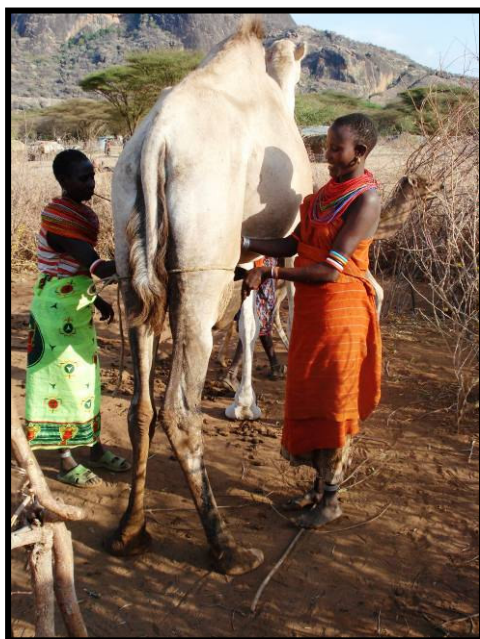


One Response to Global Warming and the Food Crisis in East Africa: Camels for Widows

For agricultural scientists in the Prairies, recognition that global warming will adversely impact the lives of farmers and contribute to food crises around the World is old news. Fifteen years ago, Tim Wright of Kelvington was Manager of the Prairie Resources Unit of PFRA, when PFRA along with Research Branch and the universities were considering the impacts of climate change and carbon trading on Prairie farmers, as well as coping strategies. Since then Tim left research to manage international development programs and consult on relief and development projects in several countries. He offers the following perspective from East Africa, where he has lived for a number of years.

As a third-generation farmer from Saskatchewan, Tim knows that farming in Canada is tough – unpredictable weather, increased input costs, unstable market prices, etc. In contrast, many herders of East Africa are now in a life or death struggle to survive the impact of global warming and related drought on livestock production. As there is no such thing as insurance for these livestock producers, there is little hope of recovery from drought for those with few or no livestock - usually widows and abandoned women with children. Sauti Moja, the Canadian charity that Tim Wright founded, is helping these women, who are usually ‘forgotten’ by government and other agencies, recover from drought. They are providing widows and abandoned women with camels which are both drought-hardy and environmentally-friendly.

Pastoralists, those whose livelihood depends on livestock, have a sophisticated survival system of seasonal adjustment to rainfall, ie. shifting their livestock and, in the case of nomads, their communities, according to availability of water and forage. However, this fragile relationship of people, livestock and environment is being upset by climate change. Global warming has increased the frequency and severity of drought in marginal areas, such as the semi-arid and arid/desert areas of northern Kenya where pastoralists live. Recent droughts have resulted in all households losing livestock, especially the donkeys, cattle, sheep and goats, which are less hardy than camels. This increased the prevalence of hunger, as historically, the staple food has been cattle, goat and camel milk.



In a fact-finding trip into the Kaisut desert this August, Tim observed hungry children fighting over the milk froth left over in the milking bowl. An elder, who has only one camel, spoke of having up to 20 people begging him for milk at each milking. With the recent failure of rains, again, there is little-to-no milk from goats, and the surviving cows dried-up long ago. Many people are surviving on relief food with no hope for a better future.

In order to increase resilience of households and communities, most pastoralists realize that, in order to survive the new reality of more frequent drought, they need more camels. Camels are more hardy as they graze on shrubs and tress that other livestock do not. As well, a camel can go much further from the water source to access forage; a camel can go for 10 days without water, but cattle, sheep and goats need to be watered every 2-3 days. In fact, the Rendille people, who live in the most

arid area, consider the camel as “one-half of God”, which reflects their dependence on camels for survival. Unfortunately, the growing demand, both locally and from Arabia, and limited supply has doubled the price of heifer camels. Nevertheless, Sauti Moja, as well as some other development agencies, is supporting this transition from more vulnerable livestock, such as cattle, to camels. Sauti Moja is the only agency that focuses exclusively on vulnerable women to ensure that their children will not go hungry and will be able to access basic health care and education.

Sauti Moja partners with development professionals who themselves grew up in these pastoralist communities and who herded livestock as young men. These professionals now volunteer their expertise to help alleviate the plight of the most marginalized women with children. With financial assistance from donors to Sauti Moja, they mobilize community leaders to select the most-needy households, purchase and distribute camels and veterinary supplies, and monitor care for the camels. In addition, they oversee the “Pass-On” process, whereby each beneficiary gives the first female offspring to the next most needy woman selected by community leaders. In this manner, a donation of one camel eventually benefits several households. In the past fifteen months, Sauti Moja and its volunteer staff has been able to provide camels and new hope to 35 female-headed households in the Kaisut Desert of northern Kenya. Mare is one of the beneficiaries of assistance from a compassionate Canadian donor.

Mare is a young Rendille widow. She was the second wife to an elderly man, who promised her 100 goats upon his death. Unfortunately, after her husband passed, the first wife and her relatives prevented Mare from receiving any inheritance. In contrast to Western societies, due to strict cultural customs, she can not escape poverty and singleness by remarrying. When asked how the camel affected her life, she said that *“it allows me to be self-sufficient, care for my son, and regain dignity within my community.”*



Sauti Moja invites you to join us in drought-proofing a pastoralist community of East Africa and providing new hope for a widow and her family. The current cost for a camel, logistics for purchase and delivery, and veterinary supplies is \$500. Your donation will turn a woman’s life around; Silamban, a Samburu widow, told us that, because of her camel, *“Drought will never be too hard for me. We will have milk when there is drought. I will become a donor of milk to others in the village who do not have milk for their children”*. We believe that such assessments by pastoralists are a powerful testimony to the need for a shift toward camels and a testimony to the merit of our program.

For more information, please visit www.sautimoja.org