

BIOVISION

Newsletter Nr. 23

Life with Drought

Climate out of control
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A future for all, naturally

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For a few years the rains in East Africa have taken too long to appear, which leads to destructive periods of drought. Torrential rain often follows the drought. Both have grave consequences for people and their animals. Photo: Flurina Wartmann / Biovision



DRASTIC EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE IN EAST AFRICA:

For millions of men and women farmers in East Africa, climate change has serious consequences: they can no longer depend on regular rainy and dry seasons as they did previously. The people of the semi-arid areas of northern and eastern Kenya are particularly affected by the change in climate.

By Rudolf K ng

Title picture:

Camel milk for people in the semi-arid areas of East Africa

Photo: Flurina Wartmann / Biovision

Mount Kenya presides majestically over the landscape in the heart of Kenya, 300 kilometres north of Nairobi. You do however, need a bit of luck to see its peak and flanks of snow. For one thing, the more and more of the n v  is melting away, and for another, the mountain reaches 5200 metres above sea level and is often shrouded in cloud. Mt. Kenya is sacred to the inhabitants of the region, as its name Kiri nyag, holy mountain, reveals. The forest-covered flanks of the mountain are a nature protection area. The contrast between the virgin forest and the semi-arid, water-scarce and desert-like areas of Laikipia, from which Mt. Kenya looms, is stark. The contrast is even greater with the dry regions that stretch out endlessly to the north and east. In early 2006, a heavy drought reigned in Laikipia. The cattle of the Maasai, Samburu and Borana found only dry leaves to eat on the desiccated earth of the common pasture. Many cows, goats and sheep died. Only private large farmers still had grazing pastures, thanks to irrigation, which shows that not all livestock owners were affected by the drought to the same degree. Since colonial times, common free pastureland in Kenya has been continuously re-

duced and is therefore no longer sufficient for the large number of nomadic inhabitants and their animals. They had no other choice than to drive their herds into the Mt. Kenya conservation area, explains Tesa Kafaro, an old Maasai man with deep lines in his face and large holes in his earlobes. The government granted them an emergency exemption, but the conditions in the forest, 2700 metres above sea level, were bad for lowland animals. They fell victim to diseases that their keepers did not know, and many cattle died from the cold. The government tried to persuade the Maasai and other livestock keepers to sell their cattle, as long as they were still healthy. But they hesitated. Cattle are not just a material way of life, they are a source of pride and have intangible value.

From drought crisis to drought crisis

The 2006 crisis in Kenya was severe. Prof. Francis Lelo of Egerton University in Nairobi said at the time that he could not remember a period in which so many people were so seriously affected by drought. But just a year later another drought began that lasted two years and was recognised as one of the worst in

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LEARNING FROM MISTAKES

The advantages of keeping camels in the semi-arid areas of Kenya have been recognised by Biovision for years. Between 2003 and 2008, first experiences were gathered in project “Cabesi”, together with the semi-nomadic Pokot, and some results were disappointing. The camel was not really accepted as a beast of burden by the Pokot and the animals were kept at large. Yet in 2011, Biovision got on board with a camel project in the Eastern Province, northeast of Mt. Kenya. Due to experiences in Pokot, Biovision is now focussed strongly on training and supervision of the people involved (page 4).

Kenya’s history. Rivers that previously burst with water year round, dried out. And not two years later, 2011, another catastrophic drought threatens East Africa.

Global warming has changed the weather in Kenya. But Kenya’s population have contributed to this too. People cut down many trees for firewood and continue to do so. What else can they do, they have no choice. Just 7 percent of Kenya’s land area is still covered by forest, and the deforestation continues. There are greater extremes of weather, says Amanda Perrett (50), who has been raising cattle, goats, sheep and camels on the family farm at Rumuruti in Laikipia since childhood. It gets hotter and colder than before. The rainy seasons are no longer regular, whereas before, you could say exactly when they would arrive. This is very hard for crop farmers, but it is also difficult for the cattle breeders. 300 kilometres east, Abdi Gorane, 66 year old chief of an Kenyan Somali clan, reached the same conclusion. All of his cows died during the 2007 – 2009 drought. Of his over fifty strong camel herd, only seven survived.

