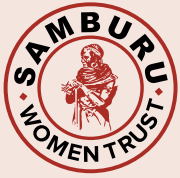


ISSUE NO. 9 | AUGUST 2019



# THE Indigenous



# us

CHANGE MAKERS IN THE COMMUNITY





## 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

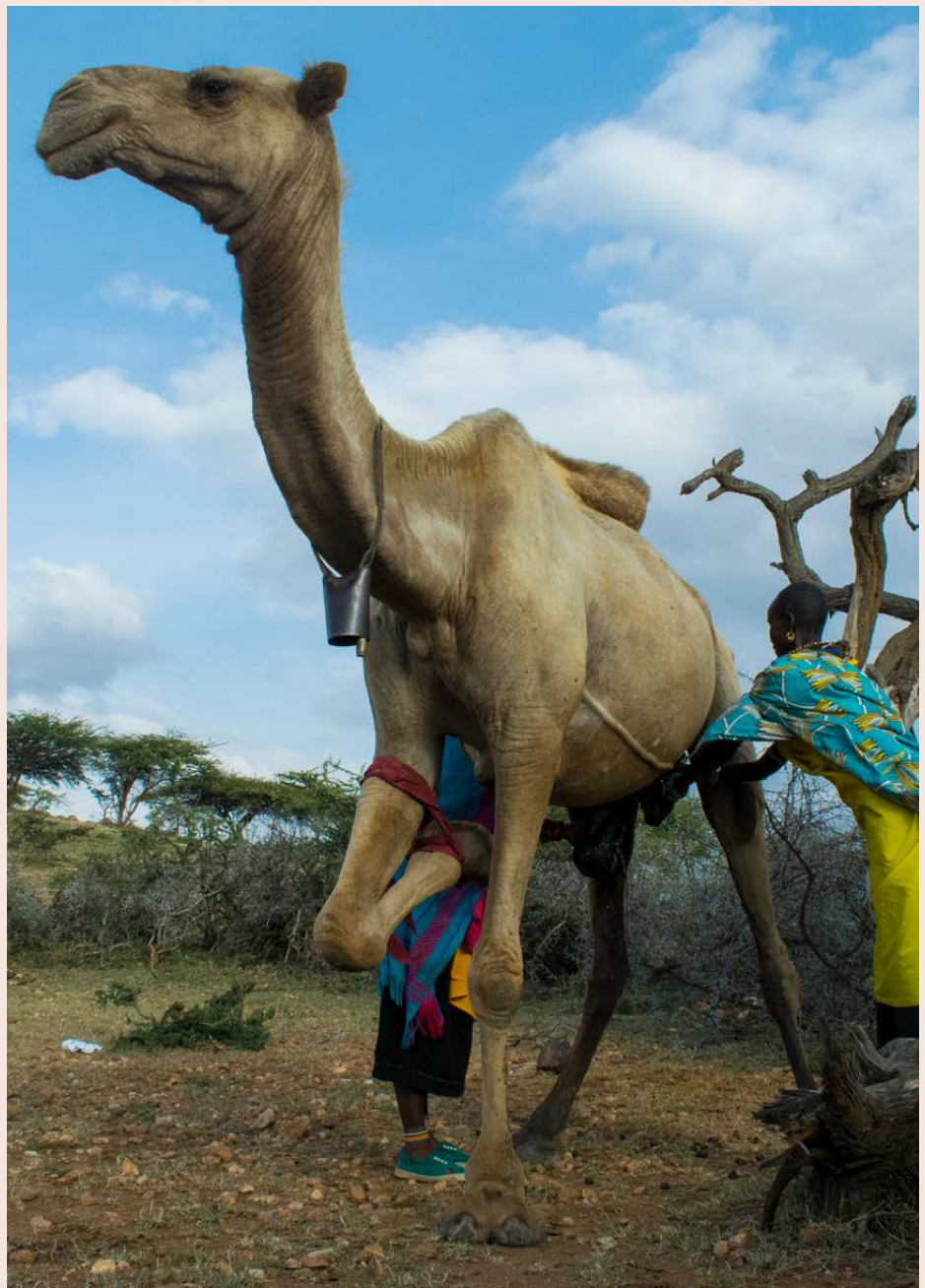
We exist to empower pastoralists' women and girls to claim their human rights, strengthen their capacity to influence local and national policies, and address harmful cultural practices through integrating the role of women as decision-makers in the community.

## 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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## Preamble

Voice Kenya under the Ministry of Netherlands supported Samburu Women Trust, an indigenous women-led that work with pastoralists, hunter gatherers and fish folk communities aiming at amplifying women and girls collective voice through influencing, inclusion and advancement of their rights. The influencing grant gives SWT visibility and tools to advance women and girls agenda using a human right-based approach to address silent harmful cultural practices among the indigenous communities.

For the last 10 years, SWT has walked a risky road of highlighting through documentation, monitoring and reporting the silent harmful cultural practices. The harmful practices in the Samburu community rip a girl's dignity and lower her self-esteem; one of them being what is called "girl

child beading". Our research has become a tool for advocacy to inform various actors and influence change. In 2019 SWT entered into an agreement with Samburu County Government to jointly develop "**anti girl child beading policy**" which is now a **zero draft** – which is a huge milestone and we are proud of the success emanating from resilience!

