to have multiple relationship or boyfriends before marriage and sign of protection from acquiring bad names from the large community.

This practice continues to thrive with full blessings of the elders who are the custodians of culture despite the great negatives impact it has especially on the girl child due to several factors. First, a beaded girl is supposed to be submissive to the moran and never raise a complaint.

In fact she is treated as a wife despite the fact that the man is not supposed to marry her because in nearly all the cases, she is from his clan and it would be a taboo to do so.



WOMEN & GIRLS DISCRIMINATION



Life for Samburu women and girls is tough. Just like their counterparts in traditional societies and indigenous peoples around Africa, women experience discrimination.



Secondly, the minor is not supposed to get pregnant despite the fact that contraceptives are foreign words here.

Should the girl conceive the foetus must be aborted through crude methods and if this fails, the baby born is an outcast and has to be thrown away in the bush or stream to be mauled by wild animals or be killed by giving it a concoction of highly concentrated tobacco snuff or to be given to a non Samburu.

Cultural practices embraced ensure that women and girls have no rights, own no property and are generally viewed as the property of their husbands.

Until recently, beading culture was a guarded secret which started 15 generation of age-sets to today.

Child and women right activists from the community have come out to denounce the vice and carry out campaign to persuade the community to stop it. But despite the efforts, some elites

from the community are not ready to admit that the practice is thriving even at this era of new constitution dispensation which guarantees protection of human rights and based on the human rights principle that

“All human beings are equal and have dignity”.

For Samburu women and girls to enjoy the freedom that constitution gives them, they need to be in complete control of their destiny.

Girl beading is a harmful traditional practice that involves sexual slavery, almost exclusively girls, to usually significantly older men.

This practice affects girls as young as 7 years old and puts them at risk of ill health nips their education prospects and dims blurs economic dreams.

There is a special kind of discrimination that affects women and girls when it comes to access and control of resources. As managers, they have no power to dispose any of the resources unless with the prior authority that comes from the figurehead of the family who is a man.

Women have always been considered as the property of the men within the Samburu community and ownership of animals or land is unheard of to them apart from the collective ownership that they can claim as a group.

Government officials have also not been vocal enough and many have been accused of turning a blind eye on this silent harmful cultural practice which violates the human rights for both the young girl and her baby. The new constitutional order in Kenya greatly empowers women and we envisage that it will significantly help in taking forward the agenda of women.

HOW BEADING CAME ABOUT

SWEEDO has been conducting research and documenting how beading came to be part of Samburu culture. Though this research is currently ongoing with people on the ground trying to dig up more facts, its origin has been traced back to sometimes in 1780s.

According to one of the elders, beading was recommended as a way of taming the community warriors (morans) from admiring and “stealing” the elders’ wives. Mzee Loshopoko from Ol Donyiro explains that beading started when the Samburu decided to separate age sets as a way of taming the morans.

This came after an ugly incident when the warriors fought the elders during a ceremony as they attempted to take away their wives.

After the fight, a bull was slaughtered and a cleansing ritual called **Lminong’** organised. It is during this ceremony that the idea of morans



Mzee Loishopoko

being allowed to take young uncircumcised girls as temporary brides was born.

It was resolved that warriors would be living in the forest where they make their own foods and were not allowed to interact with elders nor sleep with their wives. Anyone caught sleeping with

a circumcised (read married) wife lost the coveted title of being referred to as a moran.

A story is told of how one day a moran leader who had beaded a young girl sneaked into the hut of a married woman and left his spear outside. His beaded girl who was suspicious laid a trap and took away the spear which she took to her singira. When the moran came out of the married woman’s hut, he found his spear missing and proceed to his girl’s singira where he saw the spear but never made any comment.

The moran knew his secret might leak out and the following morning, he blew the horn and summoned the warriors telling them

they had to for a cattle raid to steal cattle so that he could give the animals to the elders to appease them and seek forgiveness.

However, the raid was not successful and tens of the warriors were killed by the rival community. Since then, it was resolved that beading would continue being practised in the community and elders would never admire young girls while on the other hand it was declared a taboo for a warrior to sneak into a married woman’s hut for sexual pleasure.

For over two centuries, the culture of beading has continued to thrive with no one raising a finger to challenge it.



