

Biovision

Newsletter December 2013

Living between a drought and a flood Camel's milk to alleviate distress



biovision

A future for all, naturally

Ralia Kura Abdi

Single parent in Bulesa, Kenya



"My husband left me and our four children and I now have to support them on my own. Camel's milk is very important as both food and income".

Project Camels for drought areas

- Start Date 2010

- Objective

To achieve sustainable improvements in the lives and food security of those living in the arid lands of Kenya through animal husbandry

- Activities

- To train 30 groups comprising a total of 328 people in animal husbandry and camel health
- To train 10 vets as camel specialists
- To provide camels together with training and support for 50 particularly disadvantaged families
- To train 4 women's groups in the processing and marketing of camel's milk (cheese and yoghurt)

- Budget 2013–2015

CHF 330 000.00

- Donation Account

PC 87-193093-4

Camel's milk alleviates distress

When 24-year old Ralia's husband left her and their four children, it was like staring into an abyss. That happened five years ago when Ralia was living in Isiolo, the district capital in North Eastern Kenya.

At the time, Ralia's husband was working in distant Mombasa and they rarely saw one another. When the money dried up and she did not even know if he was still alive, she realised that he had abandoned her and her four children.

Ralia, now 29 years of age, has returned to her native village of Bulesa located in a vast area known as the Borana. Although the region is increasingly threatened with disasters, Ralia and her family now have hope. With Swiss support, she has improved the family's food security and is earning an income.

Five goats and a camel

In 2010, Ralia Kura Abdi was one of 105 particularly disadvantaged people selected by the village council to take part in a camel project. The project run by SDC, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and VSF, Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Suisse provided Ralia and the others with five breeding goats and a camel in calf. The cost was a nominal but affordable amount. Selling the goats' milk provided Ralia with help in the short term: she was able to make ends meet and pay for a camel herder. Camels are sometimes grazed at a considerable distance from the village and so herdsmen are required to look after the animals.

Revival of a proven tradition

The Borana nomads abandoned camel husbandry some 100 years ago because they found cattle more profitable. As a result, the associated skills were largely lost. To remedy this loss, Biovision joined the camel project in 2010 and now funds courses in animal husbandry and provides training for

vets in the care and treatment of camels. Camels are regaining their importance because they are more adaptable than cattle to the extreme conditions that are prevalent in the semi-arid Borana region. Camels can be likened to endurance runners: they can survive for 14 days without water, living primarily on the leaves of thorn and acacia bushes and yet they still continue to produce milk every day. Camels are being reintroduced in the Borana in order to reduce the risk during periods of drought and the reliance of local populations on food aid.

Food and income

Ralia's camel has now calved and so is providing milk. This milk, together with the income from the breeding goats – the number has now doubled to ten – provides the family with about five litres of milk per day. The family drinks half and the rest is sold giving Ralia a daily income of about 150 Kenyan shillings. This income – about CHF 1.50 – is extremely important, not least because the unpredictable weather means that the supply of maize and vegetables from her garden on the banks of the river cannot be guaranteed. The life of Ralia Kura Abdi and her children remains difficult but the camel project has opened up new prospects.

To learn more about the life of Ralia Kura Abdi see film at: www.biovision.ch/movie



Camels cope better with the effects of drought than cattle.

Camel's milk is nutritious and very rich in Vitamin C. That is important for pastoral tribes who have little access to fruit and vegetables.

Pastoral tribes trapped in vicious circle

The pastoral tribes living in the arid and semi-arid lands of East Africa traditionally used special nomadic grazing systems, which – because of the low population density – allowed vegetation to recover – even under extreme weather conditions. The regular droughts – approximately every 7–10 years decimated herds and also claimed lives within the human population. These periods of extreme aridity and drought are now more frequent – about every 3 to 5 years. Even where vegetation can recover, this recovery period is now too short to make good the loss of cattle. This results in chronic emergencies and human disasters. Although food aid can alleviate some of the distress, it also encourages an increasing number of the pastoralists to settle near the distribution centres. This in turn increases the pressure on the fragile arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs).



Living between a drought and a flood

The arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs) offer considerable potential for pastoral tribes. However, increases in extreme weather are making it more difficult to use that land. Corinne Corradi and Peter Lüthi explain what this means for the local tribes.

