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THE Indigenous

The Flaming Hope in the Face of Drought Crisis



Samburu Women Trust (SWT) is an indigenous women-led network of indigenous women advancing women and girls rights in pastoralists, hunters and gatherer, women living with disabilities and fisher folks' communities in Kenya.

SWT has been on the forefront advocating inclusiveness and effective participation of the indigenous women in decision making processes at all levels. The organization has for the past 10 years successfully advanced community led advocacy and organizing on women's and girls' rights.

It is also the convener and secretariat of the Coalition of Indigenous Women (CIWO), an advocacy women movement at national level, a loose women movement with more than forty-member (40) drawn from pastoralists, hunter gatherers, women living with disabilities and fisherfolks organizations across the country.



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OUR VISION

We envision a society that recognizes, promotes and protects the fundamental rights and freedom of women and girls; and ensures full participation of indigenous women in their own development.



OUR MISSION

We exist to empower indigenous women and girls claim their human rights, strengthen their capacity to influence local and national policies, add address harmful practices through integrating the role of women as decision-makers in the community.



OUR GOAL

We seek to build and enhance indigenous women and girls' capacities using diverse strategies and approaches that are not in conflict with pastoralists cultural practices, address traditional harmful practices that subjugate women position in the society and their roles.



OUR CORE VALUES

- Accountability and transparency
- Innovative and Action oriented
- Passion for human rights
- Respect for culture
- Gender equality
- Professionalism
- Integrity



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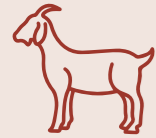
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Preamble

Drought is no stranger to the pastoralist communities of Northern Kenya. Many pastoralists' communities have lost livestock, almost every homestead has suffered the loss of their livelihoods. Several people have reportedly died of hunger-related complications in Samburu County, while thousands of others face starvation as the ongoing drought takes its toll.



Kshs 5,000



Kshs 500

Drop in the price of a goat due to drought and water scarcity



Most of the community members randomly interviewed described the famine situation as dire in the last 40 years and called for urgent intervention and emergency humanitarian response to avert more deaths. The prices for livestock at the local markets have dropped drastically as the animals have become emaciated due to lack of pasture. A goat, which used to sell at Sh5,000, is now going for Sh500.

Water scarcity in the region has increased conflicts among the warring communities due to the sharing of resources and because they have no (choice) or alternative. In most parts of these lands, there is no water, and the only place with water all the communities prefer to graze there hence increased tension and conflicts.

This due to failed rains for the last 3 years forcing women to walk for more than 100 kms to look for safe water hence increased security threats as well as gender-based violence to women and girls who trek for hours to access clean water.

The social pressures of drought-related financial struggles often result in depression, anxiety, and in most cases increase physical violence, verbal violence, psychological violence, sexual violence, social-economic violence, domestic violence or intimate relationships, harassment and sexual harassment among women and girls during the ongoing drought crisis. Similarly documented and observed cases also include suicide among men, families with elders, persons with disabilities and worse lactating and pregnant mothers who are forced to migrate in response to water scarcity are among the most affected by mental health illness.

Water is life – UN sustainable development goal 6: Access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene is the most basic human need for health and well-being. However, in most of indigenous communities' territories die due to lack of water, hence the crisis is so dire that the future of indigenous communities is now at risk, if there is no water, no food, there is no future.

This will also increase malnutrition among children, hygiene and sanitation due to lack of access to clean water.

There is evidence that gender-based violence, female genital mutilation, and child marriage have risen since the drought, as families marry off their girls to pay for food or cattle. Drought's consequences are far-reaching, impacting water quality, public health, the economy, the natural environment, public infrastructure.

Samburu Women Trust identifies women and girls' needs; capacity build, influence voice to prepare them on how to deal with these changes as well as influence different spaces for women and girls to be at the centre of decision-making on emergency humanitarian response agenda.

Our priorities and guided principle to our partners in areas with social impacts of the ongoing drought include anxiety/depression about economic losses caused by drought. Health problems related to low water flows and poor water quality.

Health problems related to dust. Loss of human life. The economic (disrupted income, livelihoods, and food systems), social (water access, hygiene and sanitation challenges), and demographic (human mobility).

We wish to thank our development partners, Oxfam Kenya, and DANIDA for the continuous support to increase women and girls' coping mechanisms to respond effectively to the drought crisis, we call upon urgent intervention response to avert the alarm situation in Samburu East and Samburu North in Samburu County.

Jane Meriwas

Executive Director
Samburu Women Trust

Indigenous women and girls fighting GBV as drought worst in Samburu County

The previous months have been very difficult for the mother of three who, like thousands of others across Samburu, has been affected by the extreme drought hitting the arid region and much of northern Kenya.



Pilot Lenaigwanai rests under a tree shed as she artistically knits a neckpiece that the Samburu women adorn.

Physical healing scars are evident all over her body. The scars refresh horrible memories and distressful ordeals she endured in a marriage bond which turned that bondage that almost swallowed her dignity. Ms. Lenaigwanai says her husband was less abusive before the drought period "because we used to have a normal spat."