SWT being a feminist organisation mobilized and organized 15 ethnic indigenous communities between June 28 and 30, 2019 in Isiolo County. It was a platform that provided space for indigenous women to strategize, learn and influence processes by give their unique perspective and views on how to assess and strengthen their collective voice in the upcoming indigenous women regional conference taking place in September, 8-12, 2019 in Nairobi,

Kenya. The platform also kicked off a discussion that would proceed on analyzing their challenges with an aim of developing strategies to influence change towards preparation to Beijing+25 celebrations and make their voice count.

At national and regional level, preliminary discussion is ongoing to review the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA). Indigenous women voices must be heard and their inclusivity in every discussion so that they are felt nationally and regionally. Their collective voice would take stock of achievements of the BPFA and advance preparation and plan for the future discussions. SWT has been in the forefront in these discussions to influence change, within indigenous People's Organization in Kenya and Africa, to develop a roadmap for Beijing+25 review process. These



conversation and discussions will help understand why the Beijing+25 review process is important for indigenous women and enable their collective voices come together to influence the outcome.

In Kenya, women and girls from pastoralists, hunter gatherers and fisher folk communities are more disadvantaged compared to other rural women in Kenya in many aspects mainly due to the cultural and geographical spaces where indigenous women live in. They live in an environment characterized by harsh climatic conditions which at some limits livelihood options, have little or no access to education, hence they are economically dis-empowered for lack of proper infrastructure to access markets. They also lack access to critical public and health services, dwell in areas with high insecurity issues like cattle rustling as well as harmful cultural practices that target girls and women leading to physical and psychological trauma. These vices that thrive are hardly voiced as they are expected to be loyal to their culture and communities by not speaking ill of these practices.

These conversations are aimed at generating discussion and actions by relevant policy makers focusing on gender equality with regards to indigenous

women equity and inclusion at all levels of the county, national and regional governments. Also, the discussion focuses on ensuring that such decisions and policy frameworks integrate a designed thinking aimed at empowering indigenous women and peoples to actively participate in search of solutions to their problems whilst improving the lives of women and girls.

It is anticipated that the conversations will drive new ways of tapping into women's indigenous knowledge to power indigenous women champions. Human right defenders would be empowered with necessary tools they require to reach out to the women and communities they serve. The frameworks developed will not only consider eradicating harmful cultural practices but also a stable and financially secure futures for the indigenous women and girls. Relevant actors will look for insights and tools for social protection programmes in response to indigenous women and girls issues hence catalyze change whilst recognizing that indigenous women and peoples are more than just clients.

*Jane Meriwas*

Executive Director, **SWT**



## Determination in the face of adversity

**Seated in a classroom with other teenage learners, she strikes the pose of an ordinary student. But Mary Longoji is no ordinary student. At 30 years, she is the oldest student at OI Ndonyiro Secondary School. Her two daughters aged 11 and eight are pupils at an adjacent primary school.**

Every evening as her school mates head home to do their homework, she passes by the local market looking for menial jobs so that she can provide supper and breakfast. Hers has been a turbulent journey in her resolve to pursue education and only determination to overcome the odds has seen her reach where she is. Though she is yet to reach the pinnacle of her education journey, she muses at the many hurdles she has had to jump.

The second born in a family of 11, she almost missed joining school 22 years ago when her age mates started the journey of what is considered to be the gateway to a future bright life.

"I was born to a single jobless mother who was not able to enroll us in school. Together with my twin sister, we spent most of our childhood days working as house help and herding neighbours' goats to provide for our younger siblings," Mary recalls.

Eventually they joined school but only for a few years before dropping out due to pregnancy. Men in the village took advantage of the family's poverty and lured the young girls into unprotected sex.

"My twin sister was the first to drop out of school at class five. I also followed her footsteps, dropping out the following year while at class six. Four years later, I became pregnant again and it appeared my fate on ever stepping into a classroom had been sealed," Mary explains.

But the mother of two was more than determined to defy the strong tides that were directing her to a life of hopelessness.

"I reasoned that going back to school was the only avenue available that could at least offer some hope of a future brighter life. I hated to imagine settling down like mum, get half a dozen children and then support them by probably being employed as a bar maid," she says.

In 2014, Mary resolved to rejoin class six after being out of school for seven years. She could not however join her former school where she had enrolled her daughters and went to Rap Primary School where she sat for her primary school education certificate exams in 2016.



However, her hopes of joining OI Donyiro Day Secondary School immediately were dashed since she could not have money for fees or even one more year was wasted at home.

"I remained at home for a year until January when a well wisher offered to buy me uniform and pay part of the fees. But it was not smooth after that and most of the time I could be sent home to collect fees," she recalls.

However, luck smiled her way in 2018 when she got interested and joined her school's mentorship programme, an initiative of Samburu Women Trust (SWT).

"After becoming a member of the mentorship programme, I narrated to the SWT staff the hardships I was going through in my struggle to pursue education. They expressed their desire to support me and paid all my fees balance and up to date, they continue to support me," she says.

For now, Mary is assured that fees will not bother her anymore and is confident that she will get good grades when she sits for KCSE

exam in November 2020. For her courage and determination to overcome the odds, SWT has named Mary an ambassador of change and incorporated her in the programme. Being an ambassador means she will be supported by a stipend to cater for general upkeep.

Previously during evenings and weekends, she could go to OI Donyiro Market in search of menial jobs like washing clothes and cleaning duties to buy food and clothes for her daughters. It was a difficult situation, balancing between class work, working and helping the children with homework.

SWT Executive Director Jane Meriwas said Mary's determination to pursue education despite the hardships is heroic.