Areas of aridity dominate the land surface of many African countries. In Kenya, ASALs account for 75% of the territory, globally the figure is 34.8%. The ecosystems in these regions are extremely fragile and are frequently exposed to extreme weather conditions such as a lack of rainfall or very heavy rainfall. These extremes are exacerbated by global climatic influences such as “El Niño” and its counterpart “La Niña”. They occur every two to eight years and affect weather patterns across three quarters of the globe by producing warmer or cooler sea and air temperatures. As a result, the rainfall in Kenya is often less during the main rainy season of March to May and correspondingly higher during the shorter rainy season of October to December (El Niño effect). Sometimes, the rains fail completely (La Niña effect). If there is no rainfall during three consecutive periods, this is classed as a drought.

Nomadic herds – an adapted form of land use

In the absence of rain, the soils dry out and with it the vegetation. If this is then followed by a period of heavy rainfall, the caked soils cannot absorb the moisture quickly enough and the result is erosion. The parched soil is washed away, which in turn causes further damage to the vegetation. These extensive arid lands are quite unsuited to traditional, water-intensive crop cultivation but they can be used for modified forms of animal husbandry. Over many centuries, the nomadic herders developed strategies that allowed them to cope in inhospitable regions. They and their animals moved on in search of ever-changing vegetation. This nomadic lifestyle often allowed them to earn a reasonable income and add value to a barren land. According to FAO estimates, livestock farmers in these semi-arid regions produced more than one-third of the country’s meat

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Immediately after the rainy season, the Ewaso Niro river, which flows through the semi-arid regions of North East Kenya provides enough water for the Borana herdsman and their cattle.

production in 2002. This major potential is in sharp contrast to the widespread marginalisation of nomadic tribes by government until fairly recently.

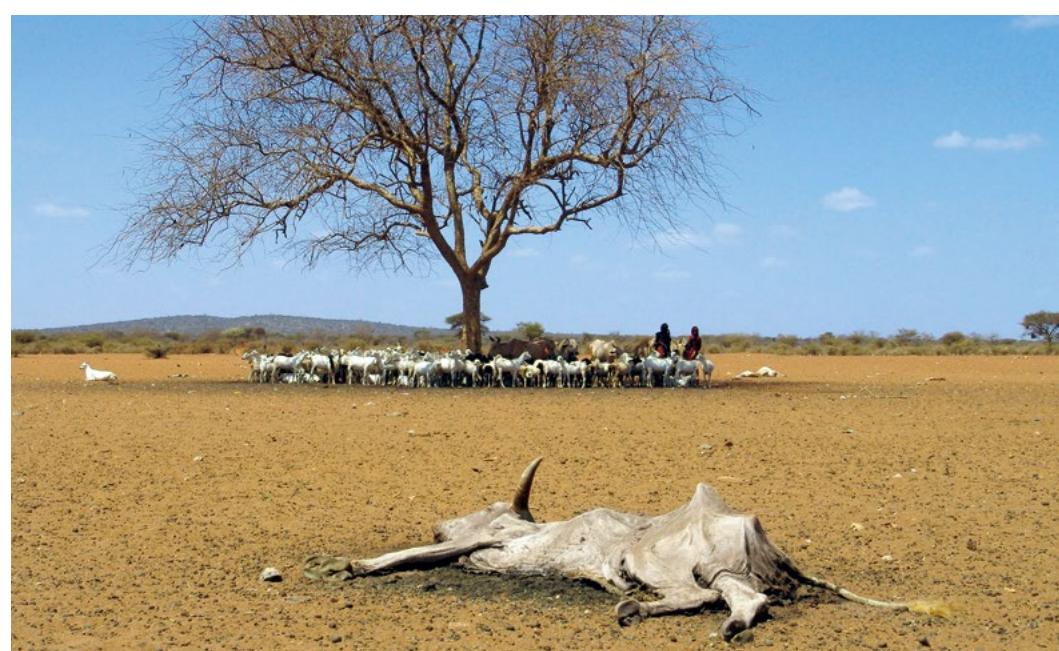
Extreme weather is on the increase

In Kenya, at least 20% of the entire population (about 9 million people) live as nomads in arid and semi-arid lands. They earn 95 % of their household income from livestock farming. However, two-thirds of them live below the poverty line – partly as a result of previous catastrophic droughts; in particular, the droughts of 1984/85 and 2011, which decimated the cattle population and impoverished many families. Increasing population pressures, restricted land-use rights, cattle disease combined with climatic changes and ever more frequent extremes of weather have increasingly disturbed the sensitive balance of the pastoral lifestyle in these ASALs (see box).

