

# THE Indigenous

SAMBURU WOMEN TRUST

THE VOICE OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND GIRLS



## The indigenous women

Systematically excluded from the decision-making processes

## Excelling amidst societal stigma

Overcoming stigma associated with mothers who find themselves in the unfortunate situation of being single



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### Family Intervention

saved a delicate situation

### My daughters, the source of my pride

Keeping a hawk eye on my daughters

### Spreading education gospel

She has taken it upon herself to spread the gospel of education across the villages

## OUR VISION

We envision a society that recognizes, promotes and protects the fundamental rights and freedom of women and girls; and ensures full participation of indigenous women in their own development

## OUR MISSION

We exist to empower pastoralists' women and girls to claim their human rights, strengthen their capacity to influence local and national policies, and address harmful cultural practices through integrating the role of women as decision-makers in the community



### PUBLISHERS

Samburu Womens Trust

### PROJECT EDITOR

Jane Meriwas

### EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

Elijah Mwangi

### DESIGN & LAYOUT

Pictomax Media Services

### PHOTOGRAPHY

Elijah Mwangi

### CONTRIBUTORS

SWT Staff

### GENERAL INQUIRIES

#### Head Office

Samburu Women Trust Gefro Imani Hse,  
Park Road 3rd Floor, Room 16

**Phone:** +254 (0) 755 555 211

**E-mail:** [info@samburuwomentrust.org](mailto:info@samburuwomentrust.org)

**Mailing:** Gefro Imani Hse, Park Road 3rd  
Floor, Room 16, P.O. Box 1763 - 10400  
Nanyuki

[www.samburuwomentrust.org](http://www.samburuwomentrust.org)

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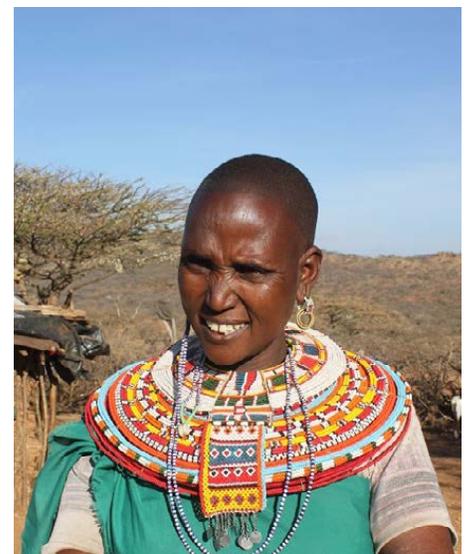
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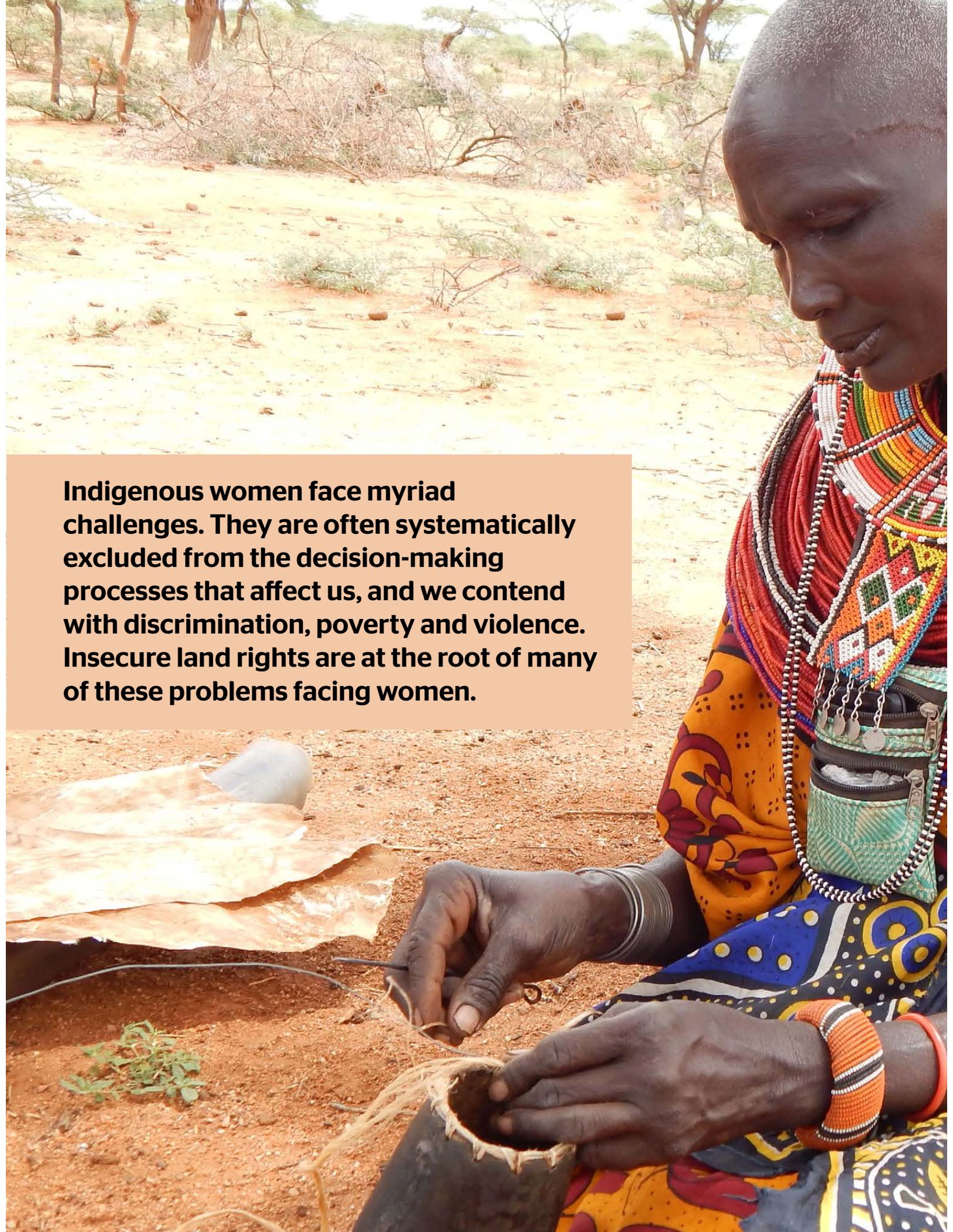
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A woman with traditional beaded jewelry and colorful clothing is shown in profile, focused on her craft. She is working with a dark, cylindrical object, possibly a gourd, and some fibers. The background is a dry, open landscape with sparse vegetation and trees under a bright sky. A semi-transparent text box is overlaid on the left side of the image.