Camels are more resistant to crises

Camels; more specifically, Dromedaries, cope with drought better than cattle. Zakaria Farah from Somalia, who has been researching camels for over 20 years as a lecturer at ETH, confirms this. Camels are more economical and give more milk than cows in semi-arid areas. Their meat tastes good and one can use them to transport goods. Camels have become more widespread in East Africa, farther south than before and to Uganda in the west. That this has only happened



In Pokot (west Kenya) Biovision gathered initial results in promoting camel husbandry in semi-arid areas.
Photo: Biovision / Andreas Schriber

ned in the recent past is partially due to an earlier ban by British colonizers on keeping camels south of the Equator – this is why the Perrett family farm, where they have bred camels for three generations, is a little north of the Equator. Amanda Perrett says her father was the first to keep camels here, now most of the farmers in the area keep them. You can now observe camels working as draft animals, ploughing the fields, but so far only on the Perrett farm.

Ruedi K ng is Africa expert at InfoAfrica.ch



Camels are much more resistant to drought than cattle, and their soft soles help conserve delicate soil. Photo: Flurina Wartmann / Biovision

A NEW STRATEGY FOR KENYA'S HERDERS:

Camels not cattle

In the semi-arid areas of Kenya, water and feed for animals are becoming harder to find as a result of climate change. This is true in Merti, 200 kilometres northeast of Mt. Kenya. During recent years, the people there have lost their cattle as the rains often did not come and watering holes were inaccessible for the animals. Since then the people are dependent on food aid.

Robust, economical and soil compacting

In 2010, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation financed the launch of a camel project to find a sustainable solution. Camels are adapted to the difficult local conditions. They can go for ten days without water and if necessary can survive on leaves from thorny shrubs. Their soft soles do not damage delicate soil, and they provide milk, meat and leather.

“Vets Without Borders – Switzerland”, with long experience in projects on cattle and camel husbandry, took over execution of the project. The people of Merti were supported by the establishment of a Camel Committee, which determined as a first step especially disadvantaged people such as widows or parents with many children, who received a female camel provided by DEZA as a long term investment, and 5 goats to immediately combat the crisis. The recipients made a financial contribution of around 30 000 Kenyan shillings (30 Swiss francs).

Rebuilding lost knowledge

About 80 years ago, people in the project area knew about camel husbandry, but since then the knowledge and experience in handling these animals has been lost. To close the gap in knowledge, Biovision joined the project in 2011 and financed additional training for ten local vets in camel husbandry, creation of teaching materials and practical courses for camel owners. Camel owners are now learning how to handle the animals, species-appropriate welfare, how to recognise diseases and simple treatment methods. Biovision is also supporting Kenyan scientists in testing if camel husbandry will deliver in the long term what is expected: Improved food security, creation of new sources of income and conservative use of land threatened by erosion.

In a Biovision-supported project in north eastern Kenya, particularly disadvantaged people receive a female camel and five goats at a price affordable for them. Photo: Flurina Wartmann / Biovision





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The women of the “Rural Women Development Association” in Kigio (Uganda) are educated in organic farming and taught about their rights. Josephine Neumbe, widow and mother of 4 children, is a member of the association.
Photo: Flurina Wartmann / Biovision

FIRST STEPS TO IMPROVEMENT: **Who dares, wins**

The women and girls of the Kayunga District in Uganda have a tough time. Despite hard work they often live on the brink of poverty on their small family farms. The girls are usually married off at 16 years old at the oldest, the women farmers have little say in society and domestic violence is commonplace. Rural harvests are small and there is not enough food or income. The main reasons for this are decreasing soil fertility, irregular rainfall and plant pests.

In summer 2010, the women of the ‘Rural Women Development Association’ (RWDA) plucked up their courage, got access to the internet and came upon the Biovision website. Their application for over 5000 dollars for support for courses in preparing compost and organic pest control was met by Biovision.

Biovision’s Flurina Wartmann visited the project in summer 2011 and was impressed by the dedication of the women and their learning success: “I was amazed at the level of detail the women knew about compost preparation, and at how engaged they are in putting their knowledge into practice”. At least as important is the mutual exchange and support that the women experience on the courses, says Wartmann. “That strengthens their self-confidence and is the first step in improving their position in society.”

