

# Biovision

Newsletter December 2018

**What does the future hold?**

Maasai between tradition and modernity



**20**  
YEARS  
REAL HELP  biovision

A future for all, naturally

Janet Maro

Co-director SAT Morogoro, Tanzania



“Essential to any cooperation with the Maasai are respect and an in-depth knowledge of their culture.”

## “Cooperation thanks to agroecology” (Start Date: 2017)

Tailored training courses in agroecological cultivation methods and adapted animal husbandry techniques combined with the development of economic cooperation between pastoralists and farmers are improving the living conditions of both groups whilst also reducing the latent potential for conflict.

- Aims of current project phase:
  - Reduce poverty in the project region Morogoro
  - Improve food security
  - Develop regional supply chains
  - Facilitate applied research
  - Defuse land conflicts

- Project budget 2018: CHF 375,506

### Sustainable Development Goals (Agenda 2030):

This project makes a direct or indirect contribution to four of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Goal 1 (No poverty), Goal 2 (Zero hunger), Goal 5 (Gender equality), Goal 15 (Terrestrial ecosystems, soils and biodiversity):



# Talking not fighting

Land is in short supply in Tanzania. Settlements continue to grow; the smallholders have little land and the Maasai and their herds are increasingly reaching their limits. The result is armed conflict.

*Peter Lüthi, Biovision, article and photos*

Pastoralists are often marginalised by the authorities and are treated with suspicion by the general public. Although the Maasai accept their treatment with pride and continue to live separately with their animals, matters are coming to a head, partly as a result of climate change. For example, the Maasai lost huge numbers of cattle in the Mvomero District during the extreme drought of 2015/16 and so they allowed the surviving cattle to eat the maize growing in the fields of smallholders. This outraged the farmers because they too are struggling with the effects of reduced rainfall and declining harvests. In addition, the land available to the farmers is dwindling. The competition between pastoralists and farmers frequently leads to armed conflict and often deaths.

### Adapting the Maasai traditions

In 2016, the Maasai in Vianzi sought advice from the nearby organic training centre run by “Sustainable Agriculture Tanzania” (SAT). The Maasai felt compelled to depart from tradition and store hay for use during future droughts. They also wanted to strengthen their independence and grow maize and vegetables for their own use. These were revolutionary ideas for the Maasai and they found a willing ear at SAT. Co-directors, Janet Maro and Alex Wostry offered the Maasai a basic training course in ecological arable and vegetable cultivation on the proviso that women were also allowed to attend the course as the promotion of women is a SAT priority. For the Maasai, the bar was set high but they agreed.

### Respect and trust

“Essential to any cooperation with the Maasai are respect and an in-depth knowledge of their culture,” says Janet Maro. A sentiment shared by Soviaki Letoga Kinyoz, President of the Maasai group Mafanikio: “The people from SAT are the only ones with a genuine interest in us”. According to Maro, it was important that the Maasai leaders were on board and this in itself was not an easy task – for outsiders, they were not an easy group to identify. “I was lucky,” she says with a smile. For years, she had been in close regular contact with one of the Maasai. “It was not until the start of our project that I realised that he was the head of the Maasai community in the entire region”.

### Give and take

Eventually, the smallholders and the local Maasai group agreed to take a risk and under the auspices of SAT, set up a discussion group. They came to realise that each side had resources that the other lacked. The pastoralists had surplus dung, which the farmers were keen to use as manure. Similarly, after the farmers had processed their sunflower seeds and maize, they were left with plant residues that were a valuable source of feed for the Maasai cattle. This enabled both sides to profit from the trade and make a promising start to resolving the conflicts.

### Earnings increase their standing in the community

The participation of the Maasai women in the project has allowed them to generate new sources of income, which strengthens their position in what is a strictly patriarchal society. For example, the women were shown how to set up a non-interest-bearing savings and loan system as an alternative to a bank. They were also trained in how to improve the marketing of their milk products and their handmade jewellery.

Additional photos and video:

[www.biovision.ch/maasai](http://www.biovision.ch/maasai)



1 Mutual trust is the basis of the cooperation: SAT director Janet Maro visiting the Maasai in Nameloki.

2 For the Maasai men, there is nothing more important than the wellbeing of their livestock.

3 The project generates new sources of income for the Maasai women, enabling them to improve their standing in this patriarchal society.

4 Notable innovation: Pastoralists learned how to make hay and so overcome the shortage of cattle feed during dry spells.