**Indigenous women face myriad challenges. They are often systematically excluded from the decision-making processes that affect us, and we contend with discrimination, poverty and violence. Insecure land rights are at the root of many of these problems facing women.**



Indigenous women have a vital role to play in the struggle over land, and are increasingly overcoming a double discrimination to assert their rightful position in the society.

These women are often responsible for their families' food security, since more and more men are migrating to the cities. This leaves the women with the sole responsibility of feeding for their families and providing other basic needs. Majority of them can only access land through marriage, which limits their economic and personal choice and makes it difficult for them to secure credit on their own.

Hence without secure rights, women are highly vulnerable to land-grabbing and forced eviction through so called development projects initiated by governments and corporations. A good example in Kenya is the LAPSSSET project and oil exploration in Turkana County, an Indigenous people's territories.

Secure land rights also help indigenous women to continue their vital role in climate change

adaptation and mitigation. Indigenous women are the main transmitters of indigenous cultural values and worldviews. Many use traditional knowledge passed down through the generations to steward the world's remaining forests. Deforestation rates are dramatically lower in forests managed by indigenous people and local communities, and in many parts of the world, such as in Africa, it is women who are primarily responsible for sustainable resource management.

To address this issue, as well as the numerous other challenges facing indigenous women, our voices need to be heard at every level, from the community to the international forums, on issues that affect us. We must be recognized as equal partners and our right to self-determination respected.

We want every woman and girl to realize the rights that are enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We also stand for other rights that are vital for women's equality. We stand for a woman's right to decide if and when to have children and to have high-quality health care that means she won't die in pregnancy or during childbirth. We know Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is a violation of girls' rights, and must be eliminated. We stand for the right of every woman to live equally and free from discrimination.

Its only when women and girls have full access to their rights - from equal pay and land ownership rights to sexual rights,

freedom from violence, and access to education, and maternal health rights - will real equality exist. Only when women have taken leadership and peace making roles and have an equal political voice will economies be transformed. And only then will all women and girls have the self-determination they are entitled to.