"With my fees challenges having been sorted out, I am now confident that one day, my dream of becoming a teacher will be realized. With formal employment, I will be able to support my children and my siblings," she concluded.



## GIRLS KNOWLEDGE SHARING PLATFORMS

Their youthful faces displayed a combination of eagerness and amusement. As they listened keenly to a colleague narrate her experience after a visit to the big city. On this day, the pupils of Kipsing Primary School in Isiolo County had a lot to learn.

The more than 300 pupils had been called to the school's assembly grounds by their headteacher to listen to the "tales from Nairobi" the capital city of Kenya and more so hear what their colleagues saw and learnt during a visit to Kenya's National Assembly.

To the majority of the audience, they had never left their home villages and never seen a tarmacked road or even a tall building, hence the undivided attention they gave to the three speakers on that Wednesday morning.

Once in a while, a pupil standing at the back row could interject the speaker, seeking an explanation or a clarification to a new English vocabulary he or she was hearing for the first time.

"What is a Mace?" a voice called from the back to which the narrator, Mercy Letimaiya, a class eight pupil went to explain.

"A mace is an instrument normally carried by the Sergeant at Arms to the National Assembly as he matches to the debating chamber in the company of the Speaker. This instrument represents the power and authority of Parliament and no debate can proceed in its absence," explained Mercy to the delight of the pupils.

By the time the three girls-Mercy, Everlyne Balosi and Peneso Lengoman were through sharing their experience following the previous week's Nairobi visit, the students had learnt a lot and some of the knowledge would be useful in their class work.

Everlyne's explanation of the storey buildings, some with over 50 floors left the pupils in awe wondering how people got into the top floors.

"Some buildings were so tall and looked like they would fall on us. We were informed there is something called a lift or an elevator that takes you to the top floors," explained Everline.





As this was happening at Kipsing, a similar occasion was taking place at Lengurma, Lebaresharak, OI Donyiro Primary and secondary schools where pupils a total of 24 pupils under the mentorship programme had been selected for the Nairobi tour, intention being to share their learning experience with fellow students.

Mary Deborah, a Form Three student at OI Donyiro Secondary School opted to share her experience with close friends and class mates.

“My classmates were very eager to hear what I saw especially at the National Assembly. As a student who is taking History and Government as a subject, I had a chance to have a firsthand experience on the law making process,” explained Maria.

Teachers who had accompanied the students to Nairobi termed the tour as an eye opener that would greatly assist the learners.

“That was like a practical lesson that gave them an opportunity to witness what they have been reading in books. For instance they saw the most magnificent road in the country- the Thika Super Highway, coffee plantations, the rail line and many other things they had only heard or read about,” said Mary Lekitasharan, a Geography and Business Studies teacher at OI Donyiro Secondary School.

Teacher Mary who was incorporated into the Mentorship programme to nurture the girls in 2018 said many of her students are now courageous, have learnt to speak confidently in public

and some have taken students’ leadership position.

Joyce Lesoito, a parent from OI Donyiro and a vocal advocate on girls’ education rights said mentorship programme has empowered girls to speak confidently whenever efforts are made to subject them to harmful cultural practices such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and early forced marriages.



## Reaping the fruits of mentorship

With her shoulders held high and wearing a broad smile, the young girl walks confidently to pick a well deserved certificate. Stella Letimalo has been named the best disciplined girl in her class, barely five months after joining Consolatta Girls High School in Embu County. She also emerged second top student academically in Form One.



**STELLA LETIMALO**  
Class 8 pupil, Kipsing Primary School

## Class eight pupil a source of

The student who has been accorded the role of a class prefect is one of the more than 70 learners under the mentorship programme initiated by Samburu Women Trust and targeting girls from pastoralist communities.

“I dedicate these certificates to SWT and my supportive parents. Through the mentorship programme, I have managed to overcome the many challenges girls at my age face,” she declares.

At 15 years, Stella is emerging to be a model student and a team leader and is utilizing the skills she learnt through the SWT programme to mentor colleagues at her new school.

“In the short time I have known her; Stella has turned out to be a great mentor. She is a source of encouragement and inspiration to other girls from pastoralist community who face common life challenges,” says Charity Nashami, a classmate to Stella who hails from Marsabit County.

Charity continues: “Being a prefect, Stella reads a Bible verse to us in the mornings and evenings. She

then goes ahead to give an advice, warning that at our age, we girls are very vulnerable and at great risk of falling pregnant or being married off. To avoid such situations, she stresses that we should stand firm and say no, pointing out that we are protected by Children’s Act and hence we have a right to seek protection from the authority.”

The student adds that she has learnt a lot from Stella and has already decided that after secondary school, she would study law so that she can be a child rights advocate back at her home county where she has witnessed young girls being subjected to female cut and forced to get married to elderly men.

For Stella, she attributes the good grades she scored in her KCPE exam at Kipsing Primary School, Isiolo County to the mentorship programme that has moulded her holistically.

“Besides being named the most disciplined student, I emerged third best in business contest, garnering 83 percent. My career path is shaping up but I will continue

sharing what I have learnt from the mentorship programme with my peers so that they can also benefit,” says Stella.

### The Mentorship Programme

Girls from the pastoralist communities are emerging as leaders and influencers within their communities. We have witnessed young under aged girls being denied opportunity to finish school, not able to access reproductive rights , all this occasioned by some cultural beliefs which are deeply entrenched within the social norms.

With support from Voice Kenya, our girls have come out boldly to challenge these myths. They have cultivated confidence and continue to share impact and lessons learnt among peers and engaging leaders in candid talks as well as other girls in the community, all this aimed at bettering the world.