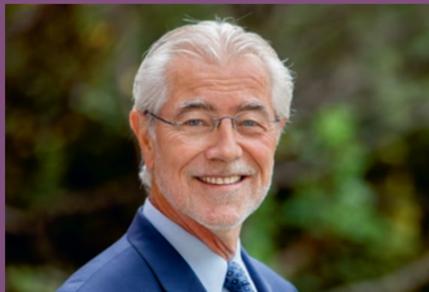
# A lesson with a happy ending?

Hans Rudolf Herren

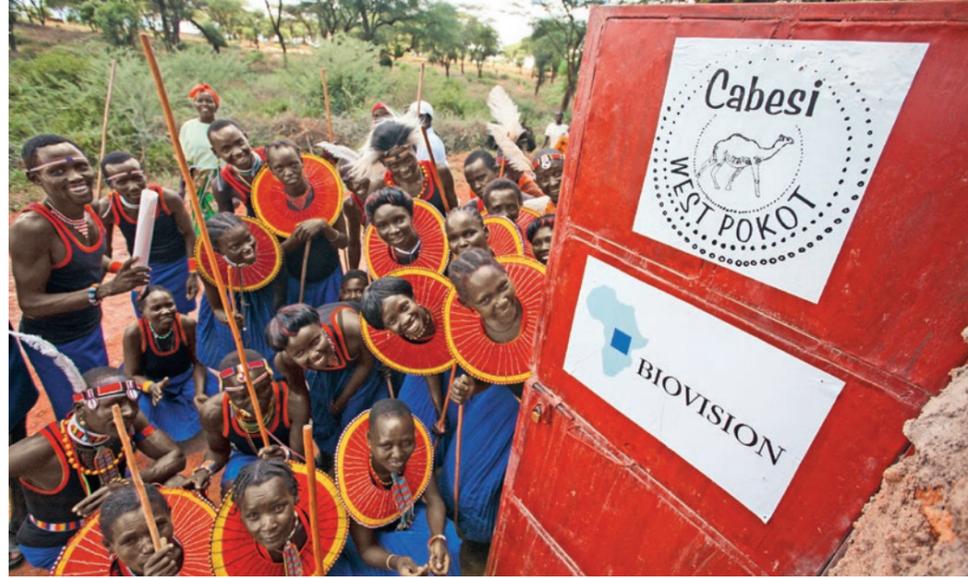
I learned many lessons during my 30 years in Africa: For example, you cannot know whether an idea is a good one until you try to implement it. Failures are part and parcel of life and it is only in the face of unexpected challenges that you really learn about yourself and those around you.

In 2004, we and the veteran “Swiss African” Rolf Gloor ventured into one of the poorest and most neglected regions of northern Kenya. In West Pokot, poverty was everywhere. Many communities struggled for survival and this was exacerbated by tribal feuds between rival ethnic groups. Not the ideal backdrop for a demonstration project in ecological development in Africa. However, sometimes the courage to try the unorthodox pays off.

CABESI is clear evidence that the willingness to try something new in direct response to local conditions and not to rely on pre-packaged plans can produce new solutions. It also provided another lesson: In the final analysis, it is local people who determine whether a project succeeds or not. With perseverance, respect and genuine cooperation, you can add value and provide real help to people in Africa.



Dr Hans Rudolf Herren  
President of the Biovision Foundation



August 2007: Opening of the honey collection centre in Lomut (West Pokot, Kenya) with the Lomut traditional dancers and the local partners of Biovision in the Cabesi project.

## Real help

The real success of a project is not clear until it has been concluded. We put that statement to the test when we visited “Cabesi” four years after the end of the project. What did the Biovision commitment achieve in West Pokot?

Peter Lüthi, Biovision

“Cabesi” stands for **camels, bees and silk**: The aim of this long-term project had been to introduce camels as pack animals and for milk in semi-arid West Pokot County in Kenya. In addition, the project sought to introduce modern beekeeping and produce pure honey. It also wanted to encourage the manufacture of wild silk from local silkworms. Between 2004 and 2014, the project disseminated the required knowledge and practical skills to local people. A further focus was the development of production chains and marketing structures. During the project, a total of six honey collection centres were set up with storage areas and honey extractors, together with a marketplace for the processing, packing and sale of products. The overall objective was to provide the semi-nomads in West Pokot with opportunities to develop new sources of income and improve their lives.

