



# Berichte und Impressionen

von Bella Adhiambo Stellvertretende Geschäftsführerin von EP Kenya

## FACES OF MPUAI, TALEK, MAASAI MARA

### OLE POLOS CULTURAL VILLAGE

In your typical Maasai village, you can tell the number of households in it by counting the number of entrances/exits on the fence surrounding the homesteads- in Ole Polos we counted five of them. Each of the households had more than one manyatta since they are polygamous, bringing the total to about 12 families in the village. The village was set up as a cultural village by the members of the five households together with a few others from the Mpuai locality. The cultural village was to serve as a socio-cultural support centre as well as a commercial one to the members as well as the larger community of Mpuai. The village currently houses about 20 women, 15 men and several children who strive to maintain and uphold most of their traditional systems and practices which they showcase to visiting tourist at a cost. They perform traditional songs and dance, produce ornaments from beads and curios for sale to the tourists in order to earn a living. This works well as long as it is peak season but not during the low season when we have few or no tourist in most of the camps.

Neboo Stanley, the village spokesman is a young man in his early 20s but exhibits a lot of knowledge and understanding of the changes taking place in the world outside the Mara and the challenges they pose to his community. He says they can no longer count on large herds of livestock as their sole source of wealth and income and envisions a future where they will have to reduce their stocks drastically or have none at all. He says his generation will be the last to inherit any livestock from their parents and will not be able to sustain them and bequeath them to their own children. It's the same old story about crazy climate changes, unreliable rainfall patterns, shrinking grazing fields and increased fencing of individual land. We have fences coming up all over forcing people to migrate long distances over equally long durations from their families in search of pastures for their stock. Until recently I had quite a number of neighbors I did not know because they have been away for a better part of the year grazing their livestock! Neboo says illiteracy and lack of training are prevalent challenges they need to address if they are to compete for employment and available economic opportunities with the rest of the world. Therein lies their motivation to reach out to EP and other institutions with similar objectives to support them in their development agendas.

Three months ago, the cultural centre youth received training on video editing and production of short films from a group of visiting researchers who also donated to them a Recorder camera. With this they have been able to make CDs of some of their songs on a wide range of issues ranging from land privatization & resulting conflicts; climate changes & unreliable rainfall; rites of initiation. They intend to shift from dependence only on incomes

from visitors during peak season to packaging their products in CDs and brochures for those who cannot make it into the Mara. They also intend to have a website through which to present and promote their cultural village to the rest of the world. This is definitely not the right forum to talk about the serious exploitation of the Maasai by dubious people who promote their own personal ventures using their pictures and videos without consent or pay- will skip that for today. Their wish is to be able to get more training on how to record their performances, produce CDs of the same and promote or market them. They also wish to raise funds with which to acquire the technology required to do this.

The women, who have been in the background from the beginning of this article, are actually the main reason we got a second invite to Ole Polos. They had been to Ole Sananka's home and seen the Bio-digester installed there by the EP team comprising Dr. Immigard and Dr. Ingo- they want to have a bio digester for the village! This is definitely a tall order for EP as the village has about 14 houses and would require a bigger and more expensive model, if not they would have to build 6 digester to be shared by two or three households depending on their contributions to the overall cost. Good thing is we are able to reach consensus with the women on one thing, should they qualify, then the digesters will be installed on a first-come first-serve basis. To sum up my interview with the members of Ole Polos, I ask a question that I have refrained from asking all our previous interviewees for fear it would be misconstrued- Why didn't they opt for the toilet& bathroom? There is an uneasy silence before someone volunteers an answer- toilet affairs are private and not for round table discussions. They tell me nature has a way of managing and recycling its processes, meaning this is not yet a problem. I point out that the increasing human populace and settlements in the area will make it necessary to have toilets & bathrooms in future not only to avert pollution but for privacy purposes. That has them thinking- they will need them for their visitors and guests in the near future, considering their expansion plans!

I set out for yet another household profiling interview having made an appointment with the residents of Ole Polos to come to our base camp and check out our Arbaloo toilet and bathroom. I am keeping my fingers crossed and hoping for at least one household to request for our subsidized toilet and bathroom. They will certainly get a super discount, with my personal contribution.

Bella Adhiambo

5/12/2011 Kenya