Camels have a future

Development organisations working with government agencies have sought to counter the increasing prevalence of droughts by taking prompt, effective action, e.g. the targeted emergency slaughter of animals followed by restocking. At the same time, they are working with local populations on long-term, preventive solutions. These include the introduction of grazing management systems, improvements to feed production together with initiatives to increase net incomes by increasing milk production and the processing and marketing of high-quality milk products. Biovision, working with VSF, Vétérinaires sans Frontières Suisse is involved in this process in the Isiolo District of North East Kenya where the particular focus is the re-introduction of camels. The Borana tribes traditionally kept camels but this practice almost died out about 100 years ago despite the fact that camels are much more resistant to drought than cattle and smaller domesticated animals. Camels do not rely on grass and so retain food sources during periods of drought. Their milk keeps longer and contains significantly more Vitamin C. The latter is particularly important for a healthy diet because the pastoralists live in areas where fruit and vegetables are rare. The Biovision and VSF project is a first step in helping pastoral tribes find their own

way out of poverty. However, decisive for their future is the extent to which they can find additional sources of income that will give them a broad base on which to build their lives. Governments in these countries have a particular role to play. They must provide support so that the people living in these semi-arid areas can use and to harness the available resources in a sustainable way.



Two thirds of those living in the arid and semi-arid lands of Kenya live below the poverty line, partly as a result of the increased frequency of droughts in recent years.

“I believe that camels are part of our future”

A look at the life of Abdi Jattani, village chief in Bulesa, Kenya



Everyone in Bulesa knows Abdi Jattani. Now 51 years of age, he has been the chief of this Borana village for the last 19 years and enjoys considerable respect and trust. As he strides through the settlement, he greets villagers, exchanges a few words with others and listens to their troubles and worries. “Our greatest problem is poverty,” he says gravely. The reason is drought. “Like the one in 2011 which was particularly bad”, he recalls. As more and more waterholes dried up, the grass withered and the distance between the remaining pastures and water points was so great that cattle died on route. Bulesa lost 300 of its 3000 cattle. The Borana people were forced to move to higher areas where there was more water and food. However, these areas were on the border with the Samburu, a rival pastoral tribe in the south west of the Borana region. According to Jattani, young Samburu go through an

initiation ceremony in order to become men: this involved the stealing of cattle. In the past they stalked the cattle with bows and spears but today they use Kalashnikovs. “Two men from our village died and 400 cattle were stolen. In 2011, we lost almost one quarter of the total herd,” complains the village chief.

In an attempt to reduce such conflicts, a system of grazing management has been introduced in the region. Instead of grazing anywhere, the region is divided into large plots of land, which are grazed simultaneously by all herds using an agreed rotation schedule. This allows a better use of the existing vegetation; the soil is well fertilized with dung and aerated so that rainwater and nutrients can penetrate. The grazing period is followed by a lengthy regeneration phase.

Another measure is to retain grazing areas close to settlements. The cattle graze the standing hay but only during periods of extreme drought. The distance between grazing and water is short because the village boreholes provide water even during drought periods.

Abdi Jattani is particularly hopeful about the reintroduction of camels. Until a few years ago, the Borana shied away from keeping these large animals but today they realise the major advantage of camels over cattle; they can survive more easily in times of drought. “They have become very popular here. I believe that camels are part of our future,” he assures me confidently.

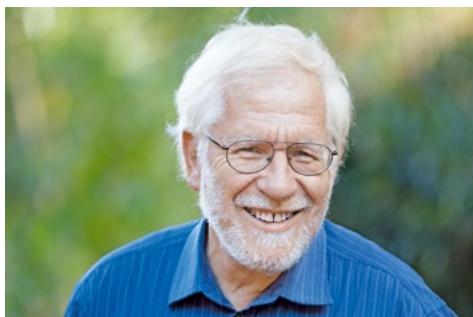
More on this project:
www.biovision.ch/camels

Staff changes at TOF

From humble beginning 8 years ago, the farmers' magazine established by Peter Baumgartner is now one of the main information platforms for farmers in East Africa.



Having travelled through almost every country in Africa, it was clear to the former African correspondent of the *Tages Anzeiger* that its farmers were amongst those staring into an abyss because of a lack of basic farming knowledge. After retirement, Baumgartner, a qualified agronomist and amateur winemaker decided to try and change things. His first venture was "The Organic Farmer" (TOF) and it is still the only farmer magazine in Kenya. In just eight years, Peter Baumgartner has published some 800 pages in 100 editions of TOF bringing regular, useful and practical knowledge to a readership now in excess of 200 000.