Our Mentees under the girl’s leadership mentorship programme who visited Kenya’s National Assembly (Parliament) had an opportunity to share what they learnt through discussions with fellow students. It was a platform that gave girls an opportunity to interrogate issues through linking and learning process.

The overall objective of the girls’ leadership and mentorship camp is to increase the youngster leadership skills, boost her self-esteem and give her dignity while preparing the girl to take a leadership role in future.

## A step at a time for girl child rights defender

Long before she was identified by Samburu Women Trust to be their change ambassador, Joyce Lesoito was already making influence to her immediate family and in the neighbourhood.

A firm believer in leading by example, the single mother resisted pressure from her mother and siblings to have her teenage daughter subjected to Female Genital Mutilation.

“A few years ago, my mother demanded that it was either my daughter undergoes the rites alongside her age mates or I leave. My daughter had already made up her mind that she would not be subjected to the cut, something that gave me the courage to stand my grounds as I continued to persuade my mother who eventually softened the stand,” explains Joyce.

From that moment, the now emboldened mother embarked on reaching out to other girls, those in school and others who had not been enrolled despite attaining school going age.

“Visiting schools and encouraging the girls to say no to some harmful traditional practices like beading, FGM and early marriages has become my passion. I am now a recognized mentor, speaking to the girls in school and on their way home in the evening,” she says

Her voluntary work was not without challenges. At times she could walk for over ten kilometres in a day from her home in Ol Donyiro, Isiolo County to reach schools that are far from her village.



“Meeting SWT and being included in their girls mentorship programme was a major stride in my endeavours. The little allowance I get monthly enables me to reach out to the affected without worrying where my supper will come from,” says Joyce adding that she still have to walk for long distances owing to unreliable means of transport in from her home village.

In recent times, she has changed tact, opting to address the problem of female cut from the source after realizing that some parents had devised discreet ways of subjecting the girls to the rite even after promising not to do it.

“I recently held a lengthy discussion with a young woman circumciser who inherited the occupation



from her mother. She admitted that she was aware whatever she was doing is criminal but was quick to point out that it was her only means of earning a living,” recalls Joyce.

She explains that this particular circumciser who resides at Labarasherek village has a husband but he is not in support of his wife’s type of business were it not for extreme poverty in the family.

Joyce has also encountered another circumciser at Mlima Chui village, a widow in her late 40s and living with a blind mother. She said she engaged in the practice 14 years ago when her husband died and had to think of ways of supporting her children.

“It is clear the circumcisers are ready to drop their razors for decent job or alternative source of livelihood. These are the approaches Kenya Ant-FGM Board should be exploring and I intend to present the case in their offices,” she avers.

Joyce’s courage to speak boldly against the practice has brought some tangible evidence with girls escaping from the harmful cultural practices to seek refuge in schools.

“Recently in June this year, two girls run away from home to seek assistance at OI Donyiro Primary School. I was alerted and informed SWT who put the girls under a sponsorship and are now in the boarding section of the school,” says Joyce.

She is confident that her efforts and that of other ambassadors of change will go a long way in uplifting the lives of girls from the indigenous communities who are weighed down by harmful cultural practices.

## A New Job For Influential Moran

A lone moran's effort to defend the rights of the Samburu girl child has won recognition from the national government.

Stephen Letooiye, one of the ambassadors of change under the SWT programme has a new feather on his cap; he has been appointed an assistant chief.

The 25-year-old college graduate views his new role as a government administrator as an impetus in his resolve to ensure as many girls abandon harmful cultural practices.

"I am now well positioned to do what I love. Giving the girls the voice to resist FGM and early marriage and instead go to school as per the government policy," says Letooiye who maintains he would still remain an SWT's change ambassador.

He adds: "When I went for the interview for the assistant chief's position, I carried a copy of SWT newsletter where my story had been published, something that greatly impressed my interviewees."

It is a campaign he started five years ago after high school with focus being on his peers-the *morans*.

He had been traversing Naisunyai, Ngutuk-Elmuget, Ngutuk-Engiron, Sasaab, Lempaute and Kiltamany in West Gate Community Conservancy in Samburu East Sub-County.

His approach has been to convince his peers to marry uncut girls and though they have been giving him audience, the major complaint has been scarcity of girls who have not undergone FGM.

"Now my strategy is to ensure as many girls do not undergo this deep-rooted rite of passage so that men who are ready to marry do not give excuses," says the new Ngutuk-Engiron government administrator.

He has already recruited young men and women to be his disciples and is confident that the momentum would not slow down as he settles down in his new role.

He is also reaching out to others interested to volunteers, age notwithstanding and is calling on them to get in touch with him.

"In this campaign, we target all within the community-elders, women, girls and *morans* since for it to succeed, everyone has to own this process of change. It is evident that force will not bring the desired change but only

makes the community continues perpetuate the vice in secrecy," says Letooiye.

The administrator admits that eliminating harmful cultural practices is not an easy task but remains optimistic. He points that his soft approach to the issue will gradually net followers saying it is the most effective way to address the deep-rooted cultural practice that has continued to thrive despite a legislation banning FGM across the country being in force.

He believes education is the surest way to bring that desired change.

"Educating both the boy and the girl child is the most effective route. Education exposes the child to diverse culture and influences the way of thinking and change their perception to life whereby majority of them think it is all about herding livestock, getting married and having children," he concludes.