### Highs and lows

Development projects go through various phases and evaluations can vary considerably depending upon when they are done. For example, in an article in the Biovision Newsletter in 2009, Mercy Kiyapyap, the Cabesi project assistant gave a sober assessment: “To date, the Pokot have not accepted the camels as pack animals. In their culture, it is taboo to use female camels to transport goods. In some cases, trained stallions were slaughtered or sold and trained animals were also allowed to roam and became semi wild”. Biovision had to accept the failure and abandon the camel part of the project. Similarly, after the production of wild silk failed to get off the ground, it could have been concluded that when the project ended in 2014 it had failed. Far from it! “Cabesi” failed to really take off until later and then it was thanks to the remaining second component.



Former project assistants Mercy Kiyapyap and Paul Losute are now successfully running the “Cabesi Marketplace” on their own.



Honey collection centres in Lomut, Kenya in October 2018. After two difficult years with drought or too much rain, this year should be a record year for both honey and beeswax.

### What is left is what matters!

Beekeeping is currently enjoying a veritable boom in West Pokot. During 2018, some 1,600 beekeepers have supplied produce to the collection centres of the Cabesi Marketplace. It is estimated that by the end of this season the beekeepers will have supplied 75 tonnes of honey and 2.5 tonnes of beeswax. The previous record was 99.7 tonnes of honey in 2014. This was followed by a reduction in yields as a result of drought or too much rain. Currently, Cabesi pays the beekeepers a stable price of 200 Kenyan shillings (CHF 2) per kilogram honey or 400 KES per kilogram beeswax (CHF 4). This means that the Marketplace will have paid the “Cabesi” beekeepers a total of 16,000,000 KES (CHF 157,500) by the end of December 2018. To which must be

added the payments to a further 3,000 beekeepers who do not sell their products via the collection centres to the Marketplace. Cabesi offers all suppliers security and stable prices.

### Pioneer of change

“The project provided the initial spark and opened up the honey market in West Pokot,” says Mercy Kiyapyap, who, after the handover of the project to an independent local cooperative became the co-manager of the Cabesi Marketplace. Paul Losute, the other co-manager of Cabesi adds with pride “Before the start of the project, the honey from West Pokot was mixed with beeswax and contaminated with dead bees. It had practically no value. Today, we produce the best quality honey in Kenya and are a model

for Kenya as a whole”. Last summer, the government identified beekeeping, alongside poultry farming and the production of goat’s meat, as one of the main pillars of economic development in West Pokot County. The relevant Ministry for Livestock choose “Cabesi” as one of its main partners in the implementation of a bee programme.

### Learning from mistakes

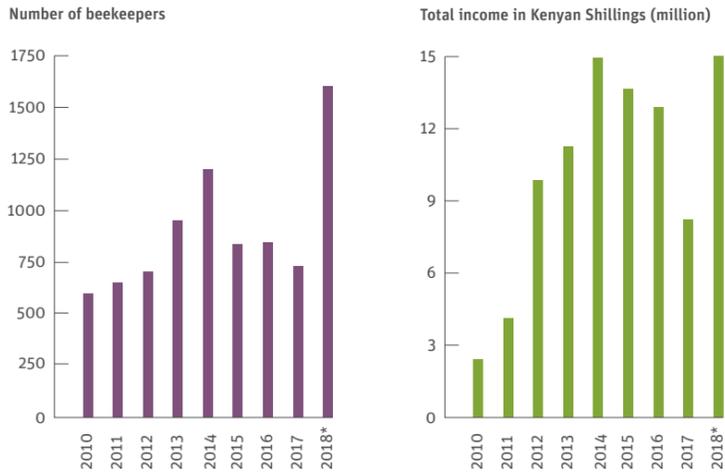
One of the factors crucial to the success of the project and its handover to the community was the painstaking development of a trustworthy local organisation and the commitment shown by the reliable and responsible management to both the Marketplace and the honey trade as a whole. However, even the setbacks became opportunities in the end and they are now being used in other projects. For example, the lessons from the failure to introduce camels were extremely useful to Biovision in a subsequent project in Isiolo County in Kenya. There, these robust animals were successfully re-introduced in 2010 in cooperation with the Borana semi-nomads. The Borana gave up keeping camels about 80 years ago when they turned to the more lucrative cattle trade. The number of camels in Isiolo County is increasing significantly and as part of the Biovision project, well-functioning structures have been developed for the collection, processing, transport and sale of camel milk.

[www.biovision.ch/cabesi-en](http://www.biovision.ch/cabesi-en)



Peter Lüthi is editor of the Biovision Newsletter and regularly travels to the project regions of Biovision to report on the projects and take photos.

Cabesi: Number of beekeepers and their income 2010–2018



\* The figures for the end of the current year (2018) are estimates.