SWT host the Indigenous Women Council which constitutes the eleven (11) member council whose representation is drawn from indigenous and hunter gatherers organizations advancing indigenous women rights across the counties. The nominated members will be a period of 1 year (2017-2018) and that the council members must demonstrate diversity and inclusivity of indigenous women in Kenya, tribes and consider other special interest groups hence SWT will be the convener and support the administration of the Council.

The mandate of indigenous women council includes; to lobby for IPs women participation in decision making processes from community, County and National levels; to mobilize IPs women and develop strategies to advance women rights and their inclusion in leadership at all levels; to increase IPs women visibility in their respective counties and national platforms; to Lobby for allocation of resources for indigenous.

### **Jane Meriwas**

Founder & Executive Director  
Samburu Women Trust

# Excelling amidst societal stigma

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**She is a shining example in her village, having overcome stigma associated with mothers who find themselves in the unfortunate situation of being single.**

At her homestead at Narasha village in Isiolo County, Ms Salante Lebulkash goes about her daily chores with confidence. She is a proud owner of a herd of goat, and this has become her source of livelihood for her three children.

Traditionally, livestock belongs to men in the Samburu community, but to Ms Lebulkash, this no longer holds water as she is now among the few women who confidently controls this valued economic livelihood among the locals.

In her community, women unlucky enough to separate with their husbands find themselves in a hostile environment, at times being viewed as outcasts in the society.



But, for Ms Lebulkash, she has stood firm for the sake of children, societal perceptions notwithstanding and she takes great pride in her achievements.

“My first born is in college studying tourism management and these goats provides the income needed to educate him,” she says with a tinge of pride in her voice as she milks the animals to prepare breakfast on this cold Wednesday morning.

Narrating the genesis of her separation, she says she cannot point to a specific issue that made her husband get fed up with their marriage.

“He just threw me out of the homestead one day and took all what we had acquired together. I left empty handed from the place I had called home for five years,” she recalls.

Finding herself out in the wilderness and with no moral or financial support

coming from her family, she was not about to despair.

Life had to move on and she was determined to move on despite the unexpected and ugly turn of events. As he strived to feed and provide shelter for her sons, she vowed to educate all her children despite her community attaching little value to education.

“Education is the path to a prosperous future and I knew educating my children would empower them socially and give them a bright future,” she says.

Her first born son went to a mission school at Ol Donyiro and this gave her an opportunity to start small business like selling tea, airtime and foodstuffs during market days. By saving the little she earned she was able to buy a goat. It is this same goat that a heard has grown and eventually Ms Lebulkash was able to put up a

decent home where she is currently staying with her children.

She attributes her success to a capacity building training offered by Samburu Women Trust saying it has enabled her to walk with her head held high despite a negative perception form the society.

“I wish I had gotten this training when I was young. My confidence as a single woman who has managed to bring up a family is encouraging other women in the locality and the negative perception is slowly fading out,” she says.

She has a message to other women who may find themselves in a situation similar to her. “A woman with strong self-esteem can build her own house, bring up and educate children. She needs to stand up with confidence and should not succumb to societal humiliation at any one moment”.





## Family intervention saved a delicate situation

Getting married young to an elderly man is what marked the beginning of her troubles.

Though her husband was kind and gentle, his brothers were cruel and were fond of harassing the new bride Noonkishu Lepiranto for no reason.

“I reached a point where I was fed up with the harassment and decided to go back to my parents’ home. I convinced my husband to accompany me though by then I did not have a child,” she recalls.

She says her parents were supportive and offered them accommodation including the livestock they had come with.

However, after a few months, her in-laws visited the home and took away cattle, camels and donkeys,

leaving the young family with no source of livelihood.

“They took advantage of my elderly husband and took away all our property. They were out to humiliate me for reasons I could not understand since they also demanded that my son, the only child I had then was an outcast who should be given out to the Turkana community,” says Lepiranto.

Through the support of her parents and specifically her brother Lekaldero, she was able to pick up the pieces and now became the provider of her husband until his death. He was buried at his wife’s homestead.



Noonkishu Lepiranto

"I am the one who encouraged my sister to come back home to escape the harassment and intimidation she was enduring at the hands of her brother-in-law. She is hardworking and even after the livestock was taken away, she has been able to stand on her feet with relying on my support," says Lekaldero.

Lepiranto says her parents' gesture to accept her back with her husband is not common in the community.

"Once you are married off and the bride price given out, you are supposed to stick to your new home no matter the circumstances. My case is rare and my family has set a good example to parents not to subject their daughters to harsh environment in the name of marriage and bride price," says the mother of four.