**STEPHEN LETOOIYE**  
Ambassador of Cultural Change, SWT

### Letooiye, a moran with a mission

He has taken upon himself to influence change from within. Though a college graduate, it is hard to distinguish Stephen Letooiye from his peers. Samburu men are known for their traditional headbands and multiple colorful beaded necklaces.

# Indigenous Women Voices on Post Beijing+25







Promoting peaceful coexistence among various pastoralist communities and preservation of rich cultural heritage were some of the key messages during indigenous women leaders gathering at a village in Isiolo County.

Women from 14 ethnic communities had converged at Memirlosho Women Cultural Village on June 29, 2019 to identify existing gaps in an effort to address the challenges facing Kenya's indigenous woman.

The event which was symbolically held deep in the village was a curtain raiser for the annual indigenous women leaders' conference that would take place two months later.

"We opted for this venue so that we could give an indigenous woman who might not make it to our annual conference in September a chance to raise her concerns on various issues that impedes her empowerment and which will form part of our deliberations," explained Samburu Women Trust Director Jane Meriwas and one of the lead organizers of the conference.

Ms Meriwas noted that as the world prepares to mark 25 years of the Beijing Conference in 2020, there was need to incorporate the voice of the grassroots woman since she is the one directly affected by inequalities and other challenges.

"Women from the pastoralist communities face a myriad of challenges among them being sidelined in leadership positions or decision-making forums, conflicts arising from competition for resources, a changing climate,



harmful cultural practices that adversely affect the girl child among others," said Ms Meriwas.

Failure by the government to conduct timely civic education was also cited as an obstacle towards the well being of the indigenous people with speakers pointing out to the recent introduction of new Kenyan currency notes and the August national census where accurate data might not be captured owing to the migratory nature of the pastoralists.

Under the theme ***Celebrating our Culture and Diversity for Peaceful Coexistence***, the women leaders interacted with the local community as they sought to identify the gaps that stands on the way towards empowering indigenous women to key decision-making platforms at the village, constituency, county and national levels.

The meeting was punctuated by melodious tunes and dances from the various ethnic communities represented as way of celebrating cultural diversity.

But even as the communities celebrated their rich cultural heritage, there was a word of caution to the communities against sticking to outdated practices that impedes the well being of the girl child.

"As we celebrate our rich heritage, let us say a loud no to Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), girl child beading and early forced marriages, discrimination on children living with disabilities and failing to enroll our girls in school. Let us embrace the good culture and discard the bad ones," said Ms Nuria Golo, one of the 11 members at the Indigenous Women Council.

Ms Judy Kipkenda, a representative of the Ogiek community lamented that 16 indigenous languages were facing extinction according to UNESCO.

"Let us teach native languages to our children even in school so that we do not lose our language identity," said Ms Chepkenda noting that her Ogiek language was among those listed as facing extinction.



## Indigenous Women Council (IWC); A Perspective

“The forthcoming African Indigenous Women Conference is an opportunity for us to have a unified voice that will speak for all women across the board regardless of social status. Ours is to take a common position as African women at the Beijing Platform as we count the successes, challenges and gaps”.

**Jane Meriwas, Executive Director,**  
Samburu Women Trust (SWT)

“Climate change is real and indigenous communities are hard hit. We need to learn how to cope with this global phenomenon to reduce its impact on our lives.”

**Eunice Lepariyo, Executive Director**  
Baringo Women and Youth Organization

“In the wake of a changing climate, let us preserve our indigenous knowledge, utilize it in bettering our day to day lives and ensure that knowledge is passed to our future generations.”

**Liban Shoba, Pastoralist Health for Women and Education (PHWE)**

“Pastoralists are affected by conflicts mainly over scarcity of resources mainly pasture and water. As indigenous women, we need to be in the forefront promoting peaceful coexistence since women and children bear the brunt of armed conflict.”

**Grace Lolim, Gender Watch - Isiolo**



“It’s unfortunate that two communities in my own county of Marsabit regard each other as enemies simply because of political interference, competition over land and unequal distribution of resources. My message to them is that we are brothers and sisters and we need to stand up against incitement by political leadership.”

**Nasibo Yattani, Gabra Community - Marsabit**

“Our native languages are dying at a very fast rate. Efforts should be put to conserve it for posterity including teaching the languages in primary schools.”

**Judy Kipkenda, Programme for Heritage of Ogiek and Mother Earth (Prohome)**

“As indigenous people, let us take pride of the rich cultural diversity. But as women, we have to be very vocal all times to condemn harmful cultural practices and particularly those that undermine the well being of the girl child.”

**Nuria Golo, Marsabit Women for Advocate and Development Organization (MWADO)**

“My appeal to the indigenous women is to be vocal while defending the rights of persons living with disabilities and especially children. Discriminating or hiding them makes them vulnerable to societal evils such as sexual attacks. Unfortunately, even when they are preyed on, parents opt to maintain silence.”

**Jacinta Silakan, Executive Director, Sang’ida Foundation**



# Indigenous Women Council (IWC); A Perspective



Monicah Yator is the chair of Indigenous Women Council (IWC) that was formed in 2017 during the annual indigenous women leaders conference held in Nanyuki, Laikipia County. Two years later, we look at the achievements, challenges and what the future portends for this networking alliance that brings together representatives from 15 indigenous ethnic communities comprising of pastoralists and hunter/gatherers.

## What is indigenous Women Council and what was the idea behind its formation?

The council is still in diapers and we thank Samburu Women Trust for bringing the voice of Indigenous women together. The idea behind its formation was to raise the voice of indigenous women. Indigenous women are poorly represented and marginalized economically, socially, politically and in governance.

