

THE Indigenos



PEOPLES KNOWLEDGE AND POSTERITY





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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JOSEPH KAIYAI



with valued weapons to help protect their animals from wildlife attacks or external aggressors.

Soaring demand for the metallic items keeps Kaiyai and other members of his clan busy throughout the year.

“This work is hard but rewarding at the same time. Previously we used to exchange one spear with a cow but nowadays we accept cash to the tune of Ksh20,000,” he says.

In recent days Kaiyai has diversified into making bracelets with the name of the client inscribed on it. This he says is to increase his client base outside the Samburu community.

“I now receive orders to make bracelets and mostly during public functions where I display my work. The price of a bracelet is Sh500 a piece,” he explains.

The bracelets are made from recycling alloys which are smelted into liquid. It is then poured on a small trench dug on the ground to cool and acquire the shape of a straight metallic rod. It is from this rod that a client's name is inscribed and cut to size.

Having dropped out of school at class two to look after his father's livestock as is the trend in his community, Kaiyai can combine letters to make words enabling him to write his client's name on the bracelets.

“These skills have been with our forefathers and the items we make will continue to be on demand. I have passed this traditional knowledge to my elder son and his brothers will learn from him,” says the father of six.

HOME BASED SMELTING INDUSTRY THAT HAS STOOD TEST OF TIMES

At his homestead at Naari village, Samburu County, Joseph Kaiyai is working overtime to meet the demands of his many clients. Seated next to a fireplace with an improvised fire blower made from tyre tubes and operated by his assistant, the two are smelting black iron ores in a tin.

After melting, the black stones will produce metal ore to make various items ranging from spears, bracelets, swords, axes and circumcisers' knives.

“We obtain the black stones from Chalbi desert in Marsabit County. After heating it for eight hours nonstop, we are able to extract metal to make various items used by the Samburu Community.

Kaiyai has never attended any school to learn metal work but inherited the skills from his late father who could also make circumcision knife for girls but which has now been abandoned after this cultural practice was outlawed by the government.

“I have been doing this since I was aged ten. I learnt it from observing my father work and over the years, I became an expert,” he says adding that this talent is purely a preserve of men.

Kaiyai comes from the **Lkunono** clan of the Samburu community. While the other eight clans are pastoralists with special attachment to livestock, the **Lkunono** are traditionally blacksmiths, tasked with supplying the community

SOCIAL ASSEMBLY THAT SHAPES COMMUNITY'S DESTINY

It serves as the community parliament, a court and a place of worship. The Samburu central assembly, called Naapo in the local language is a special place where key decisions affecting the community are made by elders.

To a first time visitor, the open ground surrounded by thorny twigs laid in a circular shape might not elicit any interest. But to the locals, it is a revered place and a symbol of unity among different families residing in a *lorora* (a big homestead with family members from same clan).

In the middle of this "parliament" stands a fire place while beside it is a mud-walled hut where valued guests can spend a night. The fire never goes off and is lit by elders using traditional method of applying friction on two sticks from a specific tree (*Ipiroi*). The fire is then shared among the various households that form a particular *lorora*.

Naapo is established where people from different families from one clan reside in a *manyatta* and where several elders meet daily to consult on issues affecting the community. Every family has a representative elder who is charged with collecting information to be disseminated during the evening sitting at the Naapo.

The parliament where one elder plays the role of a Speaker is however biased and is not gender sensitive as women are not allowed into the assembly. It is purely a men's affair.

Whenever the elders feel there is an important issue affecting women, they are called and addressed outside the parliament since they are not allowed to enter the place of worship.



The assembly has strict rules and anyone who dares break them pays a fine. "If one jumps over the wall or a woman enters the parliament, she is fined a sheep which is slaughtered and the elders feast on it," explains one of the elders Mitilon Lemeriwias.

