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Kenya: Raising Awareness For Alternative Income Initiatives for Gender Rights for Women.

Figuratively speaking, everyday the woman of the Maasai Mara in Kenya, have to wear many “hats”. Compared to their male counterparts, the Kipsigis women’s lives center-around daily chores. These chores take up massive amounts of their time and effort. During a typical day in the Mara, a woman plays the role of farmer, caretaker, and cash earner. Even though the Kipsigis women contribute so much to the welfare of the family, they live without gender equality within the home and community. The crops they tend too, fetch water for, and harvest yearly brings their family little income resulting in an annual income of less than \$400US (Free The Children, 2012). Through this paper, the women of the Kipsigis tribe will be highlighted to help create an awareness of everything they have to do for family and how little rights they receive in return for their efforts. Many organizations have started to step up and help try to bring ways for the women of Kenya to earn extra income for their families while also earning a new position within the society.

Each day the Kipsigis women have to collect firewood, cook, clean, care for their children, and gather water. With all the chores that the women are required to do, they are left with no time to make additional money. Due to gender bias in the communities, men in Kenya have more access to improved technologies for use in farming and non-farming enterprise activities than the woman do. The Kipsigis men, though, spend most of their day walking around the countryside grazing their cattle. A General Counselor of a major bank in East Africa said, “Women do all the backbreaking work, but it is the men who get the funds from the cash crops”(Georgetown Law Center, 2009). Having fewer resources and influence, the Kenyan women have been traditionally marginalized within their society(Free The Children, 2012). As the family’s traditional breadwinners, it is the men who hold all the financial control in the home and as such are often the only ones who make all the decisions(Free The Children, 2012). This has created definite gender roles in which the women, regardless of contributions to the family or community, have very limited rights within society and no say within the home because they do not earn an income.

While a typical Kipsigis family is similar to an American family because it consists of a father, mother, and children; an outstanding difference of the Kipsigis is culturally they believe in polygamy. To help with the multitude of daily chores, a woman may encourage their husband to take another wife. A husband will have all of his wives living in close proximity of each other. Procreation is welcomed in [the] East African communit[ies] where the principal form of intergenerational inheritance is land, intermediate levels of offspring production are favored for women(Mulder, 2000). The bigger the family, the more food it requires. In the Emorijoy community, the Kipsigis women travel over 8 miles by foot to the Mulot market on Saturdays to purchase food or items they might need(Orris, 2012). They survive on less than one dollar a day, so their purchasing power is minimal at the market. Corn is a major crop in the Maasai Mara because the people’s diet consists mainly of Ugali, which is a maize porridge(Wikipedia, 2012). Most food items come from raising chickens and small vegetable gardens through subsistence farming.

Each day the Kipsigis women who living in Emorijoy have to travel about 2 miles to fetch the water, and 2 miles back home. “Momma Jane”, a local Kipsigis woman, usually retrieved water five times a day to ensure her family had enough water for the day(Orris, 2012). Kipsigis women would travel this 4-mile route with approximately 65 pounds to 80 pounds of water weight(Free The Children, 2010). The ritual “water walk” started before the sun came up and ended when all of the children were in bed. The Kipsigis women would complete the water walks daily, and if they were unable to make the travels they would

require their female children to make the trip. Young females would typically be pulled from school or activities to help their mothers with chores. Typically, the Kipsigis parents usually send the boys of their family to school before the girls due to the school fees associated with yearly schooling. The girls are expected to help their mother with the chores, fetching water, and making additional money so if they are at school, their family may suffer. The cultural bias about male dominated education leaves girls no time to go to school, so like their mothers, they don't get the education that they deserve and need to survive or rise in society.

During the summer months of 2011, East Africa suffered one of the worst droughts in history. Women in the Mara now had to walk much farther to get water; sometimes up to 5 miles for one trip (Free The Children, 2011). Whether during times of drought or not, this very time consuming process of getting water leaves little time for the woman to make additional money. Drought and deforestation in Kenya make a woman's workload even more burdensome as they have to walk even longer distances to retrieve firewood and water. The weather not only affects the woman's workload, but also the food security crisis. The UN estimates that 3.5 million Kenyans will require food assistance, this may still rise (Oneworld, 2012). The food insecurity in Kenya is the result of many years of mismanagement of the agricultural sector. Over 60% of the country's households rely on agriculture (Oneworld, 2012). The drought decreases the amount of animals there are too. With the decreases in animals, there is a decrease in food.

Finding sources of alternative income is one way for women to break out of the gender roles they have been forced into. Free The Children has been operating in Kenya since 1999 within the Narok South District, working with both Kipsigis and Maasai communities (Free The Children, 2012). Free The Children realized early on that to make the most difference in this part of the world, they had to change the gender roles of society. They have been very proactive in working with the women of the Maasai Mara. One of the greatest benefits of [Free The Children's] alternative income programs is that they help to change gender perceptions within the community by demonstrating the ability of women to provide for their families (Free The Children, 2012).

