

Biovision

Newsletter August 2017

Pastoralists in Africa under pressure
Camels strengthen resilience to drought



A future for all, naturally

Abdy Guyo

Camel and goat herder from
Kula Mawe in Kenya



“Camels are much better at coping with drought. They also continue to provide milk during dry spells”.

Project: Camels for drought areas (started in 2010)

This demonstration project is designed to improve food security and income opportunities for pastoral communities and so strengthen their resilience to climate change.

• Objectives of current project phase:

- Reintroduce camel husbandry
- Strengthen supply chain for camel milk
- Monitor diseases in livestock

• Project budget 2017: CHF 173 624

• Account for donations: PC 87-193093-4

• Sustainable Development Goals:

Biovision is helping to bring about a shift to sustainable development in accordance with the UN Agenda 2030. This project is making a concrete contribution to two of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):



“Camels are the future”

The main rainy season in North-East Kenya normally runs from the beginning of March to the end of May but this year the rains were once again largely absent. With its project to reintroduce camels, Biovision is helping to develop a model that will alleviate the effects of drought.

Peter Lüthi, Biovision

The dirt road north of Mount Kenya runs for 650 kilometres from Isiolo to the Somali border and at the beginning of May, herders and their animals travel the route heading for the south west. They are fleeing the drought and looking for grass as the rains have once again failed. According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the Horn of Africa has been affected by drought almost every year since the start of the new Millennium. Kenya itself escaped the extreme drought until 2014/15. The cause that year was the “El Niño” weather phenomenon. Around Isiolo, where at least there has been some rain, livestock herders from different tribes are all competing for scarce animal feed, making for a tense situation.

Little but stones

Some 70 kilometres east of Isiolo is the village of Kula Mawe. Roughly translated this means “eat the stones”. An appropriate name as there is little else to eat. The land is hot and dry and the lives of the Borana, a tribe of herders is hard. “I used to have about 110 goats but now I only have 20,” explains 64-year old Abdy Guyo. Like most people in Kula Mawe he is reliant on food aid. The situation for his oldest daughter Amina and her family is no better, particularly as her husband is paralysed in one leg and cannot

work. Despite that, they have grounds for hope. In April 2016, each was given a female camel. They and a further 16 women and men had been selected by their community to take part in a demonstration project run by Biovision and Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Suisse (VSF). When the camels calve, each owner will have 3-7 litres of milk every day – a healthy and an important addition to their diet. By selling the surplus milk they can also earn about 100 Kenyan Shillings (about 90 Swiss centimes) per litre. “Camels are much better at coping with drought than cattle and smaller domestic animals. They also continue to provide milk during dry spells,” says Abdy Guyo with pleasure.

Learning from mistakes

“A few years ago, the plan had been to give the camels to the poorest members of the community,” reports Muktar Ibrahim, the VSF Project Officer in Isiolo. We found however, that they could not even afford the required veterinary care or pay the herders. “We have learned from our mistake and now provide camels to those with at least some income,” explains Muktar.

There are also other challenges to overcome. At present, only five of the camels in Kula Mawe are in calf and the shortage of fodder is making it more difficult to rear the camels.

Kula Mawe is one of 4 locations, where a total of 50 dromedaries (camels with one hump) funded by Biovision are being provided. Thanks to the project, the herders discover the benefits of camels, particularly during periods of drought. Benjamin Losusui, an experienced herder in the project hopes that others will copy. “Camels are the future,” he says with conviction.

Further photos and information:
www.biovision.ch/camels



Herders with their animals in Isiolo County in Kenya search for grazing (top photo)
Camels cope better with drought than cattle and smaller animals. They can survive on the leaves of thorn bushes and in extreme cases can exist for 14 days without water (right).
Camel's milk is nutritious and has four times more Vitamin C than cow's milk (middle left).
The new camel owners from Kula Mawe are happy with their animals (bottom left);
Amina Abdy, first from left).

Adapting traditions

With just a stick in one hand and small can of water in the other, the herders of East Africa follow their animals in shimmering heat through an endless expanse. It is hard to believe that up to now they have defied the extreme conditions that prevail in these arid and semi-arid regions. Unfortunately, their resilience and their experience are no longer sufficient. They can no longer lead their cattle, goats and sheep safely to sources of water or even meagre grazing. In recent years, drought and extreme aridity have repeatedly brought the herders to their knees. Their traditional practice of keeping as many animals as possible in the hope that at least some would survive the droughts has failed.