IF YOU SHARE OUR CONCERN ABOUT THE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF GIRLS AND WOMEN AMONG THE SAMBURU COMMUNITY, HELP US GIVE A VOICE TO THOSE WHO CANNOT SPEAK OUT FOR THEMSELVES.

WHAT...

IS BEING DONE?

In simple terms, culture can be defined as a way of life for a particular group of people. Abandoning what has almost acquired the status of a rite is a slow process calling for a multi sectional approach. It is with this in mind that Samburu Women Education & Environment Development Organization (SWEEDO), an indigenous women based organization has been exploring the most appropriate ways of addressing this issue.

To start with, OI Donyiro division in Isiolo County has been picked for a pilot project with plans to widen the scope in the near future to cover the entire Samburu and part of Marsabit County occupied by the indigenous Samburu who practice girl-beading.

One of the approaches being employed by SWEEDO is to get to the bottom of beading,

encouraging them to speak freely on untold stories of harmful silent practices on girl-child beading gives SWEEDO an avenue on which to fight this deep-rooted culture.

Besides talking to the elders, initiating dialogue with women, the morans, young beaded girls and community's opinion leaders gives the process a holistic approach and seeks to come up with a home grown solution to the girl-child beading culture.

While the elders' role remains to either sanction or denounce this practice which accords the community warriors unlimited sexual pleasure and no sense of responsibility, the women watch as their daughters suffer silently.

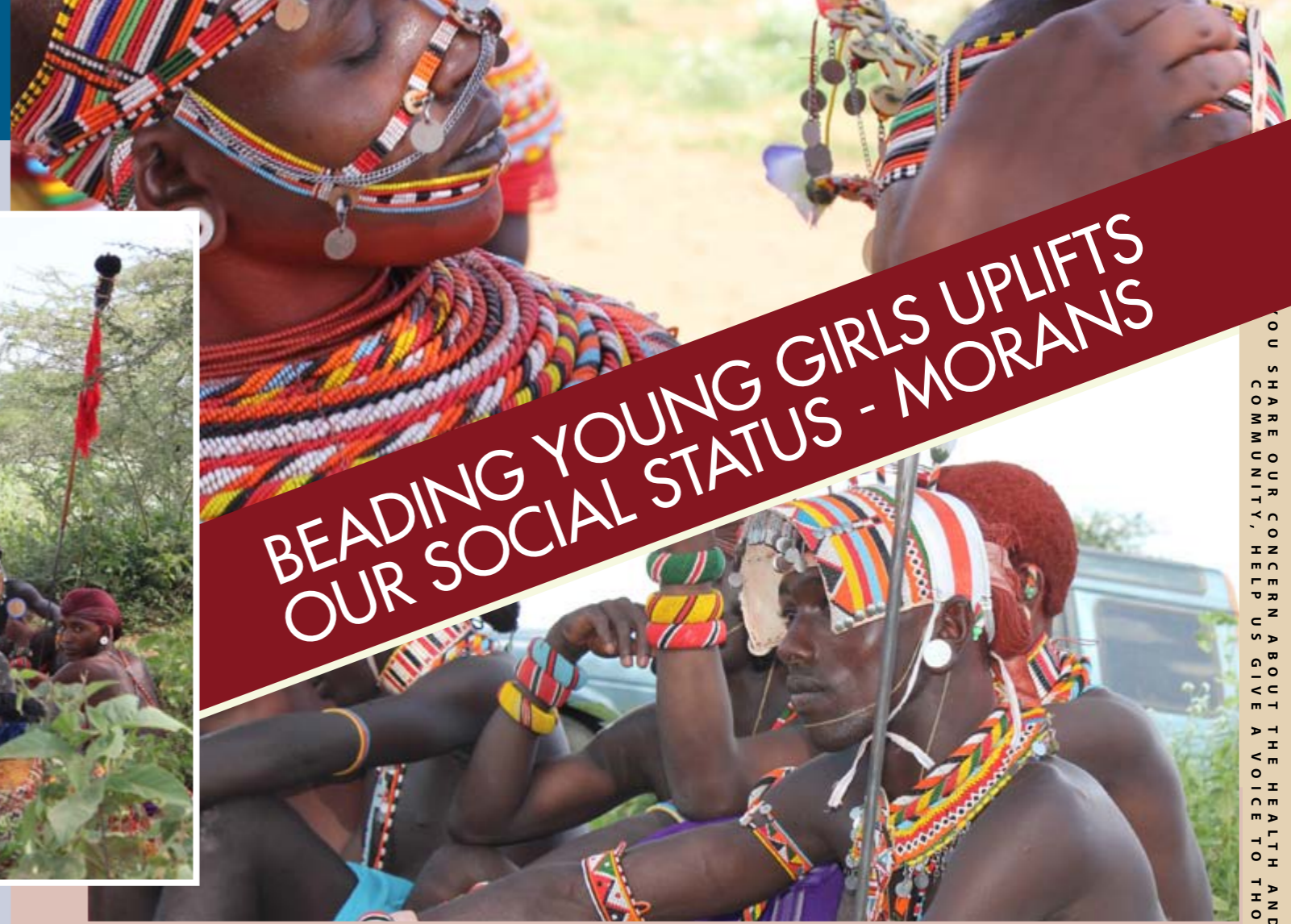
The young beaded girls are never accorded opportunity to raise any complaint and sometimes they have to endure battering from the temporary husbands and in case of conception, bear the consequences of forced abortion; death or watch as their newborns are thrown away.



