



Donkeys & Goats for Vulnerable Widows

For Northern Kenya, the drought of 2005-2006 was the most severe in several decades. Those agro-pastoralists living on the lower slopes of Marsabit Mountain were left particularly vulnerable, as they generally subsist with a small livestock herd and cultivation of small fields. The on-going drought has left many with no crop and numerous livestock deaths. It was particularly destructive to those who have only a few animals, as these people heavily rely on them for ferrying water, milk and meat, and cash income. The widows and abandoned women with no livestock, yet sole responsibility for caring for their children, have been left most vulnerable, and have the least chance of recovery from the drought.

Sauti Moja provides a female donkey and four female goats to widows in order to help them recover from drought, care for their families, and regain dignity and hope.

In contrast to those of us from the West, many families suffer the effects of our excessive consumption on climate change and weather extremes. For example, the drought has created despair for many Borana families in Marsabit District, especially families headed by widowed or abandoned women. After the drought, families survived on short-term food aid, but now hunger has increased. Our assistance provides hope for a secure future to female-headed households.



Overwhelming workloads characterize the lives of many Borana widows. They struggle to milk and care for livestock, prepare food for their families, clean their homes, fetch water and firewood, and often, conduct small business activities for cash income. This often has negative health implications and also impacts their access to social and educational opportunities.

For many women, fetching water is the most time and energy consuming task, leaving little capacity for other activities, including child care. Often, the girl children are also engaged in this household duty, so are unable to attend school. During dry season, Guyatu, a widow with seven children, walks 8-12 km every day to fetch 20 L (about 50 lbs) of water to meet her family's needs.

“Our backs, which have been wounded by carrying water, are being healed.”

“I am blessed, and life is no longer the same...my life has turned around.”

Buke, like other Borana widows, shows the Sauti Moja team the donkey and goats that she has received. The goats provide milk for the family, and the male offspring will be sold to provide for health care, clothing and education. With the assistance of a donkey, she only has to fetch water every other day, so is less exhausted. Now, Buke also has more time for other duties, and emphasized that now she has stress. She does not have to make a daily choice among begging food from neighbours, making and selling charcoal, and fetching water.