Commentary

The ball is in our court

Climate change is happening. While it is still being debated at the highest levels, many people have long ago been confronted with the effects of this change. For millions of them, predominantly in developing regions, life has become harder and more difficult. Whoever cannot adapt, goes under. This is dramatic and unjust in the highest order, since in comparison with the inhabitants of industrialised countries, the people of Africa have scarcely contributed to the causes of climate change. The ecological footprint of a Swiss person is around 5 times greater than that of a Kenyan person.

The time to act has already begun. The ball is in our court in the North. We have the scope and the possibility to do something about the causes of climate change. For us – as opposed to the people of the South – it is not a question of living or dying, but just of changing our behaviour. When we set the thermostat, choose a mode of transport or decide what and how much to buy. In living and travelling the case is clear: wear a pullover instead of turning the heating up, ride your bike or take public transport instead of taking a private car. It is more complex when we are at the supermarket. How do I make sustainable choices in the face of non transparent product declarations and a jigsaw puzzle of labels?

Biovision is providing concrete answers to such questions through the mobile exhibition “CLEVER – the sustainable supermarket” (see page 6 and the website www.clever-konsumieren.ch). This interactive information project is not aimed at farmers in Africa, but at you, here in Switzerland. Our local actions have global effects –both good and bad.



Peter Lüthi

Communication & campaigns
Photo: Biovision

QUESTIONS:

Comments on “CLEVER”



Sarina Gisler, chemist, Romiswil
“I chose eggs from the Zurich area and was totally surprised that my decision was a bad one. The eggs were produced in the area, but were battery farmed. They should have been free range and organic!”



Max Heinzer, top fencer, Immensee
“To be to achieve my success in sport I have to be competition ready and healthy. So I have a balanced diet with plenty of vegetables, which I like to buy organic.”



Jacqueline Kobel, business-woman, Langnau
“I found the exhibition super and have definitely learned something: to choose really good products and to behave sustainably, I need to read closely, pay attention to labels and buy much fewer animal products like meat.”



Reto Hug, top triathlete, Dielsdorf
“During my shopping trip in CLEVER I fell into one or two traps. As a consumer you have to really pay attention, since the appearance of products can be baffling. It is worthwhile studying the fine print.”



Regula Gygax-Häger, teacher at the agricultural school Wallierhof, Riedholz
“The exhibition is very interesting and once more it occurs to me that making the right product choice is difficult, because there are various aspects to consider, and often one isn't aware of everything.”



Bastien Girod, Politician, Zurich
“Every consumer can participate, since with the correct purchasing decision in the supermarket an indication is provided. The producers adapt to the wishes of the consumers and produce what the consumers buy.”



CLEVER – THE SUSTAINABLE SUPERMARKET

Five golden rules for shopping

Here “Clever – the sustainable supermarket” can help. The mobile exhibition from Biovision and “Natur liegt nahe”, disseminates the five golden rules for shopping sustainably:

1. **Less is more!**
Only buy what you really need
2. **Regularly eat vegetarian**
(much less meat and fish)
3. **Shop according to season and region**
4. **Choose products with eco labels**
(Organic, fair trade, sustainable fishing, animal welfare)
5. **Avoid products with palm oil**
(often described as vegetable fat)

In the sustainable supermarket, Clever, around 100 products are available to choose from. You get the receipt at the till, but it does not tell you the cost, it tells you who is paying the real price: the producers, the rainforest, the farm animals or the environment. The exhibition is aimed at all interested parties and at sixth form students, from grammar schools or vocational schools. For 120 francs they receive lectures and learning aids.



Feed for the dairy cow:
Lucy Wanjiru on the way
home from the fields.
Photo: Peter Lüthi /
Biovision

FROM THE LIFE OF LUCY WANJIRU

“My strength is failing”

“Before, we had enough rain and good harvests here”, remembers Lucy Wanjiru, a sixty year old farmer from Kigio in central Kenya. “I could sell the surplus at our local market or even in Thika, the city nearby. It was enough to live on and to send our three children to school.” Then her husband died of liver cancer. That was in 1982. From then on her life became steadily harder. She had to take her children out of school because she could no longer afford the fees. She also had repeatedly bad harvests as the rains became increasingly unpredictable. “In extreme years the yields were so bad that the state gave out food aid to the elderly and orphans.” Mrs Wanjiru was not considered for aid and so instead of three meals a day, her family ate only in the evening. “The children cried. They were hunger and had stomach ache and they lost weight”, she says bitterly.