However, she says that the abuse escalated in the recent months after the extreme drought ravaging Samburu County wiped out all 168 heads of cattle which were the family's economic mainstay.

Kicks, blows and abusive language now became a daily dosage that the husband prescribed to her even in the presence of children.

“

He was not much violent before. But when we lost all our livestock, he was frustrated and turned the heat on me and my children. I just think he wanted us out because he could not provide for us anymore," said Ms. Lenaigwanai.

The mother of three was forced out of her home to seek refuge at the Umoja rescue centre in Samburu East.

Karemi Lemantile's story is no different. She is struggling to heal from physical and mental injuries inflicted due to her husband's brutality. Ms. Lemantile has seen it all within a period of two years: lost more than three quarters of livestock due to ongoing drought, had her eldest child injured by buffalo attack as a result of human-wildlife conflicts and forced out of her home by her husband.

"We initially had a happy stay but trouble started when most of the animals died due to drought. We entirely depended on them so there was little to sustain our family and my husband could not absorb the shocks anymore," she says.

Karemi continues: "There was literally a routine of violence every morning and evening. My three children were not spared anymore, even the disabled second born."

Rose Lairolkek's story is no different from others. She is carrying a huge scar on the right-hand shoulder as a result of a long cut inflicted by her husband in May 2020.



When all 10 cows died due to drought, Ms. Lairolkek said her husband came back home from the grazing fields a violent man.

“He tasked me to feed the family, which I could not do. It triggered a domestic pull and push each day and almost cost my life,” said Ms. Lairolkek who has since left home to seek alternative sources of livelihoods.

Samburu is grappling with one of the worst droughts in four decades. As dry spells continue, it means that Samburu women and girls are being put at an increased risk of gender-based violence and other forms of exploitations. The ongoing drought has decimated livestock and other livelihoods, forcing Samburu women to bear the burden of having to find water and food during the drought.

Samburu Women Trust (SWT), an indigenous women organization, says security risks to girls and women have increased in the past two years as a result of the ongoing drought that shows no signs of easing. Samburu women are making long trips through drought-ravaged terrains in search of water and foods, according to Jane Meriwas, executive director of SWT.

She says more women have been subjected to violence including rape, sexual exploitation, and domestic abuse during the drought period, adding that most women are suffering in silence because they find it difficult to report cases to relevant authorities.

“The rate of gender-based violence is alarming in the wake of the ongoing dry spells. Women are really bearing all risks of violence and exploitations and worse is that most are suffering in silence,” says Ms. Lekuriya, umoja women village.

According to survivors, there is a growing concern that women and girls are walking longer distances each day in search of water, placing them at risk of violence, harassment and attacks from wild animals.

She says women, girls’ and other vulnerable groups in Samburu are being forced to explore weird means in response to the ongoing crisis. She reveals most have

resorted to engaging in brewing illicit alcohol, charcoal burning prostitution, forced labour, and other forms of exploitation.

“As communities and families lose their livelihoods and suffer from hunger, there is increased experiences of weak or broken family structures. Most are now engaging in dangerous activities to get a meal,” she says.

“Unless humanitarian aid is urgently and immediately stepped up, we face a situation where hundreds of children and elderly women will lose their lives needlessly due to the dangers and rights violations such as rape, violence and early marriage.”

The SWT official notes that there is emergence of female headed households because divorce rate is very high amid a spike in GBV cases due to ongoing drought. Ms. Meriwas calls on well-wishers to help “conduct even a psychosocial support because most women are mentally tortured.”

In Samburu, usually women and girls who are sent to fetch water. Because water points dried up, most of them have to trek for close to 15 kilometers and wait for hours at boreholes. This puts them at a risk of violence and other forms of exploitations.

Samburu community are pastoralists and forced to move in search of pastures and water. In the event, vulnerable women and girls have little to or no access to critical health facilities or protection and support services, according to Ms. Meriwas

“Most of these areas, it is difficult to even access police stations or health centers to report GBV cases. They (women) are really suffering in silence,” she says.

SWT is engaging the local authorities (Chiefs, Nyumba Kumi elders, police, medics, and Community Health Volunteers) to promote both preventive and responsive mechanisms to GBV. This will strengthen approaches aimed at GBV reduction across Samburu County in the wake of a prolonged drought that shows no signs of easing, says Ms. Meriwas

Why gender and protection in drought hit areas is a tool of responsive for women survivors

Cash transfer programme case study in Samburu County



As the sun sets down the horizon, Pauline Lekureiya rushes to get little foodstuffs before it gets late. Within no minute, she comes back holding a packet of flour and cooking oil stashed in a traditional Samburu basket. Her face is at ease as she says that the stuffs will help her family through the next “couple of days.”

Ms. Karin Lemantile is a Gender Based Violence (GBV) survivor living in Umoja village in Samburu East. She is a beneficiary of the cash transfer programme - one of a number of schemes that the Samburu Women Trust (SWT) is undertaking to support GBV survivors who have adversely affected by the ongoing drought.