Peter Baumgartner has written an article for our website entitled "What 100 editions of The Organic Farmer means for farmers": see www.biovision.ch/tof_e

Comment

From the outset, The Organic Farmer – TOF for short – was always much more than a farmer magazine. Underlying the idea of TOF founder Peter Baumgartner was his respect for farmers in East Africa and their empowerment.

Innovation relies on people with a pioneering spirit. The first project report for TOF gives an impression of how it all began: *"The first edition appeared in April 2005. In hindsight, it was all rather spontaneous. We had no budget and no written funding guarantee from Biovision; Peter Baumgartner funded the preliminary work and the first edition himself. He edited the magazine sitting at a table in a café at a refugee centre..."*

In September 2013, the 100th edition of TOF was published – not only the 100th but also the final one with Peter Baumgartner as editor. A new young local team will continue his work built on solid foundations. More than 200,000 readers now look forward every month to the latest edition of TOF!

However, numbers on their own mean nothing – what matters are its achievements and what it has triggered. This is the true value of his work: Thousands of small farmers have been able to change their lives for the better thanks to a farmer magazine that is unique in Africa. Peter Baumgartner has worked tirelessly and for this we owe him our sincere thanks and respect.



Andreas Schriber
CEO Biovision Foundation

www.getactive.ch

"Biotop chanta"

"biotop chanta" was an exhibition of paintings shown from 7th – 29th September at the Stadtgalerie Chur. It was an initiative of Luis Coray, a local painter and his wife Elisabeth as a way of supporting a training centre for small farmers in Tanzania known as the "Garden of Solidarity". The sale of artists' cards and the donations collected at concerts and readings brought in CHF 710, which the painter has donated to Biovision. Many thanks!



Luis Coray

Chur painter

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Editor
Peter Lüthi

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Peter Lüthi, Corinne Corradi, Sandra Menegol

Cover photo
More milk thanks to camels: Young girl from the Biovision and VSF camel project in Bulesa, Isiolo District, Kenya
Peter Lüthi, Biovision

Other photos
Peter Lüthi / Biovision
Peter Smerdon / WFP / REUTERS: P. 5 bottom,
photoart: P. 6, Urs Mattle: P. 7 top,
Keystone: P. 8 top right

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Alternative Nobel Prize for H. R. Herren and Biovision

Last September, the Biovision Foundation and its president, Hans Rudolf Herren became the first Swiss recipient of the alternative Nobel Prize. According to the jury, the prize was awarded to Herren because of his "expertise and pioneering work in promoting safe, secure and sustainable global food supplies". In his letter of congratulation to Biovision, Martin Dahinden, Director of SDC, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation wrote: "Your commitment to small

famers and sustainable agriculture in developing countries is exemplary. The results speak for themselves".

We are grateful for this recognition and also for the many letters of congratulations received from near and far! We regard the "Right Livelihood Award 2013" as an affirmation of our work, work that is only possible with the support of our partners and donors. So we are sharing our pleasure with all those who made it possible.

Biovision lecture tour

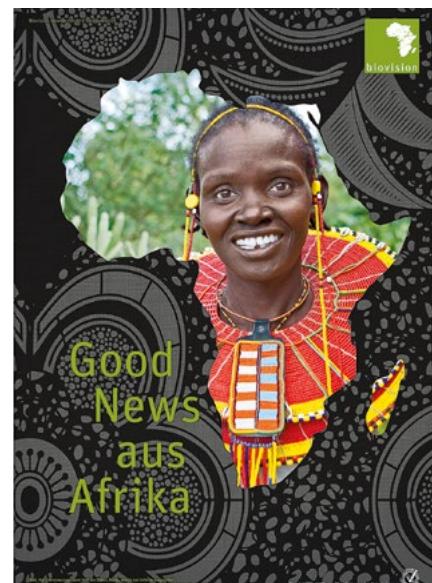
In late January 2014, our multimedia presentation "Good News from Africa" will be visiting five Swiss cities. All presentations start at 20.00 hours:

Winterthur: Thursday 23 Jan., Töss Centre
Schaffhausen: Friday 24 Jan., Park Casino
Lucerne: Monday 27 Jan., Paulusheim
Thun: Wednesday, 29 Jan., KGH Frutigenstr. 22
Aarau: Thursday, 30 Jan., KuK

Box office opens 1 hour before start

Online bookings: www.olalei.ch

Telephone bookings: Tel. 031 974 11 02



Stiftung für ökologische Entwicklung
Fondation pour un développement écologique
Foundation for ecological development

Schaffhauserstrasse 18, 8006 Zürich, Tel. 044 341 97 18
info@biovision.ch, www.biovision.ch