The herders in Africa can do nothing about the causes of extreme weather. In contrast, we in industrialised nations with our enormous consumption of energy can. It is right, therefore, that we should support the peoples of the South to overcome these major challenges.

With the project “Camels for drought regions” in Kenya, Biovision is working with local people to develop a model that will strengthen the resilience of pastoral communities to drought conditions. It is now up to the herders themselves to adopt and refine this promising approach. They will probably have no choice but to bid farewell to their old traditions such as large herd sizes.



Peter Lüthi
Biovision Project Reporter and for many years a herdsman in the Grison Alps



Nomads in distress

For thousands of years, the nomads of Kenya followed the grass and were known as the “Masters of the Arid Lands”. However, their way of life is becoming increasingly unsustainable because of more frequent droughts, the building of urban settlements and regional conflict.

Stefan Hartmann

As a rule, nomads are not very popular with political leaders. Without a permanent address, governments view these peoples with suspicion, as they are difficult to control. Pastoralists (nomads and semi-nomads) move with their herds in search of grass – often crossing the border from Kenya into Somalia or South Sudan. The authorities are unable to keep tabs on the pastoralists as they have no documents and so are stateless. Government policies are forcing them to give up their nomadic traditions. However, you cannot simply turn nomads into settled arable farmers growing cereals. The pastoral tradition is based on a lifestyle that is founded on animal husbandry with milk, meat and leather.

Conflict between settled and pastoral communities

The increasing population density is affecting the grazing lands used by the pastoralists; migratory routes are cut off or disrupted. Arable farmers and herders are increasingly in each other’s way. If important resources such as water and fodder are also in short supply because of the ongoing aridity, this exacerbates the tension and confrontations.

Climate change is limiting resources

Climate change is now a key factor. 70% of Kenya is made up of arid or semi-arid areas. In recent years, the whole of East Africa has faced extreme drought at ever more frequent intervals; the most recent were in 2005/06, 2009, 2011, 2014/15 and 2017 (see FAO chart). At present, the region is experiencing its worst drought for 50 years. Some 20 million people urgently need help. The drought has decimated the harvests. Animals are dying; cattle and sheep are the first to succumb and then the goats. The most resilient are the dromedaries (camels with one hump). Camels can survive for up to 14 days without water whereas for cattle and sheep it is only a few days. Unlike the cattle and smaller livestock, they can find food even if the grass has already withered, e.g. thorn bushes.

Weapons are easy to obtain and this fuels conflicts

The weather is exacerbating the conflicts between settled and pastoral communities. Whereas in the past issues were resolved



The lower the rainfall, the less food available for livestock: The pastoralists and their animals are forced onto the remaining grazing land where they all compete for the little grass available. Inevitably, the result is tension and armed conflicts between different pastoral tribes (photo left).

Nomads and semi-nomads in Africa have adapted their way of life over generations so that they can cope with the harsh conditions in arid or semi-arid terrain. Today, they are under increasing pressure as a result of political, demographic and climatic changes.

with spears or bows and arrows, they now use Kalashnikovs. This sturdy automatic weapon is popular in East Africa and can be bought for less than US\$ 50. According to an article in German weekly “Der Spiegel” back in 2012, an influx of weapons has escalated existing conflicts in the Sahel belt between Somalia and Senegal. This is creating a huge, almost lawless area where Kalashnikovs are used to settle disputes. “The government has lost control”.

Fence along the border with Somalia

Having fled violence, drought and hunger many people are stranded in reception

centres such as Daadab in Eastern Kenya. The Kenyan government wants to close this refugee camp, the largest in the world because it fears both the Somali clans and Islamist terrorists. However, in February this year Kenya’s supreme court ruled against its closure. Kenya has occupied an area on the Somali side of the border and stationed soldiers there. It has started to build a border fence that will run for 700 kilometres from Mandera in the North East to Kolbio. The aim is to secure the current permeable border with Somalia. However, a fence is unlikely to deter the Islamist al-Shabaab

militia. In addition, only a small section of 30 kilometres has been built so far.

Who loses from the change?