While children born by the beaded girls are regarded as outcasts or cursed and capable of bringing misfortune to anyone who dares to bring them up, there are still some Samburu women who have practically challenged this silent harmful culture and lived with "the outcasts" and have not suffered in any way.

But a good number of these "outcasts" are adopted by people from the Turkana community and the children have grown up not knowing their biological mothers though mother and child could be living in the same village.

Encouraging those who have lived with children born out of girl-beading relationship to attend the dialogue meetings organized by SWEEDO to give their testimonies is a true pointer that cultural beliefs can be challenged with no serious consequences.



BEADING YOUNG GIRLS UPLIFTS OUR SOCIAL STATUS - MORANS

To the majority of community warriors living in Isiolo County, Kipsing location, girl beading adds value to their lives by lifting their social status within the community.

"Once you bead a girl, the community (elders, women, fellow morans and young girls) respect you as a man of means and this is something we are not about to denounce," says Nkeres Lemooli from Mokerri village.



Lemoli who has beaded a girl for eight Samburu seasons (three years) now says there is nothing wrong with this practice and is quick to add that he will allow his son to bead a girl as well.

He cites one of the major advantages of beading as the assurance to the elders that the young energetic and unmarried warriors will not sneak into beds of married wives at night.

This he says promotes harmony in the community. To him beading prevents promiscuity among the young warriors since they stick to one girl. Lemoli stand on beading is firm-this practice must continue even if a wind of change sweeps across Samburiland.

Despite the firm belief in the practice, some morans still hold that beading has a dark side but since it is culture, it should continue. Cases have been reported of morans being

beaten to death for sleeping with a girl beaded by a colleague.

This is an unforgivable sin and the offended warrior normally seeks the support of his colleagues in disciplining the wayward one. In some cases, there is no concrete evidence but only suspicion but this does not prevent the suspect from being subjected to mob beating deep inside the forest which might leave him crippled or dead.

The warriors are proposing some changes so that they are allowed to bead girls from different clans so that they can eventually marry them.

This is because, you can sell cows to purchase beads for a girl and then after a few months she gets a suitor and gets married. Here the warrior ends up wasting his wealth (cattle) because a beaded girl is free to get married any time a suitor comes along.



how it came into being and why it has continued to thrive while the community admits it is detrimental to the girl child.

Among the Samburu community, elders in these case men have the final say when it comes to matters of cultural practices. Involving all age-sets in dialogue at the community and

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Saitoti Leparmarai

traditional of crude abortion methods to forcing the girl to take excessive drugs to kill the foetus.

Some young beaded girls undergo a crude abortion before their pregnancy advances. Others hide their condition until it is too late for that. They are left to give birth, but only to kill these babies immediately, if the girls are lucky, their babies are given away to strangers.

For Loishoru Nkai Lemeriw, only education can help reduce this culture since once enrolled in schools, the warriors will not have time to bead young girls. He says: "If we were educated, we cannot practice this culture (of beading).

Now that we are grown up, we can join adult education in the evening after we come home from grazing instead of dancing".

But for moran Saitoti Leparmarai, beading is bad and should be discouraged. "I have not given beads to a girl and I will never allow my daughter to be beaded," he says.

But the girl carries a lone burden in case she conceives accidentally. Culturally, the moran is either ordered to give a cow as a fine (Nkiteng' e ngornno) or forced to leave that girl.