Lepiranto owns some goats which are the source of food and income to educate her children. Her two sons are in secondary school while the last born is in primary school.

Her message to single or divorced women to stand up and speak with one voice and do not accept to be treated as second class people. She however adds that women who find themselves in such a situation needs empowerment and emotional supports since at times the society is hostile.

Her bother advises parents to accept back their daughters in cases where the marriage totally fails.

"While it is a fact that nearly all marriages are smooth, there are some which are a source of torture to an individual and it is in such cases that interventions can be made," says Lekaldero, a married father of five.



Noonkishu's brother, Lekaldero



Shangaiyo Lolpuranai

# My daughters, the source of my pride

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## At her mother's homestead in Lengwenyi village, Isiolo County, Shangaiyo Lolpuranai keeps a hawk eye on her daughters as they play in the compound.

They are all below 15 years in age but that does not minimize the threats of them being married off by her estranged husband.

Shangaiyo escaped from an abusive marriage and was warmly welcomed by her mother. The abuses came from her husband and the mother in law after which she enrolled at a local school where she was in the same class with one of her daughters until when she dropped out after she got pregnant.

But since running away, her former husband has been monitoring them especially the girls which he still maintains he has an obligation to shape their future despite the separation with their mother. After all, he has argued, the children have retained his family name and in the Samburu community, divorce is an alien vocabulary.

Shaping their future does not involve providing for their daily upkeep or contributing to their education needs. It is about the material gain-the bride prize that can come his way when he marries them off, their tender age notwithstanding.

"He has been saying that there are people out there interested in marrying my daughters who are still in school. As a precautionary measure, I have reported to the chief, the headteacher and a Catholic sister at Kipsing Mission," says Shangaiyo.

Though reporting to the authority about her former husband's intention might have given her a peace of mind, she nevertheless does not abscond her responsibility that of protecting her children from harm. It is for this reason that she is extra vigilant during school holidays when she knows the responsibility of ensuring they are safe lies squarely in her hands.

"One of the reasons I took my children to school is to seek protection of the law since they cannot be abducted to be married off when in school. Secondly I want them to be educated up to the university where they can be self-reliant in life and choose their own husbands at the right time," says the mother of eight.

She admits she only managed to overcome the social stigma associated with separation in marriage owing to her loving mother and protective brother. Each of them gave her a goat and she now has a flock that supports the children's food and education needs. Her will power to conquer the hurdles that stand on her way in life has been an inspiration of women in her neighbourhood.

At her mother's homestead are several other women who have become peers, not because they are of the same age group but owing to the fact that they have experienced similar predicament.

"Only a few years ago, married women would endure abusive marriages since they did not want to be the laughing stocks in their village. But after I took the bold step, others have followed suit. I do not advocate for separation but for those who find it unbearable out of a genuine reason, there is a way out regardless of the negative perception from the society," she says.

Shangaiyo says she is not done with class work yet and will pursue adult education once a centre is established in her locality.



Shangaiyo's mother



## She has volunteered to spread education gospel in villages

**Hellen Leisono has taken it upon herself to spread the gospel of education across the village though she has never been to school.**

During market days at Ol Donyiro Shopping Centre and at times in her home at Puruta village, you will find her engaging groups of women on hearty talks on why enrolling their children in school will bring the desired social change in the conservative pastoralist society.

Well known as Mama Riziki in the village, Leisono's main interest has been on empowering the Samburu girl child. "Educating our daughters is the only way to rescue them from harmful cultural practices such as beading, Female Genital Mutilation and early marriages. We have to be bold enough to tell our husbands why we have to take all our daughters to school," Mama Riziki tells a group of eight women during a meeting at her homestead one Thursday afternoon.

In this community, educating a child is considered a form of punishment. Those who are not good at herding are allowed to go to school by their parents while those deemed to be hard working at home and hence productive in the pastoralist way of life are the favourites in the family.

"This kind of attitude has to change and realize that every child deserves to be in school. I have been using a friendly approach to women in my neighbourhood and this has borne fruits," she says.



Mama Riziki understands this dangerous cultural practice so well, having adopted two children from a beading relationship. She is a single mother who overcame societal stigma to be a beacon of hope among tens of women in her community who find themselves in such a situation.

She is economically empowered, with cattle, goats and camel at her homestead, something that earns her respect and attracts women eager to know how he managed to turn around an unfortunate situation of being a single to a successful women in the community.