A special Kudu horn - *Mouwo* is kept inside the Naapo. This musical wind instrument is blown by an appointed person to call parliament to order either early in the morning or after sunset. The same instrument is at times blown to produce a different tune as a way of passing a coded message, for instance to announce danger during a raid on the manyatta by cattle rustlers.



MZEE LEMERIWAS

On a normal day, the **mouwo** is blown and elders troop to the assembly with the first agenda being to pray for a peaceful night or to thank the creator for bringing back all the animals safely from the grazing fields in the evening.

Time keeping is strictly observed and an elder who is late has to pay a fine in monetary form which his colleagues at the assembly use to buy sugar for their tea.

Once the prayer session is over, the elders are invited to give feedback/ progress on their families progress, present their grievances if any, misunderstanding or looming conflicts which are then deliberated upon and acted upon.

“This practice of having a central assembly is a continuation from our forefathers. It has been passed through generations and has contributed to promotion of harmony and coexistence,” says Mzee Lemerwas.

He explains further: “If an elder is having issues with his own family, like picking unwarranted fights with his wife or children, this is an issue worth attention of the **Naapo**. The culprit is given a warning and an advice on resolving the matter is prescribed. If he fails to follow the advice, a fine of a goat is imposed”.

Mzee Lemerwas says that over the centuries, this parliament has continued to play a pivotal role in promoting peace, unity and harmony among the indigenous Samburu community and will continue to do so in coming years since this knowledge is passed on to new generations.

TRADITIONAL HEALER TURNS MANYATTA TO A HEALTH CARE CENTRE



ABIGAELENANGULE

On a sunny Wednesday morning Felista Lenakum makes her way to a neighbour's manyatta (traditional Rendile house) for prenatal health care.

She is eight month-pregnant with her fourth child and has come for routine check up from a traditional healer residing in the outskirts of Merille market, Marsabit County.

Indeed, this *manyatta*, owned by a traditional healer - Abigael Lenangule has assumed the status

of a health centre, at times admitting pregnant women for days for a closer monitoring.

Once inside the three-roomed manyatta, Felista is asked to lie on a spread cowhide, her face up. The healer then proceeds to expertly feel and massage her stomach while applying liquid oil on the protruding belly. This exercise lasts for about seven minutes.

By using only her palm and fingers, the healer is able to tell the position of the foetus, identify a problem and fix it on



the spot either through the massage process or by prescribing traditional herbs with an advice either to remain in the manyatta for observation or return a few days later.

"The baby is growing well, is resting in the right position inside the womb and you shall have a normal birth," proclaims the healer to the delight of her patient.

Felista is among more than 30 women who solely rely on services offered in this manyatta to get routine examination and an assurance on the



state of their unborn babies. Some commute for long distances, coming from as far as Isiolo and Samburu and counties.

"I first came here eight years ago when I accidentally fell from my house which I was constructing. I felt a sharp pain in my lower abdomen and when I visited a hospital in Isiolo, I was asked to first undergo an ultra sound test but did not have enough money. I came back here and sought help from Abigael since I know she does not demand money from her patients.

Once inside her manyatta, she took me through a massage process and after a few minutes, she announced that she had managed to reposition the baby inside the womb. A few weeks later, I delivered my firstborn son at home without any complications," explains Felista.

She adds: "Since then, I made it a routine to be visiting her whenever I am pregnant. One time I had complication arising from delayed placenta and she gave me some herbal remedy and it worked."

High level of poverty, traditional beliefs and inaccessibility to health facilities has encouraged women in the expansive Marsabit County to depend on traditional healers and traditional birth attendants.

Those in need have found solace in Abigael's traditional healing skills who besides attending to pregnancy cases also deal with limb fractures.

"They prefer my "clinic" since I do not charge them any fee. Those who can afford appreciate in kind or cash out of their own volition but for those without anything to give out, I provide my services free of charge," says Abigael adding that majority of her patients come from the neighbourhood.

She says she did not inherit the skills from anyone but started after experiencing complications on her first pregnancy and since there were no health facilities nearby then, opted for self treatment using locally available herbs.