In most cases, he will leave the girl silently but there are also cases where some continue to befriend that girl till she gets married.

Where the family decides to have the girl carry the pregnancy till birth and then give out, the relationship between that girl and the moran is terminated.

Asked how they feel for causing young girls to be subjected to abortion or their newborns to be killed, the warriors are in agreement that it is wrong but add that culture dictates so.

But they claim that in recent years, the community is moving away from the old



Nkeres Leemoli



Loishoru-Nkai

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF: ELIJAH NDIRANGU



While many empathise with beaded girls for the likely consequences, the girls actually love it when a warrior comes along to present her with the red beads. Morans are highly respected in the community and young girls take pride when a warrior catches her eye. As young as they may be, they appreciate beauty like any other woman and hence being beaded signifies that one's beauty has been noticed.

Many of the girls openly advocate for the practice while some are not ready to discuss it when they realize it is viewed negatively by an outsider. They have no idea what goes on in the outside world since their lives revolves around taking care of goats, collecting firewood and fetching water. A good number of them have reached puberty but they have never stepped in a classroom.

In their free time, they make beaded necklaces or bracelets to beautify themselves and indication that many of them may not mind being presented with more beads regardless of the consequences. To them, getting beaded is part of life, after all no one in the community has talked ill of the practice. But few who are in school say they would rather continue with education than get engaged to a warrior who will never marry you. It is a pointer that enrolling the girls in school is one way of reducing the widespread of beading culture.

SPEAKING FROM IGNORANCE?

The young girls do not mind being beaded and turned into tools of sexual pleasure or sex slaves.

Chances are that they could be speaking from naivety or ignorance. Few can fathom what is likely to befall them should they get pregnant.

Women who underwent beading in their teenage years have varied stories, some unpleasant.



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"I was forced to abort"

MEPUKORI LEKULA



"The pain I felt as women forced foetus out of my womb is still fresh in my mind."

I had been beaded for two years and then got pregnant. I remember I was going to the river when a group of women accosted me, forced me to the ground and the next thing I felt were many hands all over my abdomen.

They were using their palms to feel my unborn baby and later they started applying pressure using their elbows. After a few minutes they used their heels and luckily the foetus came out.

After this incident, I removed the beads I had been given by the moran and threw them away. I was not ready to endure such pain again though I was lucky the forced abortion did not make me barren since I still got married and got children.

I would not want my daughters to be beaded because the process of abortion is too painful for anyone to undergo. During the sexual encounter with the warriors, nothing is used to prevent pregnancy. If I were to be asked, beaded girls should be circumcised so that should they conceive, children born out of this relationship can be accepted by the community and forced abortion will die out".

"My mother sanctioned my beading"

NOONKUTA LEMERIWAS

"I was beaded through my mum who the warrior had talked with no consultation from my side and place a black and white beads (referred by Samburu as nkeri) symbolize commencement of girl engagement from a Moran).

Later on he started beating me. I think the beating was meant to instill fear in me and keep away from other warriors who may have had interest in me. I removed the beads but my mother forced me to continue wearing them. When I removed the beads I was always forced to have them back.

I later disappeared from home to escape the beatings from the warrior but after several days my family came looking for me and brought me back home but thus time they did not force the



beads on me. I have not seen the good side of beading though none of my daughters has been beaded I cannot however tell my daughters to reject the necklaces should they be given by the warriors.

I have to wait for the moran to come to them and then see how they will be treated and from there I can say if the practice is good or bad."

"I would prefer my girl being in school than accepting beads"

"I was given beads by a moran and for several days I did not know peace. The warrior kept on quarreling and threatening to beat me up saying I was entertaining another warrior. The quarrels and occasional beatings persisted for days and when I could not take it anymore, removed the beads and gave it to him.

I disappeared from home and went to school and where I studied up to standard four. It is my parents who removed me from school and bought the beads for me. After a while, I got married and was blessed

with a baby girl as our first born. I enrolled her in school and she has not been beaded like her age mates."

NGUUSIIN LEMERIWAS



"I married the warrior who beaded me"

SETI LEKATULA

"I married the warrior who beaded me and am happy about that. To me, marrying the moran who gave you beads is good because he does not feel the pain of losing the resources she used in purchasing the beads when a girl gets married to another person.