## With renewed strength into the future

Loredana Sorg, Biovision

The Biovision Partner Meeting in the Kenyan town of Mbita provided clear evidence that bringing together more than fifty project professionals from five countries releases considerable energy and produces innovative ideas. Last July, the team from Switzerland met with representatives from partners in Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda in order to strengthen cooperation on joint projects and accelerate agroecological developments in East Africa. Speaking at the Biovision anniversary celebrations, Elizabeth Birungi from Prometra Uganda said “I am impressed by the diversity and professionalism of the various organisations”.

This inspirational exchange of ideas across national borders encouraged new beginnings. The different skills and expertise brought to the table by individual partners complemented one another and allowed considerable scope for synergies; combining political engagement with practical agriculture knowledge, arranging mutual project visits or the mapping out of new business ideas for smallholders. At this important meeting, the Biovision family not only expanded its network but with these new contacts it can face the future with renewed strength.



A strong team: Biovision representatives and its East African project partners met to develop joint strategies for the future (at the front in the middle: Elizabeth Birungi from Uganda).



New York, June 2016: How can we overcome global hunger? In New York, Biovision, in cooperation with the Senegalese government, brought together a range of opinion formers.

## New directions of travel

With a rucksack packed full of experience and knowledge, the Biovision team “Policy and Advocacy” is forging ahead with efforts to bring about a global breakthrough in the use of agroecological principles.

Stefanie Pondini, Biovision

“Agroecology” explores food systems from a holistic standpoint; it focusses not just on the yields per hectare of individual varieties but on the productivity of the entire agricultural system. For example, the principles of agroecology include closed nutrient and energy cycles, integrated arable and livestock farming and encouragement for the diversity of genetic resources.

“Business as usual is not an option”. This warning, expressed by Biovision President Hans Rudolf Herren in his summary of the conclusions of the IAASTD Report, is now on everyone’s lips. Despite that, agroecological practices are often neglected or talked down by policymakers. This is a serious concern because the application of such techniques has the potential to improve soil fertility, increase biodiversity, adapt agricultural

techniques to climate change, encourage a balanced diet and improve the incomes of farming families.

### Concrete action rather than merely lip service

Over the years, the Biovision project team “Policy and Advocacy” has successfully used its negotiating skills to ensure that sustainable agriculture was included in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the UN. The team is now focussing on two key areas for sustainable agriculture: research and policy. Firstly, Biovision is seeking to persuade decision-makers to change the way they think and act. In particular, it is advising and supporting African countries with policy planning and the introduction of agroecological measures with the aim of improving food security, climate resilience and general sustainability. The second project seeks to strengthen research into agroecology. One of its core components is to encourage networking between the international research community and investors, donor organisations and governments: New research and future-oriented techniques in the field of agroecology are crucial if we are to provide healthy food for a growing global population and conserve natural resources.

## Mountains and bees

People living in the arid district of Dehana in Ethiopia grow millet on narrow terraces cut from the barren slopes. Increasingly, however, they depend for their livelihood on livestock farming and hopefully in the near future on the sale of honey and beeswax. Since early 2018, Biovision has been helping local people develop modern, commercial beekeeping. In addition, recommendations made by the bee expert Dr Peter Gallmann are also feeding into this new project. As a result the local people are not only using modern beehives but also adapted traditional hives.



For people living in Dehana District, the production of honey and beeswax offers a valuable addition to livestock farming.

### Imprint

Newsletter 53, December 2018, © Biovision Foundation, Zurich

**Published by** Biovision, Foundation for ecological development, Heinrichstrasse 147, 8005 Zurich

**Editorial** Peter Lüthi

**Production** Sabrina Nepozitek

**Text** Peter Lüthi, Loredana Sorg, Stefanie Pondini, Martin Grossenbacher, Andreas Schriber

**Languages** This Newsletter is available in German, French and English.

**Translations** Sue Coles (English), Daniel Wermus (French)

**Cover photo** Maasai woman from the Mafanikio group, Vianzi, Tanzania: Peter Lüthi/Biovision

**Other photos** Peter Lüthi/Biovision: Pages 1,2,3,4 and 8; Christof Sonderregger, Page 4 top; Paul Louste/Cabesi: Page 5 top; Fabian Kohler/Biovision: Page 6 left; Simak Sam Loni: Page 6 top; Loredana Sorg/Biovision, Page 7 left; Martin Grossenbacher/Biovision: Page 7 top

**Design** Binkert Partner, Zurich

**Printing** Koprind Alpnach AG, Alpnach

**Paper quality** Cyclus Offset (100% recycled)

The Biovision Newsletter is published five times a year and is available on subscription for a minimum donation of CHF 5.-.