In her relentless campaigns on education, Mama Riziki has been seeking the support of the OI Donyiro Catholic Mission to have the girls admitted to the boarding facilities to minimize risks of dropout. She also involves the area chief to ensure the safety of the girls during school holidays.

For her efforts, she has won national and global recognition were she is invited to conferences on women issues.

Recently, she toured Gutemala in South America through the support from Pawanka Fund through Samburu Women Trust.

She says the tour gave her a wider exposure on the challenges indigenous women face worldwide, an experience she will be sharing at local and national forums.

“Most of the challenges facing indigenous women and girls can be overcome through education. I will continue stressing education until there will not be a single girl child herding cattle and waiting to be married off to an elderly suitor,” she says.

Through her efforts, tens of girls have been rescued from beading and forced early marriage and have enrolled in school. Beading is a practices where morans (Community warriors) turn girls, some as young as ten into sex slaves with the blessings of the girl’s mother. This sometimes leads to pregnancy, resulting to crude abortion since babies born out of this relationship are considered outcasts.



# Highlights of the 2017 National Indigenous Women Conference

On December 9 - 10, 2017, Samburu Women Trust and National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders-Kenya through donor support held a two days conference in Nanyuki, Laikipia County for indigenous women drawn from seven counties. It was slated to coincide with the World Human Rights Day which is celebrated annually on December 10.



With the theme; ***Celebrating the Resilience and Success of Women Human Rights Defenders and Leaders from Indigenous Communities***, the symposium mainly focused on the success and challenges facing women from indigenous communities. Participants included leaders and notably women from the indigenous communities who have displayed resilience and have emerged as role models in their respective communities. Some of the women invited to the conference have

achieved political leadership or stood out in defending the rights of the marginalized.

Among the areas the conference explored were gaps and challenges facing indigenous women and girls' rights, the land tenure system over ancestral lands, litigation on land tenure cases, the rights of indigenous communities in the emerging extractive industry and strategies for breaking barriers for effective political participation.

The climax of the event was the inauguration of an eleven-member team to sit in the Indigenous Women Council whose mandate is to spearhead the rights of indigenous communities through engaging policy makers.

The ceremony was officially opened by Laikipia Governor Ndiritu Muriithi who delivered a key note address highlighting the role of women in shaping the society and the need to stop blocking their path to greatness.

## Key points highlighted during the conference



### Hon. Ndiritu Muriithi

Governor, Laikipia County

- Women are not property to be sold off or battered in furtherance of manhood or society hood. Women are of inherent talent and we need to stop blocking their path to greatness. We need to stand up and stand up boldly.
- On his behalf and that of his government they will continue to champion the cause of women and the indigenous woman in particular.
- Need to promote women leadership in Laikipia County and opening opportunities for women therein.
- Women should desist from being their own enemies and he gave an example where two women he had nominated to his cabinet were rejected by fellow women during vetting at the County Assembly
- That his administration would lay more emphasis on working towards ending retrogressive practices that affect women and girls, promote access to education, retention and transition for indigenous communities in Laikipia North and Laikipia in general.



### George Morara

Vice Chair, Kenya National Commission on Human Rights

- Any achievement made by any woman leader or human rights defender working among indigenous communities has only been possible because of a strong passion and a firm commitment to matters human rights.
- Kenya is a deeply patriarchal society like Kenya and women leaders and human rights defenders from some indigenous communities are more at risk of being subjected to certain forms of human rights violations, prejudices or exclusion compared to their male counterparts
- A tool kit has been developed Women Human Rights Defenders s can use to create better networks and frameworks which will ensure their security
- The two thirds gender rule is yet to be realized at the Kenya's National Assembly and the Senate and women have a duty to make this happen progressively



### Ms Shoba Liban

Board member, Anti-Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) Board Kenya

#### Human Rights situation for women in Kenya

Ms Shoba presented a paper detailing the success and challenging in eliminating the female cut. She told the participants that the vision of the board where she serves is to transform Kenya into a Female Genital Mutilation Free Society with a mission of upholding the dignity and empowerment of girls and women by ensuring the implementation of the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act 2011.

Some of the board's achievements include:

- Inclusion of FGM content into the new school curriculum
- Tabling of the FGM Bill 2016 at the East Africa Legislative Assembly
- Community declarations to stop and end FGM

Ms Liban noted that some gaps and challenges still remains toward FGM. She made some suggestion that if implemented would drive the country towards being an FGM free society:

- Explore other ways of curbing FGM among the communities that do not have Alternative Rights of Passage (ARPs)
- County government to allocate resources and continued support of educating the communities on the dangers of FGM
- Have alternative livelihood support for reformed circumcisers.

