



Update: Jul-Dec 2007

This was the period in which we were able to bask in the glow of Sauti Moja's first year. We not only felt the satisfaction of success, but also a sense of relief – so many unknowns that could have interfered with our stewardship of donor resources. The successes are a testimony to the dedicated and highly-competent volunteers, as well as to the commitment of the communities that we work with. During the past few months, we have continued the projects initiated last year, but focused on a sound start for new ones. Hopefully, this update will interest and encourage you, as well as potential donors. *If you like it, please pass it on to others!* With increased financial support, we could expand our program to help more marginalized people.

Feature (Longido Early Childhood Education - LECHE)

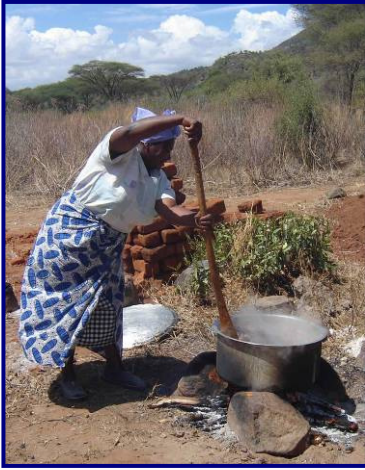


Our Annual Report, which is linked to our homepage (www.sautimoja.org) provided an introduction to a new project that we are supporting. Briefly, indigenous children from rural communities - in this case, Maasai - are often disadvantaged upon entering the school system, which usually leads to poor performance and early dropout. This perpetuates a cycle of marginalization, as too few Maasai are qualified for positions of power that influence provision of government services, such as health, education and agriculture, to their communities. Sara Mollelian, a retired Maasai teacher, returned to her home in Longido, Tanzania with a vision for reversing this cycle of early school dropout and continued marginalization by providing a better educational and nutritional start for children. Last year, she started a pre-school in Longido, and sought Sauti Moja's assistance for that and for a new school in Oltepesi. The community demonstrated commitment, so together, we established the "Longido Early Childhood Education" (LECHE) project for marginalized Maasai communities.

We are pleased to report on recent progress and community commitment:

1. **Nevada Learning Series:** We were pleased to be approached by this Canadian supplier of educational materials for computer software, and they have made a corporate commitment to support LECHE, thereby contributing to healthy early childhood development, increased success rates at school, and stronger Maasai communities. This fits the Sauti Moja criteria for an Umoja Initiative, ie. this community development project has a dedicated sponsor with a long-term commitment to partnership with a rural community. Sauti Moja facilitates this, and supports building understanding and relationship between the donor and beneficiary community.
2. **Graduation:** In December, the first three children from LECHE's Longido School reached the age for mandatory entrance to primary school. They received certificates at a community ceremony attended by community and religious leaders, a member of parliament, and government officials. In addition to honouring and encouraging the children, this ceremony raised awareness of how LECHE contributes to the well-being of children, and hopefully, will translate into greater government support for early childhood development initiatives in Maasai communities.
3. **Oltepesi School construction:** Last year, the children met under an acacia tree. This year, the community has constructed, with the financial assistance of Sauti Moja donors, an 'airy' classroom with concrete floor. As shown, roof and walls are made from locally-available materials, and thatching is nearing completion. The new school year will begin in this classroom at the end of January.





4. **Teacher dedication:** In addition to the vision and dedication of Sara, the founder, Sauti Moja recognizes and applauds the other teachers' and teaching assistants' dedication. They not only walk several kilometers to-and-from school each day, but also purchase and transport food from the market, haul water and firewood to the school, and prepare meals for the children. The staff models volunteerism and commitment to community, as they receive only \$70 per month for this service
5. **Spirit of Umoja (Unity):** Last year, school fees were about \$5/mo, but only some could pay that amount; some families paid less, and some, nothing. In a school meeting, parents decided that none of the children should be chased from school for lack of money, but that fees should remain the same. These parents decided that families would pay according to their ability. This spirit is something that most communities have lost – “From each according to his ability; to each according to his need”. The relatively poor community of Longido is a positive model for we who are so individualistic.

Other Activities and Progress

- The Board of Trustees met in September, when they reviewed projects and provided direction. A key decision was to retain our current focus on Marsabit District of Kenya and Longido District of Longido, areas where we know and are known by the pastoralist communities. Expansion of the program to include LECHE and a Child Mother in Longido was approved. In addition, we are providing a small grant to local agency to investigate collaboration on a new project that supports self-sufficiency for 50+ widows in Logologo, a community in the Kaisut Desert of Marsabit District.
- Tim made a monitoring visit to Marsabit, where he visited the beneficiaries of the Child Mother project. He was pleased that most of the girls who have established small businesses, such as Godan, who is shown here and buys and sells sheep and goats, are doing well. Three child mothers whose businesses are not sustainable, due to new competition, will be assisted to diversify or transfer their assets to another enterprise. Plans were made to enroll several more child mothers - some as young as 13 - into school or help them establish a small business.
- While there, Tim was pleased to hear praise from both beneficiary communities and development personnel of other agencies. The donkey and goat support for widows has been exemplary and is assisting the poorest of the poor. Plans were made to expand the re-stocking activities – camels, donkeys and goats - to benefit more widows' families.
- The Community Conversation component of the HIV/AIDS Project has continued to raise awareness and mobilize communities around this pandemic. Specifically, a deeper understanding of the epidemic has been developed, and community members are critically evaluating and debating policies and practices; villagers are enacting policies that reduce vulnerability of women and girls; customs that facilitate the spread of HIV/AIDS are being challenged; community members have begun voluntary testing for HIV; counselors are being mobilized and volunteering their time at the local clinic; and some women are volunteering to provide home-based care for those living with HIV/AIDS.
- The Child Mother Project in Longido has been initiated with a three-year financial commitment of \$10,000/yr from a private donor and her friends. Renovation of facilities for short-term stay of pregnant girls, who have been chased from school, are nearing completion. A counselor has been hired, and she will support these girls to experience healthy pregnancy and delivery, conduct family mediation to avoid forced early marriage, provide life skills education, and lead advocacy activities that enable child mothers to return to school.