"On my first pregnancy, I accidentally fell from a tree and I suspected this had affected my womb in that the baby remained unborn past the normal nine months. I resorted to self massage and trying to feel the baby and repositioning it and eventually delivered though the placenta came out in pieces prompting me to make and apply herbal remedy," recalls Abigael adding that she experienced a similar problem during her second pregnancy.

From these two occurrences, word spread across the village and since then, expectant mothers who experience problems before birth or immediately after birth have continued to seek this form of non-conventional treatment.

Once she identifies complicated problems like when a baby dies inside the womb or the baby has some of disabilities, she refers the patient to a medical doctor.

Abigael, 45, and a mother of seven has been training young women in the neighbourhood to carry on her skills and is optimistic that out of the several who have shown interest, one or two will follow her footsteps.

Through her skills and expertise in this traditional knowledge, she has been recognized by the county government of Marsabit as a traditional birth attendant and is provided with basic birth attendant's equipment like the scalpel blades, cotton wool and gloves.

Samburu Women Trust has also extended its support to help her perform her job well though still requires further assistance.

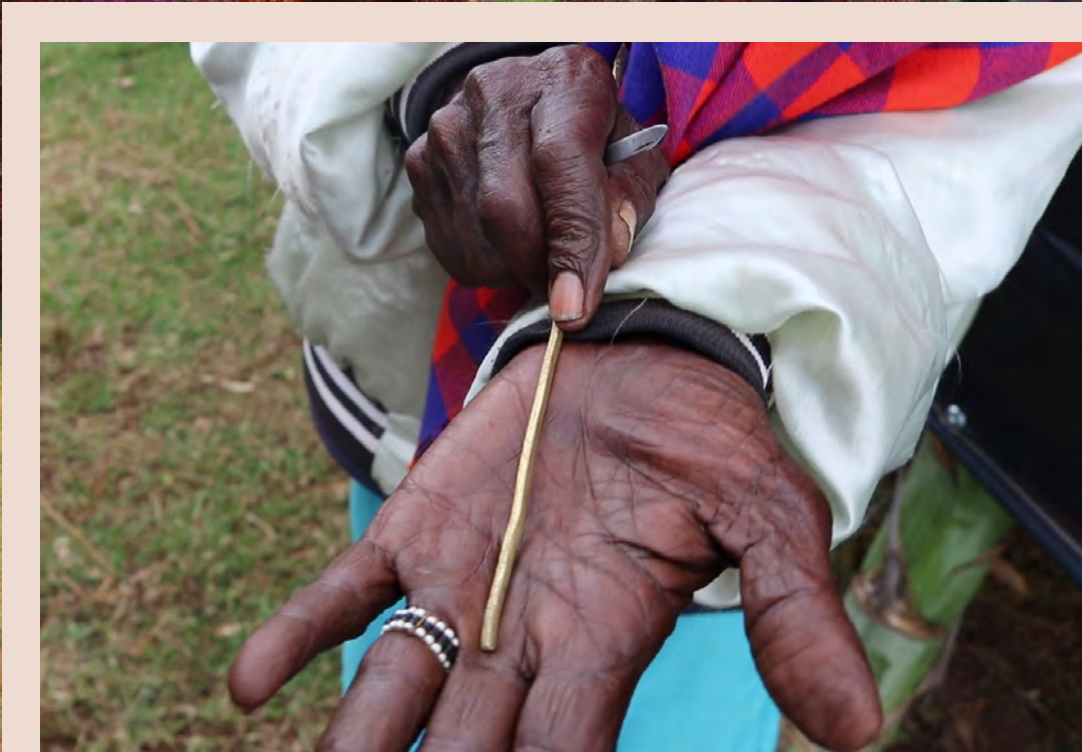
Her major concern at the moment is lack of a consultation room for the increasing list of her patients. She has been utilizing her small manyatta which she shares with her children and two grand children into a dispensary.