I would like all my girls to be beaded. These days they are no forced abortions. If girls get pregnant, they are circumcised and get married the warrior who is responsible and if he does not want to marry the girl, she will get married to another man and leaves the child with its grandmother.

Things are changing now and warriors are avoiding beading girls from their clan since in some instances, beading is being treated as a form of engagement to marriage. Beaded girls are better placed to get husbands than unbeaded ones."



"I beaded and married her"

MZEE LEKATULA

"Beading a girl gave me discipline since I was committed to her and was able to perform my main duty of taking livestock very well.

Beading prevents promiscuity as one stick to a single girl. However, when you meet your girl with another warrior you can beat her or even fight with the warriors because one spends wealth for the upkeep of this girl

The disadvantage though as that when the family of the girl decides to marry her off, you are not informed and sometimes she is sent off to another man and you are warned never to talk to her again.

Another disadvantage is that if you bead a girl who is not disciplined, you will fight constantly with other morans when you find them together hence bring enmity and conflicts among the families.

For me, I married the same girl that I beaded. My advice to the warriors is that they should bead girls they will eventually marry. It would be very good if the entire beaded girl end up getting married the same warriors.

This would be a positive thing in the community and also reduce a lot of children being killed or thrown away."



"THERE IS NOTHING WRONG WITH BEADING"

NOOLNGIRO LEPARMARAI



Beading is a good thing. I was beaded for several years and later got married to my present husband.

Before I got beaded, he first consulted my brothers and my mother and when they agreed, he went ahead and gave me beads. The only disadvantage

is that one is not allowed to get children with the warrior.

I would like my girls to be beaded though I would not know what to do if she got pregnant. This culture is not ending soon. It is our tradition and it should continue".

"Beading is of no value to our girls" - Mamsaab Lemeriwias



"In my opinion, beading is not important. For me, I was not beaded and none of my daughters has been beaded. I know beads make a Samburu woman or girl beautiful but it does not have to come from a warrior.

What I have been doing is selling goats and cows and using the money to buy beads for my daughter. All this I do to prevent morans enticing my daughters with the necklaces and I take it as my responsibility to make my daughters look beautiful just like the beaded ones.

Parents should take it upon themselves to make their daughters look beautiful and not wait for warriors to give them necklaces"



Elders Stand on Beading Shaky

Opinion from Ol Donyiro elders over possibility of denouncing the culture of beading is divided.

As custodians of culture and traditions, they hold the final say and without their word, all efforts might just be in vain. During the discussions, it emerged that they are very cautious not to condemn this culture but they collectively agree "that with time and aggressive education" it will definitely come to an end one day.

According to the elders, educating the girls is one way that can be used to reduce the prevalence of beading but "it will in no way eliminate teenage pregnancy because it is also happening in schools".

In this community where cattle raids are common, the elders explain that beading gives morans the "synergy" to conduct a successful raid or recover stolen animals. A moran who takes part in a successful raid will be rewarded with praise songs from the girl she has beaded. For this reason, the warriors cannot think about the elders' wives.

On why they encourage babies born by beaded girls to be thrown

away to die, they justify this by stating that the newborns are "children born by children" and hence outcasts. (Any uncircumcised girl is considered a child).

The elders whoever point that they are not consulted on matters of beading though they know it exists.

"We just noticed a hut (*singira*) being constructed and that is when we realize our daughter has been given necklace by a moran," explained one of the elders Mzee Lemeriwias. He adds that while he personally and scores of others think beading has more demerits than merits; there is no one to lead in denouncing this practice for fear of the well known consequences.

"Anyone who dares to stop this culture will become an outcast (*Lperet*) and will be barred from performing any of the many revered rituals in our community," explains Mzee Lemeriwias.

The same fate will befall anyone who keeps a child born out of a beading relationship and this fear binds the elders to a conspiracy of silence.



What befalls those who adopt the "outcasts?"

HELLEN LEISONO (MAMA RIZIKI)

One day eight years ago, Hellen Leisono was collecting firewood in the forest when she heard the cries of a baby. Upon checking, she found it was a newborn who had been abandoned in the forest. When she approached and saw the tiny human being, she estimated that the baby could have been abandoned at around 3am. It was 8am by then and she took the baby girl home, washed it and named her Riziki. Leison later took the baby to hospital. After checkup, she was found to be in good health and had not been affected by the cold. Now assured that the baby would survive, Leisono named her Riziki

When Riziki was three-years-old, she again came across another newborn baby boy who her fellow women were preparing a concoction of 'tobacco' ready to killed the infant and asked them to give her instead. She also took it home and today he is in good health.