“Sounding Soil” lets you hear that not all soils sound the same.

## Sound of living soils

**“Sounding Soil” brings alive and makes audible the diversity of life beneath our feet. The inter and trans-disciplinary research project to increase our understanding of soil ecosystems is also an art project.**

Martin Grossenbacher, Biovision

“It started two years ago when out of sheer curiosity, I placed in the ground the sound sensors used to record the noises made by trees,” explains Marcus Maeder, sound artist, researcher and composer at the Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK). “The results were impressive: There is a hugely diverse sound world beneath our feet”. His idea has now become an inter and trans-disciplinary research and artistic project. To date, more than 20 areas of soil in Switzerland have been recorded, including intensively and extensively used agriculture land, Alpine meadows and woodland soils. The sound recordings include the animals that live in the soil, such as springtails, centipedes, beetles, earthworms, spiders and grasshoppers: The sound installation makes them accessible to the public for the first time. On 20 October, the installation was premiered at the Paul Klee Centre in Bern and can be viewed at the Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK) until February 2019.

### Raising awareness of the importance of healthy soils

As a result of climate change and a growing global population, the role of food security is becoming ever more important. Healthy soils are crucial as they underpin food security and biodiversity. “In contrast to air pollution or clean (drinking) water, people have little understanding of the soil on or in which their food is grown,” says Sabine Lerch, Project Manager. In fact, the amount of healthy soil in Switzerland has dramatically declined in recent decades. The initial results from *Sounding Soil* demonstrate a clear difference between extensively and intensively cultivated soils. Explaining the idea behind *Sounding Soil*, Sabine says “we need to raise awareness amongst the general public of the importance of healthy, natural soils”. As part of this, a Citizen Science Project will be launched next spring in which interested members of the public will be able to borrow equipment so that they too can measure the sounds coming from the soil. It is also planned to record soils as part of a project in Africa.

Further information and venues:  
[www.biovision.ch/soundingsoil-en](http://www.biovision.ch/soundingsoil-en)



## Story from the life of the Lopus family from Lomut in Kenya “Honey is a secure source of income”

Peter Lüthi, Biovision

Two small, sparsely furnished circular houses and an enclosure with 33 goats; such was the home of Chemunung and Peter Lopus in December 2006 when I last visited them. Their life in the remote Kerio Valley in West Pokot was not easy. Despite that, they radiated happiness because Chemunung had been delivered of a healthy boy three days earlier.

12 years later, last July, I visited the family again. They are now living further away from the village. When I entered the enormous yard with three spacious houses and a store, the couple came up to me with beaming smiles. “Do you remember”? says Chemunung pointing to a boy in a green T-Shirt. “That is Kibet.” When you last visited, he was three days old and I gave him his bath outside in front of the house”.

The couple now own a cow, a bull and four other cattle, 119 small domestic animals and an impressive array of chicken. They have bought a motorbike that Peter rides to take the honey harvest to the collection point in

Lomut. Since 2004, he has been part of the Biovision project “Cabesi” and has learned how to produce pure honey (see Pages 4/5). Peter started with five beehives and now has 34. In a good season he can produce half a ton of quality honey that he sells at a stable price at the Cabesi Marketplace for about 90,000 Kenyan shillings (about 800 Swiss Francs). “Honey is a secure source of income,” he says. “Even if the livestock die, the bees still continue to collect pollen and make honey”. Peter knows what he is talking about as during the last drought, he lost 7 cattle and 37 smaller animals. Fortunately, his livestock numbers have recovered.

Despite their success, Mr and Mrs Lopus still hold onto their simple life in the bush and their careful way of working. The profit from the lucrative honey business is invested cautiously. It allows all the children, including the girls, to complete their schooling. In West Pokot, that is not a matter of course. In addition, they are continuing to expand and Peter has already made 10 new beehives. This will allow them to improve their lives

further and if the harvests collapse in the semi-arid Kerio Valley because of a lack of rain, they will have money to buy food.

As I leave, Chemunung presents me with a live hen. I am touched and I have no choice but to accept the gift. I ease my conscience with the realisation that the couple have achieved success and taken control of their lives.

More photos and video:  
[www.biovision.ch/lopus-en](http://www.biovision.ch/lopus-en)



A photo from 2006: Kibet, then a new-born baby is now a strong boy (lad in the green T-shirt in top photo).



Biovision Foundation for ecological development  
[www.biovision.ch](http://www.biovision.ch) [www.facebook.com/biovision](https://www.facebook.com/biovision)  
 Donations to: PC 87-193093-4

**20**  
**YEARS**  
 REAL HELP  **biovision**