They are also subjected to various forms of violence, some stemming from cultural and traditional beliefs. We still intend to broaden the representation at the council to bring in more indigenous communities. Some of the communities represented at the council currently include Ilchamus, Eldorois, Ogiek, Sengwer, Yaaku, Pokot, Tugen, Turkana, Borana, Gabra, Wayyu, Samburu, Maasai among others.

## How does IWC execute its mandate?

IWC is more of a stakeholders engagement. Through quarterly meetings, we deliberate on what we can push forward together. One of our objectives is to ensure women are represented in major decision-making bodies both at the county and national level. For instance we have gotten representation at the National Gender Commission and also at the Anti-FGM board. This representation makes us influence some of the decisions that affect the indigenous woman.

Pastoralist Development Network in Kenya (PDNK) is a partner and we work closely with it at the national level especially on fast tracking policies such as on Community Land Act and Climate Change Act which is affecting the indigenous women and girls.

We aim to influence policies affecting girls and the focus currently is on full implementation of the FGM Act.

### **What are some of the challenges that you experience?**

One of our major challenges is on funds mobilization. Our strategy is to have IWC representative implement programmes geared towards empowering women in their respective counties. Currently, we also do not have a coordinator or a central point to run the network since members are engaged in their respective organisations. Another goal which we are yet to achieve is capacity building where we intend to expose them to women movements across Africa.

### **Are there some achievements that IWC can boast of?**

Yes and they are several. One of them is that minority communities are able to speak with one voice. We are now visible at the local, national and international forums. International partners have shown great interest in our network and are keen on supporting our activities. One of the areas we are getting support is on climate change which is affecting our women and we are already doing civic on this with SWT taking the lead, notably on educating them on Community Land Act. Communities are now forming committees to manage their land giving them a voice by forming by-laws hence no investor can encroach on this natural resource without consent.

Another notable achievement is that we now have a say at the Anti-FGM Board where we have a representative. This is a plus for SWT which is working closely with the board and has been carrying out awareness campaigns at the grassroots.

The third achievement is that we have established linkages with Pastoralist Parliamentary Women Caucus and Kenya Advocacy Working Group who have been inviting us to deliberate on various issues.

Fourth milestone is that we have taken women to international forums in the United States as well as those convened by the African Commission where besides learning from others, we are accorded chances to make presentations. IWC members get invitations to conferences on climate change and we shall be making a representation at next year's COP 26.

Last but not least of the gains is on the annual indigenous women conference which is a linking and learning platform. We have had three successful conferences and we are looking forward to the fourth one in a month's time. This year's gathering will have a broad representation from across the African continent where we are expecting to host 17 indigenous communities from North, South, Central, East and West Africa.

### **Could you comment on the Beijing Platform of Action now that we shall be marking 25 years in a year's time from now?**

We are taking the Beijing Platform of Action very seriously and IWC will develop a concept paper that will be shared during the forthcoming conference. It is an opportunity for the world to know there is a council protecting the rights of indigenous people and notably women who are marginalized and affected by a changing climate.

### **What are your plans of action in coming days?**

One of the areas we intend to raise our voice is on Climate Change Act 2016. Our biggest concern is that it does not mention sustainable pastoralism but dwells on climate smart agriculture. Pastoralism is a way of life for majority of the indigenous communities and government need to realize this and support it through a policy.

You notice that pastoralism is about movement of people and their livestock but in recent years this mobility has caused conflicts in Laikipia, Samburu, Isiolo and Turkana and women and children bear the brunt. We intend to address this matter at national and international forums.

Recently, I attended a meeting convened by Africa Food Sovereignty and was able to expound on various ways pastoralism can be sustained. One of them is protecting indigenous livestock breeds that can withstand hardships and adapt to climate change. Secondly is to support the Trans Human Protocol which was brought forward by IGAD and which seeks to allow free movement of pastoralists in Tanzania, Uganda and Ethiopia.

Another area we are going to focus keenly is on seeking inclusion in Climate Change Action Plan where we shall be pushing for indigenous knowledge adaptation to climate change.

tailor the policy framework to local needs by ensuring the policy answers to local questions and dilemmas and is not an imposition from outside the community.

## Samburu County set to unveil policy to curb girl child beading

For example in developing a PP policy, the community must...  
 The constitutional and legal underpinning and authority for...  
 - The functional assignment to the two levels of government - schedule four; counties cant legislate for functions assigned to NG.



Samburu County Government is set to put in place a policy to address one of the entrenched harmful traditional practices that adversely affects the girl child.

A meeting held in Nanyuki Town, Laikipia County in July 2019 and which brought together legal experts, community based organisations, NGOs and senior officials from the Samburu County Government was told that the final document expected to be unveiled early next year.

“A policy is expected to be ready for assent by the governor by January next year. We are hopeful that a policy and a bill to be introduced at the county assembly would effectively address the problem,” said Hon. Irene Senei, CEC member in charge of Gender, Youth and Social Services at the Samburu County Government.

Once in place, the policy would be the first in the country with other devolved units expected to head towards the same direction. Girl child beading is rampant in Samburu, Marsabit and some parts of Isiolo and Laikipia counties.

The practice entails a *moran* giving out special beaded necklace (called *nkerii* in Samburu dialect) to a girl without her consent but with the knowledge of her mother, a gesture that turns



the minor into a “temporary wife” but with no obligation of marrying her.