Another challenge arises when patients come with complicated cases that require admission and closer observation.

Some spend weeks and in such a situation Abigael has to provide food, other basic needs and herbal remedy at times without pays.



MZEE LEKUNGWANI



TRADITION SURGEON USING HERBS TO BEAT CANCER +

At his advanced age, Mzee Lekungwani from Samburu County continues to use herbs in treating patients one of the dreaded diseases - cancer.

His healing skills have been recognized by the Samburu County Government and is frequently invited during cultural activities to showcase his skills. One time, some few years back Wamba Mission Hospital provided him with a consultation/surgery room.

He narrates his own story...

"My name is Lojulunjoo Lekungwani and resides at Locho, Lodokejek Ward in Samburu County. My work is to treat bone and skin cancer (nayengi) and for several years now I have successfully treated more than 150 people.

I use a special thin metal rod to measure the extent of the disease and then follow the infection using my special knife that I strictly use for surgery work. Cancer has its own root in the human body and is easy to locate from the point of infection. I use the knife to remove the infected parts and then apply a herbal remedy to cure the disease.

All the patients I have attended to over the years have been healed but as I stated, I do not attend to stomach, brain or other types of cancer; I specialize mainly on bone and skin infection.

Those I have treated hail from Lorukoti, Lodokejek in Samburu County, Kipsing in Isolo County and some from Laikipia County but cannot recall the particular village.

My clients are of both gender and varying ages including two pupils from Lokodejek Primary School. My fee is a cow, regardless of the type of cancer or the degree of infection.

I have also treated a woman from Lengewa family who was suffering from breast cancer. Her infected breast healed and even gave birth and breastfed the baby.

The major problem on cancer treatment is that many people do not seek treatment early and wait for the disease to spread in the body. Nevertheless, I apply my skills and follow the infection simply because it spreads like the roots of a tree. Flesh and blood on infected parts of the body tend to change colour and turns black like a cooking pot that is the part I systematically remove until I get to a point where the blood and flesh have normal colours.

It is a painful process for the patient since I do not anaesthetize them during this operation and the herbal

remedy is so strong and patients scream loudly. It takes two to three days to complete the process since at times the pain is unbearable and the patients request time to relax.

The only conventional medical substance I apply is surgical spirit which I came to know about it at Wamba Mission Hospital where I was based for several months on invitation by the then hospital director ... a Dr Pirandon.

At the hospital, I had been given a room where I could attend to cancer patients and remained there for a while before the foreign doctor left the country. At the hospital, patients were given options to have their limbs amputated or try my healing formula. A few months before the doctor flew out of the country, he requested me to teach him my cancer healing skills but there we could not overcome language barrier since I only speak Samburu language.

My skills on cancer treatment are God given and nobody trained but I have a wide knowledge on herbal remedies. My first patient was an elder from Lenkupae family who resides in Nolmotuo village. He approached me about 20 years ago and told me he had bone cancer. I operated on him and he is alive today and in good health.

Now that I am getting old, I have tried to pass on the skills to several people who are not necessarily my relatives but a number of them are afraid of blood - they do not have the courage to operate a human being as he is watching.

Some cannot even assist me by holding a patient's leg or hand as I conduct the surgery and take to their heels the moment I begin. There is another elder who has similar skills like me but in recent years he has become a heavy alcohol drinker such that patients can no longer trust him with an operation."



ROARING HOLY ROCK THAT OFFER SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE

A few kilometres from Merille Market, Marsabit County stands one of the most revered natural features among the Rendille community - the Moilie hill. Standing majestically a short distance from the Isiolo-Marsabit Highway, the huge rocky hill with no vegetation cover has been a place of worship for many generations.

Locals refer to it as Mount Moilie and it is here that women and elders have been trooping once in a while to offer sacrifices and beseech the creator in times of calamities such as prolonged hunger or during war time.