The government fears both terrorists and drought: In this situation, the nomads have been dealt an extremely poor hand. In their search for grazing, they decamp with their herds earlier in the year and so cross the arable lands of settled farmers when the crops are still in full bloom. Pastoralists in Kenya (Laikipia) recently drove their animals onto private farmland belonging to white settlers and shot dead one of them.

Whereas in the past they were “Masters of the Arid Lands”, their way of life is becoming increasingly unsustainable. They “are the losers from the change,” according to Der Spiegel. In past, pastoralists used traditional transit routes but now these routes are intersected by new towns or farm fencing. “There is not enough fodder and there are too many livestock,” says one local observer.

AVAILABILITY OF ANIMAL FEED IN KENYA – PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

The FAO Early Warning System presents a bleak picture: This year’s drought is worse than at any time since 2000. Similarly, the shortage of animal feed in much of Kenya has never been as bad.



Stefan Hartmann is an independent journalist specialising in the environment and a member of the “Presseladen” in Zurich.

Work is bearing fruit

As part of the Biovision Project “Reforestation in Kaliro” in East Uganda, trees are planted for timber, fruit and medicines. The aim is twofold: firstly to counter increasing deforestation and secondly to provide an additional source of income for the rural population. In 2016, a new farmers’ group – called the “Gadumire Fruit Farmers’ Nursery” was set up. It has 22 members and is run by Naphtali Mpira (see Newsletter 31, August 2014).

In addition to the obligatory agro-forestry classics such as callandria that is used for fodder and the medicinal plant leucaena, the Group concentrates primarily on two types of fruit trees: lemons and mangoes. The farmers propagate not only traditional varieties but also new ones. “It means that we can eat the fruit from the trees – they are good for our health. We can also sell the seedlings and so earn money. We use the money to buy books for the children or household items such as soap,” says Naphtali with satisfaction.

A major challenge for the new tree nursery is the distance to the nearest water source. SUPD (Sustainable Use of Plant Diversity), our partner implementing the project, is seeking to solve the problem through intervention at the local political level. | tm

www.biovision.ch/kaliro-en



The right soil mix is important: three different soil types are mixed together in order to provide the seedlings with the right conditions. The farmer group has learned this and much more as a result of the project.



RWDA Board Members at the Closing Ceremony – Joanne Cissy (1st from left) and Jusef Lugendo (2nd from left) – looking confidently and united into the future.

“Of course, we will continue!”

The project “Promoting women through agriculture” supported by Biovision was concluded at the end of June. The local group in Kayunga (Uganda) will now continue on its own.

Meng Tian, Biovision

“We very much appreciate what we have learned about ecological farming,” – that was the general tenor of comments made at the project’s Closing Ceremony. Some 800 small-scale farmers have benefited directly from the training in ecological methods of cultivation; a further 400 now have better access to markets for their products. Since 2010, Biovision has provided financial support to its local implementing partner RWDA (Rural Women’s’ Development Association). RWDA now has 150 members and they will pass on their knowledge to other farming families, mostly on an honorary basis. “The project has strengthened our sense of community. Of course, we will continue,” says Joanne Cissy with conviction.

Women and men together

Joanne is the female chair of the nine-strong Management Board that now comprises three women and six men. The Board is aware that this gender split no longer reflects the name of the organisation. “It was a challenge to keep the women committed to the work of the organisation in the long term without generating complaints from their husbands at home,” explains the new board member Jusef Lugendo. “The men are now pitching in as well”.

Old and young together

RWDA members pass on their knowledge and lead the way by setting a good example on their own farms. The children learn from practical examples at an early age that they can achieve higher yields if they use organic fertilisers, respect the environment and value biodiversity than with large-scale monocultures. Jusef sums up his creed as follows: “Don’t throw everything away, live and let live and so learn”.

Biovision Events

CLEVER Exhibition: 8 August – 26 September, Verkehrshaus Lucerne

The interactive exhibition “CLEVER – playful intelligent shopping” is an enjoyable way of disseminating valuable tips on how to shop in an environmentally friendly and fair way.

Agri-Kultur-Tage: 19 August and 30 September, Paul Klee Centre, Bern

On these two Saturdays, Biovision will demonstrate the link between biodiversity, food and health.

Biovision Symposium: 18 November, Volkshaus Zürich

Set aside this Saturday afternoon for our main event of the year!

For more information on our events see: www.biovision.ch/events



We look forward to welcoming you, your family and friends at our exciting events!