It is a form of sexual slavery which has thrived for years with no one raising a voice on a subject considered a taboo in the community. It was not until nine years ago when Samburu Women Trust initiated a spirited campaign to end the practice.

“This has been a journey. Along the way we have met resistance from some conservative individuals but never relented. We are happy now that other stakeholders have come on board to support our initiative,” SWT Director Jane Meriwas told the attendants.

Other organizations that have teamed up with SWT and Samburu County Government in formulation of the policy include, Kenya Law Reform Commission (KLRC), African Medical Research Foundation (AMREF), World Vision Kenya, Caritas and Child Fund among other Community Based Organisations.

Legal experts advised that the policy needs to be drafted in such a way that it would effectively address the problem, noting that there exists other legislations and international treaties to protect the girl child from sexually related offences but they have failed to eliminate the vice.

“We have existing legislations such as Sexual Offences Act but our girls continue to be subjected to sexual abuse with the culprits going scot free. In formulating this policy, there is need to involve the community right in the village through public participation,” advised Joan Onyango from KLRC.

The participants agreed that spelling out punitive measures for the offenders in the policy should not be the guiding principal but civic education to the affected and identifying the enablers in minimizing the practice was the way to go.

“High illiteracy levels in parts of Samburu County are some of the contributing factors in girl child beading. The policy needs to identify such gaps and formulate ways of addressing them,” observed Loronyokwe Peinan, a legal adviser at the Samburu County Government.

Putting the beading policy in place was described as timely noting that it comes at a time when hundreds of boys from the Samburu Community are set to undergo initiation to ***moranhood***, a situation that is likely to trigger mass beading on vulnerable girls.



**Raising the  
voices of persons  
with disabilities**





Generally, people living with disabilities face discrimination from the society and at times from their own families. This vice is however more pronounced among the indigenous pastoralist communities, the reason behind Indigenous Women Council's efforts to reverse the trend.

Her weekly work plan involves shuttling between a hospital where she is employed, a home for children living with disabilities and visiting the villages for dialogue sessions with pastoralist women.

Jacinta Silakan sits at the Indigenous Women Council and has a great passion for children with special needs after watching her now grown up autistic son subjected to open discrimination.

"Owing to his condition, my son Sang'ida was never invited to birthday parties and his age mates preferred inviting his younger brother. Out of this unpleasant experience, I resolved to stand with children with disabilities and mothers of such children," says Jacinta.

In December 2017, she founded Sang'ida Home where children with disabilities, mainly from pastoralist communities are housed and provided with nutritional, educational, health and social needs.

Besides the children's home, Jacinta has been in the forefront in advocating for the rights of children and people living with disabilities right from the village, county, national and international levels.

"In 2018, Samburu Women Trust (SWT) forwarded my name for an invitation at the Commission on State of Women (CSW-62) in New York, United States to be

among hundreds of participants drawn from around the world.

This was a timely exposure tour and I learnt a lot which has greatly assisted me in my programmes of supporting people with special needs," she says.

She explains that during the New York Conference, she attended several side events where presentations were made on empowering the indigenous (rural) woman, mitigation on climate change and involvement of the media to highlight success stories of the rural woman.

Back at home Jacinta has focused on economic empowerment on mothers of children with special needs as well as women living with disabilities.

"I have realized that some mothers discriminate their children not out of choice but owing to high levels of poverty. It is therefore not enough to just sensitize these mothers on the need to take care of these special children without first creating a source of revenue," she explains.

"One of our successful programmes initiated after the New York Conference is formation of two women groups where they have opened a joint savings account. Each of the group has saved Ksh 70,000 and now qualify for a loan of Ksh 100,000

from the government's Uwezo Fund," she says.

Jacinta has been inviting experts to train the women on business management top on the list being on making ornaments from beads for local and national market.

At the county and national level, the Sang'ida Foundation director has been engaging elected leaders including Members of County Assembly (MCAs), Governor and MPs notably during the annual 10Km walk where the leaders participate and address the issues on policy implementation.

"It is unfortunate that we have very beautiful policies to support people living with disabilities including reserving five percent of positions for them. But that is not happening and it is an issue IWC is pushing very seriously," says Jacinta.

Her efforts on inclusivity are paying off after a member of Sang'ida Foundation who is living with disability was recently incorporated as a board member at Kiwanja Ndege Special School in Laikipia County.

"Inclusivity for people living with disability is an issue we as IWC will push not only in Laikipia but in all the counties where we have indigenous people," she concludes.

## Stakeholders take on ending Harmful Traditional Practices



Devolvement of Anti-Female Genital Mutilation Board could hold the solution towards elimination of some harmful cultural practices among the indigenous communities.



Statistics released in 2018 by the Anti-FGM Board indicated that female cut is prevalence among the Somali and Samburu communities at 94 percent and 86 percent respectively.

In attendance were chiefs, Samburu County Government officials, church leaders, ambassadors of change under SWT programme, CSOs and youth leaders. It was evident from the sentiments from the stakeholders that little has changed since the Anti-FGM Board was created six years ago and the community remain resistance, adopting new tact to beat the law enforcers.

This was one of the key recommendations during stakeholders consultative meetings aimed at identifying gaps that have remained barriers in the war against vices that inflict girls in pastoralist communities.