SWT is providing cash transfers to at least 375 indigenous women and adolescent girls who are mostly survivors of gender-based violence and are reeling from the effects of the biting drought. The beneficiaries under the programme “multi-sectoral humanitarian assistance” are currently receiving Sh8,886 each in form of cash transfers to help them sail through the drought period.

Ms. Karin was chosen to be a beneficiary because she was living in abject poverty having had escaped from her abusive marriage. Bringing up and providing for children alone was a tall order.

Despite the traumatic experiences she endured in her marriage, she is determined to make a change.

This cash is a blessing. The little that I get is helping me sustain my children for now because initially it was very difficult for me to provide for them, she says.

She showed a strong entrepreneurial streak and is learning knitting skills from fellow women so that she becomes an independent woman.

The cash transfer programme has helped prevent nearly more than 375 women, mostly GBV survivors from slipping into severe food insecurity in drought-ravaged Samburu County. The SWT is giving Sh8,886 to each individual who is enrolled in the humanitarian programme.

“The rate of gender-based violence is alarming as drought bites and women are rendered hopeless. We have at least 375 women mostly GBV survivors who are receiving Sh8,886 each in form of cash transfers,” she says.

“SWT Director, Ms. Jane Meriwas says that many women have turned to illicit brewing, charcoal burning and prostitution for survival as broken families increase”

SWT calls on the government and other development partners to prioritize an emergency humanitarian programme to reduced suffering, while also strengthening women's economic resilience through providing alternative means of livelihood.

Ms. Meriwas also says that, a part from humanitarian assistance, GBV survivors need psychosocial support because most of them are mentally tortured due to the ordeals, they have endured in their respective marriages. She reveals that a high number of children below the age of five are malnourished due to insufficient or lack of food and clean water.

According to the National Drought Management Authority (NDMA) previous report, 4 percent of the sampled children in Samburu County under the age of five years are severely malnourished and another 28.9 percent are moderately malnourished as per the September 2022 sentinel sites data.

The NDMA says the high prevalence of malnutrition in the pastoral region has been attributed poor quality of diet due to inadequate food, poor health practices as caregivers are involved in households' chores that limit time on breastfeeding. The report also blames the season long community conflicts which result to loss of household livelihoods and displacement of households.

“Higher proportion of malnourished children under the age of five years were recorded in pastoral livelihood areas of Waso, Wamba North, Wamba West, Ndoto and Nachola,” said NDMA in the report

“The situation is expected to worsen as the inflation rates increase coupled with prolonged dry spell affecting negatively on living standards of the households.”

According to the new report, persistent drought coupled with food commodity prices also continue to impact food insecurity in the region thus most households are only able to afford unbalanced one or two meals in a day which is lower than recommended 3 - 4 meals daily.

The SWT calls on government, development partners and donors to intervene to save thousands of people affected by the ongoing drought crisis.

Ms. Meriwas says the situation is severe as survivors have no food to eat due to the prolonged drought that has lasted for more than three years.



SWT explore opportunities for women for long term sustainability in response to drought mitigation

Market for beaded and bead value addition

Besides cash transfers, SWT is providing capacity building to indigenous women to venture into alternative income-generating activities so that they can become self-reliant to support their families.

SWT is also providing psychosocial support, guidance and counseling to help them gain confidence and ultimately improving their lives by engaging in beadwork. Most women have gained knitting skills and are flexing to knit beads to sell to both local and international markets.

For instance, Pauline Lekureiya is now boasting of skills she learnt few months ago and she is hopeful to venture into a lucrative bead making business.

In offering response and interventions to the looming drought situation in Samburu County, SWT does not only provide non -food items and cash transfers to the survivors of GBV but also considers having in place long term solutions through creating a sustainable livelihood for them.

Samburu Women Trust (SWT) is creating a unit that will market beads in neighboring counties and internationally using online platforms. Items that are knit by the women include breast plates, earrings and bracelets and the SWT now seeks to harness markets to boost earnings of the GBV survivors dealing in beads.

Ms. Meriwas notes that the women often face market barriers challenge. “Most of them (survivors) have acquired skills and so we are trying hard to get markets for the beadwork items. We will use available means including online platforms to help them market and sell their products,” she says.

Bead ornaments are popular souvenirs among tourists in Kenya and thus the women have resolved to fully engage in the business. Ms. Meriwas says the women have the potential and if empowered, are catalyst for societal transformation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1

The prolonged drought has rendered all community members vulnerable in that, they are losing most of their livestock which has increased the poverty levels

Increased urgent intervention is required to continuously save lives as well as reduce GBV cases on women and girls

2

For more than a year, drought has really affected local inhabitants. They have experienced persistent drought and loss of livestock which they depend on, women being the most affected.

There is a need for continuous counselling/ psycho-social services for the women, most having undergone extreme cases of GBV. Also, continued support for the indigenous women to improve their living standards.

3

There is the need to capacity build indigenous women on income generation activities - to ensure sustainability through small businesses.



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