# 2017 National Indigenous Women Conference

DECEMBER 9 - 10, 2017 - NANYUKI, LAIKIPIA



*Governor Muriithi and NCHRD-K Executive Director Kamau Ngugi*



*SWT staff with Hon. Ndiritu Muriithi*



*Margaret Lesuda with other participants*



Conference participants



Conference participants



SWT Executive Director,  
Jane Meriwas with Laikipia  
Governor Hon. Ndiritu Muriithi

# Celebrating

THE RESILIENCE OF WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AND LEADERS FROM INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES



Changing practices that undermine women's rights and empowerment

Ms Nuria Gollo is the executive director of Marsabit Women Advocacy Development Organization (MWADO) and is among the 11 members appointed to sit in the Indigenous Women Council representing the Borana Community.



*Newly unveiled members of indigenous council during the 2017 National Indigenous Women Conference*

Ms Nuria explores effective strategies and approaches towards women empowerment in minority communities in Kenya.

- Working within cultural structures that provide an important component of their identity, while at the same time gradually expanding the space available for women to claim their voice and their rights
- Peace building by working to promote women's rights through recognizing and working within patriarchal systems that dominate life in many minority communities in Kenya



Ms Nuria Gollo (©CBC Radio)

- While working with indigenous women, it is of paramount importance to hold regular meetings with men, helping them understand how women organisation can support the family and the community at large
- Female Genital Mutilation is best tackled through women groups and activists through promotion of positive cultural practices to counteract widespread FGM
- There has been positive strides towards eradication of FGM where the topic can now be discussed openly unlike several years back where the mere mention was a taboo
- Putting in place an economic alternative/compensation for FGM practitioners who agree to abandon their work
- The indigenous Women Council is set to work towards increasing women's access to justice as a step towards reducing impunity on violence against women through interaction with both the formal and community-based justice systems
- The council will promote women participation in meetings of the council of elders, a traditionally all-male space, whenever cases of violence against women and children, as well as marital and inheritance issues come to the fore

According to Ms Nuria, another task that the council will undertake is to push for recognition of indigenous women in the larger Kenyan society, especially the relationship with the government.



*Ms Christine Kandie*

## A success story on Endorois community and their heritage

**Ms Christine Kandie, Gender Officer at the Endorois Welfare Council and a member of the Indigenous Women Council highlights the struggle and gains of her community.**

Endorois are an indigenous community with a population of about 60,000 in number and occupy the counties of Laikipia, Nakuru with the majority residing in Baringo.

In the early 1970's they were evicted from their ancestral land around Lake Bogoria to pave way for the creation of a National Park.

After several failed attempts to reclaim their land, the Endorois lodged a case with the Africa Commission on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR) and won the case in February 2010.

Though the court ruling is yet to be implemented fully, some progress has been made:

- The community has been recognized and is now receiving some resources though still on the lower side
- The community now has free access to Lake Bogoria
- The community now receives royalties on an annual basis and is used as a bursary for needy students
- Women are involved in management of the land process and other negotiation processes
- The community was involved as key stakeholders in the development of the Lake Bogoria Management Plan
- The Endorois case has been referred and fully implementation urged by several international instruments including Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in 2016 and the International Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.



*Lake Bogoria, the ancestral land for the Endorois community*



# It is a step at a time for the Rendile community



**Ms Rose Orguba from the Rendile Community is a nurse by profession and a member of the Indigenous Women Council**

Provision of health services and access to education still remain a major challenge to this pastoralist community that reside in Marsabit County.

Their nomadic lifestyle denies them access to school and health facilities and child mortality is still high. As a member of the council, Rose intends to engage policy makers to establish mobile hospital units to be stationed in the manyattas and follow the herders during their migration.

However, on political leadership and governance, the Rendile have made major strides with a woman elected Member of County Assembly and two women sitting in the cabinet of the governor.

Rose who runs an organisation to support girls who drop out of school due to teenage pregnancy aims to strengthen partnership with county and national governments to develop policies that can adequately address challenges affecting girls and women in her community.