The hill unites various faiths from traditionalists to followers of modern religion, driven by one purpose-that of speaking to the almighty creator while stepping on a holy place.

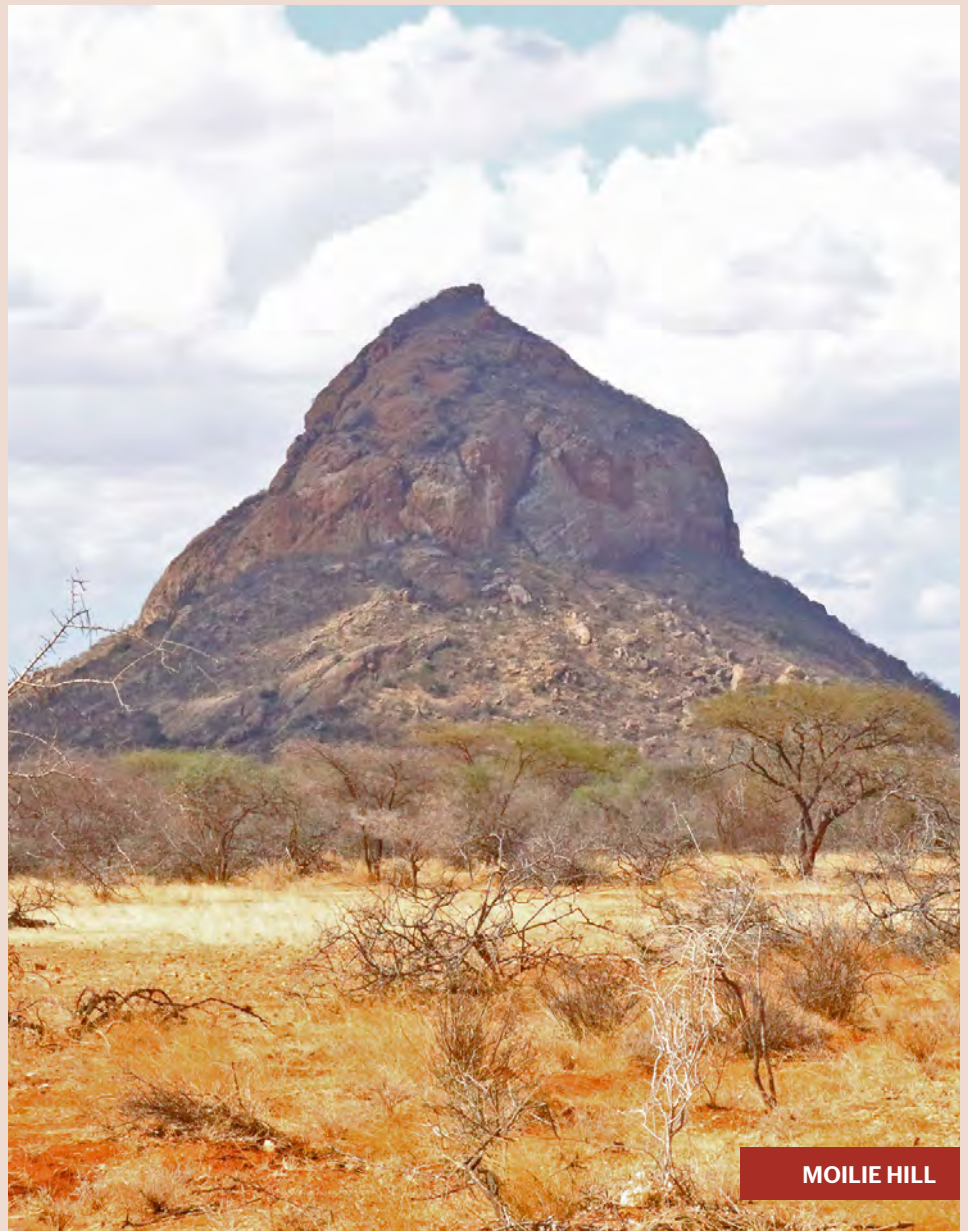
"I was born here and since my childhood have known this as a holy place of worship. Women have been climbing up the hill, spending days praying and offering sacrifice in form of milk asking God for peace and prosperity," says Halima Ngolei.