The Alternative Income Projects are broken into three phases:

- Phase 1: Women are mobilized into more formal women's groups that help women establish their own participation, ownership, and recognition of their own access and control over resources. They then initiate small projects within each group. The focus of the small projects are decided and implemented solely by the group members and often include the purchase of goats, tin sheets for their homes and others.
- Phase 2: After a successful completion of the program's first stage, the groups move to more advanced group formation trainings such as: writing group, learning leadership processes and conflict resolution strategies, minute-taking, as well as human & children's rights issues.
- Phase 3: Once the training is completed and put into practice by the group, Free The Children provides financial literacy trainings. Small loans are given to expand or establish small businesses and provide additional household income. Small loans empower women by allowing them to increase their influence over some of the household economic decisions.
(Free The Children, 2012).

One of the alternative income projects Free The Children promotes in Kenya is Bee Keeping. "Momma Jane" was one the first member of her women's group to purchase her Bee Keeping needs through her women's group pooling their extra money together (Orris, 2012). By selling honey from the bees, "Momma Jane" was able to earn additional money that she gave back to the women's group to purchase things for the other women in need in the group. Every women in the group must contribute to the group's funds each week. Once they have enough money to purchase everyone in the group an item they

are all in need of, for example larger water containers to carry water in, they purchase the items. Every woman in the group has a say as to where and how the money is spent. This empowers the women and allows for them to have an equal say in how the money is spent. They are able to buy things they need and change the way their families survives.

Another way Free the Children works with the women of Kenya is through artisan work such as beadwork. The women of the Maasai tribe, whom Free The Children also works with, are known for their beadwork. To combat the drought of 2011, the sister organization of Free The Children, "Me To We" sold Rafiki Chains made by the local Maasai women. These beaded necklaces were sold using the Free The Children/Me to We website and thousands of people in both Canada and the US purchased them for \$10US. By selling these chains, Free The Children gave 100% of the profit to back to the Maasai women who made them to help curb the drought problems they were facing (Free The Children, 2012). This extra money gave these women the power to purchase clean water from Free The Children water stations in Kenya and food items at the market they needed. Club Hope, a club from Maquoketa High School, sold 92 of these Rafiki Chains sending \$920US dollars back to the Maasai women to help them.

Women also can weave baskets and make other small things, but those don't often bring in money because many other women are trying to sell them in the local markets. Beadwork and weaving are very time consuming hobbies, and the women don't always have time to do those. Because women spend so much time on their chores, and fetching water, they don't have time to do the other things to create alternative incomes. There are ways that can help the women make more money, but people need to take the time to invent them. Inventions such as improved stoves, rainwater harvesting schemes, improved hoes and planters, grind hills, cassava graters, oil-seed presses, and food processing equipment could save time and effort for the women of Kenya allowing them to focus on alternative incomes. Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation received a \$19 million grant to boost productivity and income of women farmers using low cost mechanized power. If someone spoke up about the women of Kenya, the Kipsigis and Maasai, just think how different the Mara would be if \$19 million dollars was being spent on them for positive change.

A big issue the women of Kenya face is lack of property rights. Oloo from the league of Kenya Women Voters says, "If my husband died today... I would be given a piece of land to bury my husband and that would be the only land that I could use. The only thing that I am entitled to is the grave" (Lightening the Load, 2010). Women are unable to inherit property from their spouses, fathers, or other relatives. If a man dies in the Kipsigis culture, the land is left to his sons while his wife receives nothing (Everyculture.org, 2012). The women in Kenya do 70% of the labor and own less than 1% of the land (Lightening the Load, 2010). Due to the absence of effective authority and a clear definition of property rights residents are forced to choose informal ways of enforcement for their property rights. Because women do so much work and receive little credit, such as property rights, there is law being revised in Kenya called the "Law of Succession Act".

The "Law of Succession Act" was created to try to protect and define property rights. The Act embraces the idea that men and women should have equal rights to inherit property. It would also treat male and female children the same in terms of their right to inherit property from their parents. The act also states that widows are permitted to inherit property and are given priority over brothers or other male relatives to become the administrators of the estates of their husbands (Mulder, 2010). Even though the "Law of Succession Act" has been passed there are many deficiencies in the law. Due to the four major types of marriage in Kenya, the law does not provide for widows in both monogamous and polygamous marriages to inherit land.

One well-known organization that is making a difference in other countries regarding gender equality is the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, also known as UN

Women. The United Nations has been working with governments in other countries since October 24 of 1945. The UN Women currently are working in other African countries such as Nigeria and Zimbabwe fighting for women's rights and gender equality (United Nations, 2011). Using the diplomatic reputation and existing relationship between the UN and Kenya, UN Women may have more leverage to promote and push for equitable inheritance changes in the revised "Law of Succession Act".

In conclusion, finding ways to create positive change for the women of Kenya will take a lot of work and time. Organizations like Free The Children, I feel, are on the right path to creating lifelong change for the Kipsigis and Maasai women. Unfortunately, getting Governmental support in developing countries is where non-profit organizations can run into their biggest hurdles. Women like "Momma Jane" will be forever changed because of the efforts of Free The Children. I, personally, cannot wait to go and meet "Momma Jane" in July of 2013 when I travel with club hOpe, a Youth in Action Group through Free The Children, to the Maasai Mara of Kenya. I look forward to the days of seeing first hand the alternative income projects that the women are participating in and encourage them through gathering water for them for a day so they have more time to work on their artisan projects. I truly cannot wait to see first hand these programs operating in full force and witness gender equality changing before my eyes.

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