*Ms Rose Orguba*



# Women breaking leadership barriers

*Hon. Jane Teiyaa, Women Representative - Kajiado*

**Hon Catherine Waruguru, Hon. Jane Teiyaa, Hon Sarah Korere and Naisula Lesuuda have one thing in common. They overcame odds during the 2017 General Election and now represent their constituents in the National Assembly as Members of Parliament.**

Waruguru climbed the ladder from a first time nominated MCA at the Laikipia County Assembly to the County Women Representative after defeating her opponents in the race, some with great influence and strong financial muscles.



*Hon. Catherine Waruguru, Women Representative, Laikipia North*

“During the campaigns, my political opponents resulted to mudslinging, attacking my character by insinuating that I was a single woman who should not be given a chance to represent married women,” said Waruguru as she presented a paper entitled breaking leadership barriers on women leadership at the December conference.

She is living proof that we can all be able to break the ceiling and barrier of women in leadership and says her success did not come through luck but through luck, determination and commitment.

“We need to celebrate women in the marketplace who work tirelessly to provide for their families. Women and children are the most affected by hunger and poverty experienced during drought and am working on programmes aimed at empowering them economically through the Affirmative Action Fund,” says the Women Rep.

The achievement by the three women is a testimony that women from the indigenous community are slowly overcoming traditional barriers to claim high positions in political leadership.



*Hon. Sarah Korere, MP Laikipia North*

In Laikipia North and Samburu West constituencies, history was made when two women, Hon Sarah Korere and Hon Naisula Lesuuda floored indomitable in a tightly fought political duel. It was the first time women from the indigenous Samburu community were defeating men to be elected as constituency representatives in the National Assembly.

As tables were being turned against political heavyweights in Laikipia, an almost similar scenario was unfolding in Kajiado County where Hon Teiyaa, a woman living with disability clinched the seat for Women Rep in the county mainly occupied by pastoralists.



*Hon. Naisula Lesuuda, MP Samburu West*

# Confronting stigma that stalks children with special needs

Among the pastoralists, livestock rearing is the main economic activity and children are introduced on taking care of the animals from an early age.



Leshipen Lerosion



Leshipen's wife



*Jacinta Silakan, founder Sang'ida Foundation*

The geographical zone they occupy calls for endurance owing to climatic challenges that resorts in constant movement of animals from place to place in search of pasture and water. This responsibility lies in the hands of the young, including the morans.

Hence any child born is expected to grow to be a strong person capable of herding livestock and even defending the community in case of aggression.

But this is not always the case and owing to various factors, some children are born with some types of deformities. To the community, these children have no economic or social value.

“Being born with disability is considered a curse, these babies are killed on birth or abandoned in the bush to be mauled by wild animals,” says Jacinta Silakan, the founder of Sang'ida Foundation, an organization to support children with special needs.

Ms Silakan, a nurse by profession says most children born with disabilities are first born, a situation that might be brought up by teenage pregnancies and unavailability of health care services in rural areas.

For a first time father, having a disabled baby is interpreted to be a curse, which is normally blamed on the woman. The mother might be neglected or even sent to her parents with the husband resorting to marrying a second wife.

“If the mother of the disabled child is lucky not to be sent, the child endures the suffering throughout life. Some are locked up in the goat pens with no foods and in case of girls, they are exposed to the dangers of rape,” says Silakan.

She notes that discrimination among these children is also prevalent in urban areas during social gatherings of pastoralist communities.

“I have two sons but one of them, Sang'ida aged 20 and the first born is a child with special needs. The unfortunate thing is that my second born is invited to birthday parties leaving out his elder brother,” she says.

It was out of this realization that Silakan founded the organization to sensitize the community on accepting children with special needs and desist from mistreating them.

“When my child was born, women from the community never visited me to celebrate as is the norm upon realizing he had some abnormalities. Eight years, later, the child continues to suffer discrimination,” lamented Margaret Meshami from

Kimanjo village in Laikipia County.

Margaret was among tens of parents who gathered at Dol Dol Town, Laikipia North during the launch of Sang'ida Foundation whose mission is to encourage parents not to shy away and hide children with disabilities.

“Currently we are working with 26 parents and their children in Laikipia North Sub-County. Bringing them together to share personal experiences is way of eliminating the stigma associated with disability where some women have been told it is a curse that runs in their families,” she explained.

Through this sensitization, fathers are also starting to accept disability as a healthy situation and not a family curse.

At Rap village Leshipen Lerosion plays with his two year old daughter who cannot walk or talk. The father says his third born child developed health problem on the eighth day and since then, she can only feed on soft food.