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At the inaugural meeting of SDSN in Bern, participants split into interactive discussion groups to consider priority themes for the future. The photo shows Professor Peter Messerli, co-director of the CDE at the University of Bern and co-author of the Global Report on Sustainability.

Switzerland – a developing nation

Switzerland has an obligation: It is also required to implement the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. In order to make an active contribution to the process, Biovision and the CDE are helping to develop a powerful network in Switzerland firmly anchored in both science and society.

Jorge Tamayo and Michael Bergöö, Biovision

In Autumn 2015, the international community agreed 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) designed to protect the future of our planet. All countries are under the same obligation and so must achieve the goals by 2030. Back in 2012, the then Secretary-General of the United Nations Ban Ki-Moon launched the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) in order to ensure a transition towards sustainability. The aim of SDSN is to bring together top-quality scientists, responsible businesses and results-oriented NGOs in order to develop practical solutions. These solutions would then feed into the decision-making processes initiated by politics, industry and society and so support and accelerate the implementation of the SDGs.

Sustainable financial systems, production and consumption

SDSN Global asked Biovision and the interdisciplinary Centre for Development and Environment at the University of Bern (CDE) to work together to develop an appropriate network in Switzerland. Its inaugural meeting on 5 May 2017 in Bern was attended by 40 delegates from research, politics, industry and the civil society. As a result of the discussions at the meeting it was agreed that the focus in future should be on governance, sustainable financial systems, consumer behaviour and production processes – all issues where Switzerland has both specific expertise and an urgent need to catch up.

The next milestone is scheduled for Spring 2018 when SDSN Switzerland will be officially launched in the presence of a member of the Swiss Federal Council and Professor Jeffrey Sachs, a development economist and Director of SDSN Global. Further initiatives should also be underway by that date. For example, there are plans to make Swiss citizens more aware of the SDGs and to show that each and every one of them can make a positive contribution.

www.biovision.ch/sdsn-en



Story from the life of Mery Nakode, Chumvi Yare, Kenya “Life is hard but I do not have a choice”

Peter Lüthi, Biovision

Hanging behind the turquoise curtain and just visible in the gloom is another piece of material and behind that on the bare floor are pieces of shredded cardboard and two threadbare sheets. This is the bed used by Mery Nakode and her two daughters Paulina and Insina. The front part of the accommodation is equally empty: on the floor a few cooking pots and dishes, on the window sill a few basic essentials for the home and on the blank wall, three sheets of waste paper with children’s drawings. That is all.

The authorities have provided Mery and her two children with a temporary refuge in an abandoned military building in Chumvi Yare in Kenya after her mud hut was destroyed in a storm. She wants to rebuild her house as soon as possible but that project will have to wait. In the meantime, Mery is happy if she can obtain enough food for her children every day.

Mery is 22 years of age, her daughter Paulina is eight and Insina is four. The older one goes

to school and the younger one attends nursery. “My children must learn so that later that they can manage for themselves,” says the young mother. She was not allowed to go to school, nor were her three sisters and four brothers. In her family, everyone had to work. As the third youngest, Mery had to look after the goats. She now regrets that she was denied the opportunity to go to school. Nevertheless, she has managed to teach herself a few things. “When it comes to money I am good at sums,” she says and laughs even though she is being very serious.

When she was 15 years of age, her parents arranged for her to marry a man 22 years older than her. “I was far from happy,” she recalls “but that is the tradition where I came from” – Mery Nakode is a member of the Turkana, a tribe of pastoralists in Kenya.

Her husband works as a night watchman in Isiolo, some 20 kilometres away and only

comes home at weekends. He earns 8000 Kenyan Shillings (about CHF 73) per month, of which he gives Mery about 5000 KSH. Mery herself earns a further 1500 KSH as

“The camel has improved my status”

a charcoal burner. Every month, Mery produces three bags of charcoal that she sells for 500 KSH each. They have to survive on that. “Money is very tight – we receive no food aid,” she says, adding with some bitterness that they sometimes have to ask other villagers for support. “Life is very hard but I do not have a choice”.

Mery was one of those selected by her community to participate in the camel project in Chumvi Yare supported by Biovision. “I very much hope that the camel will soon be pregnant. We will then have milk and can start to breed more camels”. However, the animal is important to her in another way. “I am very grateful for the camel as it has improved my status in society”.