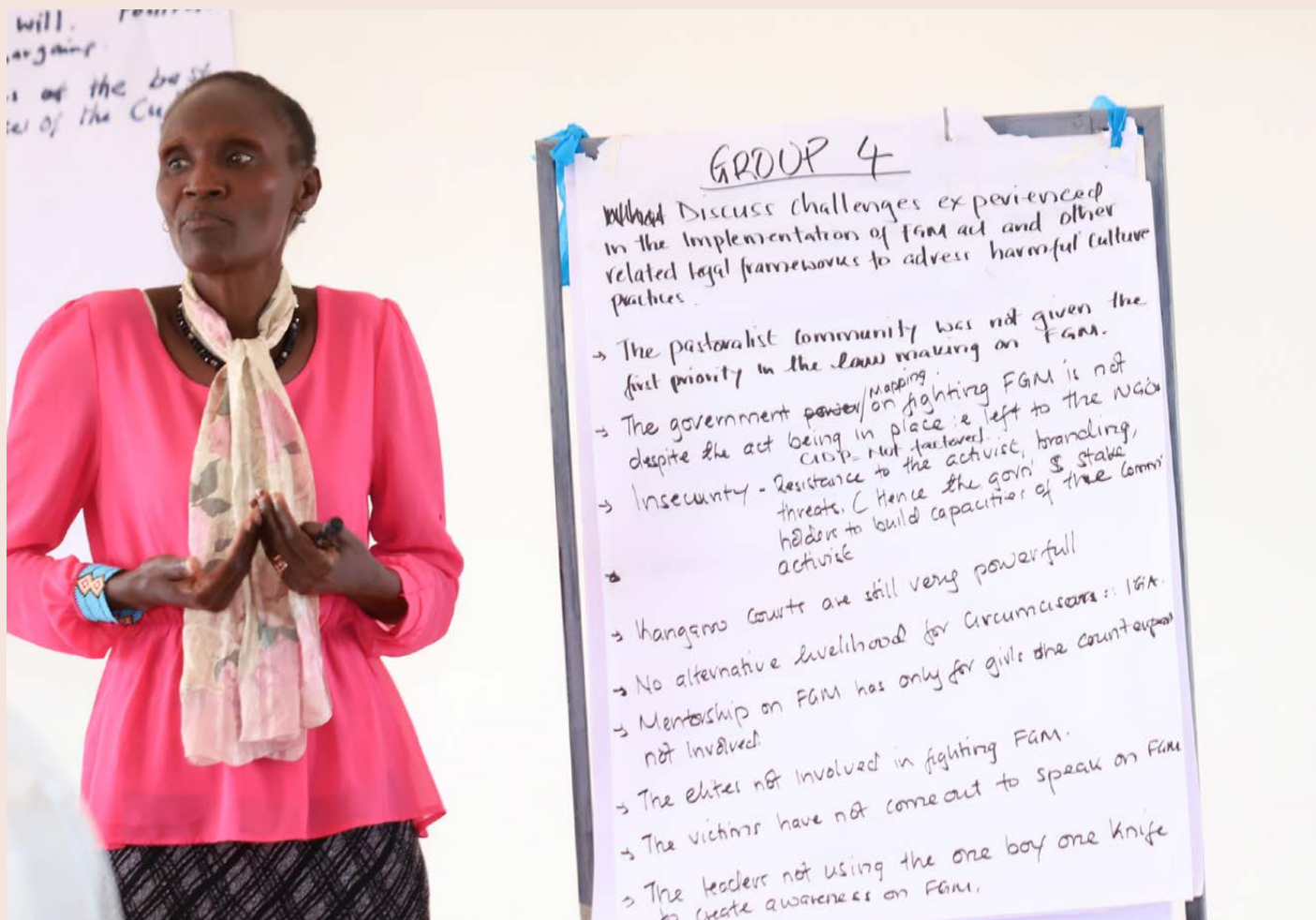
The meeting held at Archers Post Town in Samburu County heard that active participation of the stakeholders at the village level has been lacking, an issue that needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

“Anti-FGM Board’s presence is not being felt at the village or even at the ward level. There is need to have it decentralized to the county’s if tangible results are to be realized, said Christina Namunyak, a village administrator at Waso Ward.

The meeting had been organized by SWT to seek their inputs form various local leaders from Samburu County as to why FGM and other harmful cultural practices are still prevalence despite concerted efforts and CSO’s to eliminate the vices.

“Let us not cheat ourselves that FGM and other harmful practices have been eliminated. Our women and girls continue to suffer in silence while there are agents and organisations whose interventions are hardly felt,” Jane Meriwas, SWT Director told the participants.

Civil Society organizations in collaboration with Samburu County Government were asked to organize a massive civic education to sensitize the community and law enforcers on FGM Act.



campaign should also involve elected women leaders from the region who were accused of not being vocal in condemning harmful cultural practices at the village level for fear of political backlash.

Other recommendations reached at the meeting were:

- Engage the Ministry of Education to include FGM Act as a lesson in the school curriculum
- Engage local leadership and seek political good will, develop strategies to address Harmful Traditional Practices (HTP) in the community.
- Hold mass awareness creation campaigns on enrollment and retention of pupils in schools. This would help in reducing illiteracy levels in the community and gradual change towards abandoning the vices
- Empower age set leaders in the existing cultural structures to be able to address FGM and other HTPs in the community
- Encourage elites and *morans* in the indigenous communities to take lead as role models by marrying uncut girls
- Engagement of parents, circumcisers, bride and the bridegroom and all concerned family members to allow girls to undergo alternative rite of passage without undergoing the physical cut before marriage
- Encourage parents from indigenous communities to take up responsibility as role models to protect their children from being subjected to harmful cultural practices.

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