

Having a well close to their village frees kids and women from fetching water from a river, giving them more time for study and other chores.



## Living on Dry Land

“In my grandpa’s time, a drought happened every 20 years; in my dad’s time, it happened every 10 years. Now, it happens every 5 years.” Climate change has been threatening the long-lasting traditional lifestyle in northern Kenya over the years. Today, we present a close-up of an effort to protect those people’s lives.



Residents discuss water use at a meeting. A project respecting the local lifestyle is crucial.



### FREQUENT DROUGHTS RUIN THE LIVESTOCK

“Most of the places around northern Kenya are tough for agriculture to start with. It rains very little. Nomadic grazing where you feed your animals grass in a yearly cycle of two seasons, rainy and dry, is the best lifestyle for this harsh environment,” explains Fumiaki Murakami from Nippon Koei Co.,Ltd.

The lifestyle here has gradually been changing due to frequent droughts. Losing livestock to a drought means losing one’s assets and food. If a drought happens once every 20 years, it still could allow time to grow the herd. However, with a drought every three or five years, the herd only keeps getting smaller.

As a response to global climate change challenging people’s lives on dry land, Murakami and his co-workers have worked on improving the local resistance level against droughts to lessen damage.

The operation had three main focuses: securing a water source and effective use of green lands, pro-

motion of livestock trade, and securing an income source other than grazing.

The local people decide to go to lands further away when they are out of water. If a water resource is provided, the area could have been used as a new place for grazing. The further they go to find water, the more likely that they are implicated in conflicts by invading another tribe’s living area. Improving the use of grazing land that was close to one’s living space could have prevented inter-tribal issues, too.

Even so, the whole thing was more complex than just putting a water resource in place. There were three main tribes with different customs and livestock breeds to raise in Marsabit County, which was the target location for this project. Each tribe’s sub-lifestyle needed to be considered. Murakami recalls, “Borana people mainly have cows that need to be given water everyday, so, they live in a place where the water is fairly rich, and they’ve also unionized to manage the water resource and the supply plant for some agriculture. On the other hand, Rendille people mainly have camels, which only need to feed water every two weeks. Their mobility is high, and they hardly stay in one spot long enough to run a facility like a water plant.

As a response to those customs in the Borana people’s living space, we planned a big reservoir, which holds plenty of water, but needed frequent maintenance, and in the Rendille people’s living space, a much smaller and easy-to-manage water facility was planned.

### PROMOTE PROACTIVE TRADE TO RESPECT “LIVESTOCK AS ASSETS”

The promotion of the livestock trade was no simple matter either. Selling the livestock to get cash before a drought hits would lessen the impact from the drought. However, the livestock is highly valued by the locals. People did not want to sell them unless absolutely necessary to do so, and thus the livestock market was not very developed.

In this framework, Murakami drew his attention to the benefits of female animal that could provide both new calves and milk. Female animal were so valuable to the grazers that they didn’t want to sell them. It was very rare to see female animal at the livestock market in northern Kenya. Then, Murakami planned the sale of virgin female animal brought from other regions in the market. “We interviewed the people who purchased the new livestock and 70



The reservoir developed by the project became the main spot for grazing and lots of cattles gather around.

to 80% of them said they had sold their own livestock to make the price. Before that, almost nobody sold his or her own livestock to get a new one at the market. This program really worked to increase the number of people who would let their livestock go at the market as we’ve hoped,” Murakami says. If livestock sellers from other regions take part in selling female animal at the market, the livestock trade there should be very much enhanced.

The third focus of the project, in addition to supporting local traditions, was to create an extra income source besides grazing, especially to produce income available for women and young people.

Murakami looked at goats, which the local people had handled for a long time and were familiar with, and chickens, which had increasing demand in the city suburbs. He made a system where people would raise livestock in a group and share the newly produced kid goats and chicks. Some proactive action by the participating local women has been seen, such as coming up with a way to hatch more eggs.

In addition to this, there have been continuing attempts to gradually solve ongoing problems in the community and to create ways to produce more income to enhance adaptability to droughts. Murakami emphasizes, “This area will continue to be influenced by climate change, and it is important to continue support with the respects towards the traditional lifestyle of the grazers.”



Left: It is important that the people themselves want to sell and buy new, younger animal. Right: The merry-go-round project where everybody can work together and share the fruit strengthens the bond in the group, and it has been an effective work style for the local women.