

by Dr. Larry Loewen-Rudgers

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From October 16 to October 20 I had the privilege of visiting the work of Sauti Moja Marsabit (SMM) with Tim Wright and many of the SMM staff members both on the more moist Marsabit Mountain and drier surrounding lowlands in north central Kenya. We interviewed eight single women parent beneficiaries as well as a group of beneficiaries in five of the 21 community livestock banks (CLBs), witnessed reproductive health education by two SMM staff members of primary school girls in Badasa (one of two 'peace project CLBs/villages'). I also sat in on an all-day meeting of about eight SMM staff members - a meeting to discuss the successful conclusion by end of April 2016 of the first phase of the ERDO/CFGB (1000 Widows) Project as well as the first of several meetings to plan the second phase of the Project. I was very impressed with the "development" competency of SMM staff members as well as the great understanding of facilitators as well as beneficiaries of the "development process". And, of course I was impressed by the increasing quality of life of CLB beneficiaries as well as the relative peace brought about by the Badasa (Borana)-Songa (Rendille) "peace project". See the photo at the end of this report of Tado in Badasa with her donkey "Nagela" (Peaceful in Borana).

Sauti Moja Marsabit is determined and is succeeding in carrying out "development" in a different way than other usually larger NGOs/CBOs leading to bottom up, community owned sustainable development and keeping a low profile- SMM vehicles are known not as SMM vehicles but rather as "widow cars" or "camel cars". And, people say that SMM is the only development organization that is in it for the long term, whereas, other CBOs/NGOs come to visit and carry out needs assessments rarely reporting back to communities and only helping for a year or two, if at all. I would like to elaborate on those projects I witnessed- 1000 Widows, reproductive health instruction by SMM staff in primary schools and the Child Mother Project. Each of between 500 and 600 widows have received either four female goats and one donkey in wetter areas on the lower slopes of the mountain or one camel in the dry lowlands. It is estimated that with pass on of female progeny even without a phase two, 1500 widows could be helped in three to four years. In Badasa of the Badasa-Songa peace project one beneficiary said the Borana and Rendille used to fight but now since SMM came they live in peace. Recently some Rendille stole goats from the Borana but it is expected that the problem will be sorted out by leaders from both ethnic groups, mainly as a result of the Peace Project. And then there is in Badasa a donkey named "Peaceful".

Also, in the Badasa Primary School the classroom of girls in their early teens learning reproductive health from SMM staff members was filled to capacity and still more girls continue to join the course. Teachers at the school used to be sceptical of the reproductive health classes but now are very supportive and indicate that this is the only such education the teenage girls receive. It is not part of the government curriculum.

In Kamboe just north of Logo Logo in the lowlands southwest of Marsabit Town we had the privilege of meeting the soon pass-on recipient of a female camel AND her camel's donor. The donor single mother has been providing animal husbandry advice as well as milk for the

recipient's five children. Kamboe is a new CLB village. Of the 20 camels to be received by single women with children, two camels are pass-ons. In the round-one village of Logo Logo, five female camels have been passed on! (There are at least two years between camel births.) Also, in Kamboe, I met Grace Kochale in her successful tailor shop. After SM helped with her schooling, SM sent her to a tailoring course and gifted her a Singer sewing machine.

Thus, in general the work of SMM is going well. But, there are many challenges. The ever increasing frequency of drought as well as predators such as hyenas and leopards have caused the deaths of many goats and some donkeys. Drought necessitates giving much food aid also by ERDO or ERDO/CFGB, particularly in this relatively early stage of the Project. Ideally as the numbers of livestock owned by vulnerable single mothers increase in the next five to ten years, the need for food aid will decrease considerably.

Once again I would like to emphasize not only the great competence of the SMM staff members but also their tremendous commitment and humble, servanthood approach to on-the-ground empowerment of the most vulnerable pastoralists on and around Marsabit Mountain.



Tado in Badasa with her donkey she has named 'Nagela' meaning 'Peaceful'.