"Riziki is now in standard three while Innocent is in nursery school some people tell me I did a good thing to rescue and bring these children up while others continue to caution me that I will meet a misfortune for keeping outcasts," said Mama Riziki.

But for Mama Riziki, the issue of misfortune coming to her homestead does not occupy her mind. To her, she believes the two are innocent children who deserve care and support.

"I have been branded an outcast but I will continue bringing them up and noises from the community do not bother me at all," said Mama Riziki.

I would like to tell my people to stop these evil acts of killing and abandoning children because the children they kill or abandon might end up becoming big people in the society in the future," she said.



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An eyewitness on forced abortion

NOOLTULAN LERUSO

She is one of the women who have defied the odds to speak on the silent sacrifice meted on young pregnant girls by local women who apply crude abortion methods. Nooltulan happened to witness one incident and here is her testimony:

"I coincidentally witnessed the process of cruel and forceful abortion to a beaded girl."

During the abortion women pressed the victim's abdomen with the palm of their hands before using their heels to force the foetus out. Later they used their knees, while supporting her back till the foetus got out.

Before pressing commenced, the girl's abdomen (womb) was tide on the upper side to ensure the foetus did not survive. To us women, that act is terrible and inhuman. When a girl is forced to undergo that cruel form of abortion, her mother will get herbs called "sekotei" no other treatment is sought.

In such cases, the women inform the elder, that the girl is unwell and take the tasks of treating her with herbs and sheep oil.

It is only when a girl becomes critically ill that the women seek advice from elders for further treatment but not in hospital".



WHEN VIOLATOR'S RIGHTS ARE VIOLATED

It is not only the girls who are victims of the beading practice but also the warriors who bead them. Morans become victims of the beading rituals when they are suspected and proven to be in an affair with beaded girls. As a disciplinary mechanism, punishment is always done through beating which sometime results to loss of life and disability among moran-this punishment is executed silently and even the beaten warrior happens to survive, he will not report it anywhere.

However, there are few cases which have come to the fore of involving death, maiming and serious injuries-all from Oldonyiro division of Isiolo district.

In 2010, there was big fight between the Lpishikuri clans in Tualle, Oldonyiro Division area as result of moran fighting over a beaded girl. One moran was shot in the leg and luckily he survived. The following year at Matundai area of Oldonyiro location, a moran was beaten to death after he was suspected of having an affair with a beaded girl. Here, the culprit was arrested and is currently serving a life sentence after he was convicted of murder

In January 2012, the above moran Ltoikan Leruso was beaten in Lenguruma area but somehow he escaped with serious injuries. He was accused of having an affair with a girl who had been beaded by his cousin. There could be many other incidents that go unreported among the Samburu community. This silence only acts to promote impunity and gross violation of human rights among the girls and the morans.

LTOIKAN LERUSO

COMMUNITY'S OPINION LEADERS HOLD THE SWAY ON BEADING



Fr Paul Mwangi

According to two Catholic priests operating in the region, elites must speak against this culture if the community has to rethink about the issue.

Fr Paul Mwangi of Ol Donyiro and Fr Feliciano Luciano of Kipsing believe that though religious approach may help, it has never been easy to fight culture especially if you are from a different community. Hence, they point out that community elite must set the ball rolling by initiating education for the community.

Two civic leaders and two members of the provincial administration have come out strongly to condemn this vice but the effect is yet to be felt. For this reason, SWEEDO believes that an aggressive campaign at

By a casual look, the morans may appear as if they are the major beneficiaries of girl-beading. However documentation by SWEEDO indicates that serious fights among the warriors are common over the young girls.

Deaths and serious injuries have been reported when a morans is accused of moving with a girl beaded by a colleague. The suspect is beaten mercilessly in the forest by colleagues and left for dead.

Going by the stand taken by elders and the advice given, beading will only be eliminated through involving diverse opinion and religious leaders in the community as well as promoting education for the girl child and encouraging morans to go to school as well.



Fr Feliciano Luciano

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If you share our concern about the health and well-being of girls and women among the samburu community, help us give a voice to those who cannot speak out for themselves.

SGC

The Samburu Girl Child Magazine

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