



Longido Early Childhood Education

Indigenous children from rural communities - in this case, Maasai - are often disadvantaged upon entering the school system. This usually leads to poor performance and early dropout, perpetuating a cycle of marginalization, as too few Maasai are qualified for positions of power that influence provision of government services, such as health, education and agriculture, to their communities. Sara Mollelian, a retired Maasai teacher, returned to her home in Longido, Tanzania with a vision for reversing this cycle of early school dropout and continued marginalization by providing a better educational and nutritional start for children. Last year, she started a pre-school in Longido, and sought Sauti Moja's assistance for that school and a new pre-school in Oltepesi. After consultations in which the community demonstrated real commitment to this shared vision, we agreed to support early childhood development in remote Maasai communities. Private donors and Nevada Learning Series, a Canadian supplier of educational materials, sponsor this program.

Through early childhood education initiatives, Sauti Moja is fostering healthy early development and providing rural children the opportunity to develop the characteristics and skills that will assist them academically, as well as enhance the strength and capacity of rural communities.



On the left, a pre-schooler is being supervised by the founder of LECHE, Sara Mollelian. The child is using one of the tools that is common within Montessori-style education. Children use a host of different tools and engage in activities, which develop attention span, hand-eye coordination, and tenacity. Under Sara's leadership, Sauti Moja will integrate Montessori methods into this project and is excited about how this methodology is instilling a joy of learning among Maasai children. Parents have become convinced that this pre-school education is important for both children and the community; they decided that families who cannot afford the \$5/mo/child contribution to teacher pay, supplies, and lunch should still have their children attend pre-school.

With help from donors, Sauti Moja will train local teaching assistants, provide school and educational supplies, and support expansion of the pre-school program to other remote communities.

The photo on the right shows Serewa, a young man from Oltepesi village, who is an enthusiastic teaching assistant. We are proud of him, as he has been integral to mobilizing the community and assisting with classroom activities. His involvement is especially powerful because caring for children is typically the domain of women. Therefore, Serewa's involvement is an important model for other men whom we hope to engage more fully in matters related to child education and health.

Last year, as shown, the children met under an acacia tree. This year, the community has constructed a classroom from local materials, and Sauti Moja provided concrete for the floor, a secure door, classroom furnishings and teaching materials.