Halima, a Muslim lady confesses the presence of some mystic powers on this protruding giant rock that has stood here for ages.

"At times a roaring sound is heard emanating from the rock and when this happens, the local community translates this to mean the rock is speaking, calling them to worship.



HALIMA NGOLEI



MOILIE HILL

Elders prepare to visit and slaughter a goat for sacrifice,” explains Halima.

She has witnessed women from Merille, Laisamis, Kamotonyi, Loitolio and Nairibi make visits, at times walking for seven days to the mountain where they pour milk from special gourds at particular places up the hill.

Blood from slaughtered goat, a ceremony conducted by elders is poured at selected points as a sign of sacrifice to appease the creator (**Wakh**). During prolonged drought, elders and women spend lengthy hours on top of the hill, under

scorching sun reciting prayers, fasting and calling for rains.

Many are the times when prayers for rain are answered, giving relief to the pastoralist community that migrate to far off places in search of pasture and water for their livestock.

Catholic followers have also chosen Moilie Hill as a place for worship and frequently camp there for days, fasting and praying.

Halima explains that there is a cross-the most important Christian symbol on top of this rock and which was fixed by white missionaries many decades ago.

The importance of this natural feature that stands in an upright position as if guarding the community from perceived enemies is bound to linger on for many years to come. The information on its relevance to the community’s spiritual well being continues to be passed from generation to generations.



Teaching youngsters through story telling



BAN LESANGURIKURI

Every evening when the goats are safely secured in their pens, children gather inside the manyatta of Naputaki Leparmarai at Kililio village, Isiolo County.

On this night illuminated by a full moon, the youngsters have come to listen to folktales from a granny, a tradition that has been practiced by the Samburu community for ages.



NAPUTAKI LEPARMARAI

In this village with no television or radio sets, these exciting stories narrated by elderly women (*nkoko* in the local language) fills the entertainment gap. Before trooping to this manyatta, the kids had been playing various games under the moonlight.

But of most important are the lessons the youngsters learn by relating the folktales they hear to present day lifestyle.

“Some of the stories help in instilling good morals on the growing minds of the children. For instance there is a famous



folktale of a greedy hyena that wanted all food but ended up getting nothing eventually. Once narrated, the children realize the price of greed and selfishness,” explains Naputaki, Nkoko adding that each story comes with a moral lesson.

Most of the stories are based on animals, both domestic and wild animals many of the children might have come across. The stories have been passed on orally through generations and the children are also expected to pass them on in their late stage of life. Some of the stories are spiced up with songs that the children recite, thus making them easily stick to their minds.

“Some folktales are meant to teach the children the importance of livestock to the pastoralist community. For instance, some of the stories explain how a sheep or a goat’s soup is mixed with herbs to treat some,” says Naputaki.

The folktales are based on events that happened long time ago, imaginary or real when animals could speak like human beings but the narrator makes every occurrence relevant to present day life.

However, not all elderly women are gifted in the art of storytelling like Naputaki. Similarly it is expected

that though they may learn vital life lessons, not all the children will remember the narration in their sunset years to pass it on to their grandchildren. Story telling abilities is a preserve of a few but some families are known to be talented in this art.

An elder from the same village Ban Lesangurikuri explains that folktales has been part of Samburu community’s life and would continue to be so in coming years.

“Folktales match our lifestyle and is not something that should be forgotten in our culture. We cannot do without storytelling because it helps in mind development of our children and make them have a good perspective and understanding of issues even when in school,” says Ban.

***He adds* “Through folktales, small children learn how to speak and pronounce certain vernacular words, therefore, telling stories to is an essential component in a child’s growth.**



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