Today her daughter and two sons are grown up and married. But in 2004 one of her daughters in law contracted meningitis and left six children behind. Lucy brought the children to her, since her son seeks his income as a casual labourer and is away most of the time. Since then she has done everything for her grandchildren. But she is worried about the future. “I am getting older and my strength is failing” she confesses. “I don’t know how I am going to manage.”

But Mrs Wanjiru has no choice and seizes her fate. Since 2010 she has attended courses in sustainable



Biovision’s projects are effective in the long term and help people in East Africa to help themselves.
Photo: Peter Lüthi / Biovision

BEQUEST FOR BIOVISION:

Do good beyond this life

More and more people are deciding to include non-profit organisations alongside their loved ones in their last will and testament, thereby continuing to do good after they have passed away. This helps institutions like Biovision to continue their work and support people in East Africa to improve their lives. Perhaps you would like to leave something behind after you have gone. If you have any questions or would like to order our bequest guide, Biovision’s Chantal Sierro is at your service.

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farming. In these practice-oriented trainings, financed by Biovision and supervised by the Kenyan Agricultural Research Institute (KARI), she learns how to make compost and how to combat maize pests organically. Lucy Wanjiru is very interested in organic farming – not least because artificial fertiliser and agrochemicals are unaffordable for her now. In addition, she has experienced that sufficient harvests are possible even with a lack of rain, if the soil has been ploughed deeply enough and enriched with compost. Mrs Wanjiru is satisfied with the project: “It is very helpful”, she says. “I was able to increase the maize yield and milk production considerably. With this, my six grandchildren and I will get by”.



“Mkulima Mbunifu”, the Biovision farmers’ magazine in the national language, Kiswahili, is greeted with great interest in Tanzania.
Photo: Andreas Schriber / Biovision

MKULIMA MBUNIFU:

Farmers’ magazine in Kiswahili

“Mkulima Mbunifu” is Kiswahili and means in English “the innovative farmer”. On 5th August 2011, the first edition of Biovision’s farmers’ magazine was published under this title in the national language of Tanzania. This advisor for small scale farmers provides background information and concrete tips on sustainable farming and is the counterpart to “The Organic Farmer” in Kenya. At the launch, Isdory Shirima, Regional Commissioner in Arusha, thanked the Biovision foundation and both finance partners DEZA and USAID: “The magazine comes at the right time and closes a large gap in the training of and advice for farmers in Tanzania.”

LUIS CORAY:

A picture for Biovision

On 4th October, Chur artist Luis Coray handed a cheque to Biovision for over 2000 francs. During his exhibition ‘transblau’ from 3rd to 24th September in the Chur State Gallery, Coray sold one of his paintings as well as cards in favour of Biovision.

“In the Swiss foundation, Biovision, I have found an organisation that combines my ideals and concerns in its mission and projects: my deep connection with nature, my awareness that everything is interrelated, my solidarity with disadvantaged people and my special affinity with the African continent” says the artist of his support.



“It is important to me, and a joy to support the work of Biovision according to my abilities.”

Luis Coray, Artist in Chur

Photo: Biovision / Peter Lüthi

BENEFIT CONCERT IN GUNDELI YOUTH CLUB, BASEL:

Hip Hop, Ska, Jazz and Blues

One stage, 6 bands and a keen young audience: that was the benefit concert organised by apprentice carpenters Dennis Silberer (above left) and Lukas Grogg in October at Gundeli Youth Club as part of their studies in ‘Event Management’. They wanted to give the proceeds to a non-profit organisation and asked themselves where the money would actually go into the right hands. “We turned to our teacher, and he promptly and with conviction recommended Biovision”, says Dennis. After carefully studying the website they decided on Biovision. “We wanted to show society and individuals that every person can do something to combat poverty, hunger and suffering”, says the young concert organiser. The event brought in 1200 francs. Biovision warmly thanks them and wishes them the best of luck in their work and in the completion of their apprenticeships.



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