“We have taken her to various health facilities but the condition has not improved. We have now resolved to give her the necessary support and wait for God's intervention,” says Lerosion sitting next to his wife who is pregnant with their fourth child.

# Girls Leadership and Mentorship Program

**Fifteen-year-old Stella Letimalo stands out in front of her peers in school to articulate some topics which only a few months ago were considered taboo and could only be discussed in hushed tones.**

One of them is Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and early marriages which the girls now talk about openly without fear that adults could be listening.

In fact the girls have designed the message to be consumed by adults the more who listen the better

“When you go for Christmas holidays and your mother tells you to undergo the cut, tell her you are not ready since you are aware of the dangers associated with this practice,” says Stella in a confidence almost commanding tone.

Stella is a class eight pupil at Kipsing Primary School and one of the girls under the mentorship programme, an initiative of Samburu Women Trust to influence culture change.

“Cultural change is a process and we realized that we must involve the victims of harmful practice-the girls themselves to spearhead this change. That was the idea behind the mentorship programme that has now seen over 10 schools enjoyed,” explains SWT Executive Director Jane Meriwas.

The programme is carried out during holidays and currently targeting the girl child. Teachers, the clergy and professional counselors are involved in the one week training program. Girls are taught to speak with confidence against issues that violate their rights especially on education.

They are also taught how to resist FGM by convincing their mothers on the dangers of this cultural practice. They are expected to deliver the same message to their age mates back in the manyatta and convince them to enroll in school.

“Tell the girls in the manyatta that there is a safe haven here where they can escape to avoid FGM and being forced to get married to old men,” Stella tells her classmates numbering 30 during a meeting.

This strategy adopted by SWT to reach out to that girl deep in the village and pass the message in a friendly, convincing way has won support from pupils themselves, teachers and the clergy.

One of the notable achievements is the confidence the girls displays not only when discussing cultural practices but even when discussing hygiene like how to use sanitary pads.

# What they said on mentorship



**Albert Lekuiyie**  
Headteacher, Lengwenyi  
Primary School

"The programme has been good, the girls have improved both academically and socially. Since undergoing through the programme, they now answer questions in class confidently, plus the girls now speak among themselves and mentor others through peer teaching.

It is helpful in many ways since when we talk to parents, they say they have improved and have abandoned some cultural practices like night singing. Some of the children have discovered leadership talents. In our community, girls are not allowed to speak. Things are now changing and they are airing their views freely including to their fathers, something that was unimaginable before.

In this area, the programme has involved several schools but the main challenge is that there are many girls willing to be enrolled. In Lenguruma Primary School for instance, there are only 13 girls enrolled against a population of 375 learners. Another challenge is that the training takes only a week or two which is not sufficient time for the big number willing to learn. Our request to SWT is to seek extra funds to increase the enrollment of girls into this programme and it be made more frequent with those who have already been trained graduating to the next level."



**Sister Mary Flora**  
Kipsing Mission School

"I have been a teacher here for the last two years and have been interacting with children and parents from the Samburu community. One thing I have noticed is that some girls are being forced to undergo Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and early marriage while others are withdrawn from school to go and herd sheep and goats.

However, since SWT started the mentorship programme, I have noticed several changes. One of the changes is that girls here who have undergone the training are a source of encouragement to the others.

They have improved in class performance and in keeping themselves clean, motivated and better dressing than before. We have also noticed an increase in the number of girls running away from home to seek shelter here at the mission to avoid being beaded or married off. This is happening during holidays after those who have gone through mentorship interact with their peers in the manyatta. Performance in class and co-curricular activities has also recorded improvements.

However, to my observations, the programme sessions have been very short with some of the girls having participated only once or twice during holidays. It is my wish that it be done more frequent, monitor a group

(maybe for a full year) and once they graduate, they can share whatever they learn with those who had no chance of participating. I have encountered children who run away from home and come here to seek shelter and guidance, specifically from those who have undergone through mentorship.

My message to SWT is that many more girls are waiting for the mentorship programme and it should make the visits more frequent."



**Stella Letimalo**  
Pupil at Kipsing Mission  
School

"I am one of the pupils selected by SWT for mentorship. It commenced in December last year and we were taught many things concerning us as girls. For instance, we were told that FGM is dangerous practice since it leads to complication during birth of a baby. We were also told to be clean and tidy all the time and use sanitary pads properly to avoid discomfort or diseases. Since the mentorship process commenced, FGM ceremony has not taken place in our village and it is because we have been telling girls to say no. Our request to SWT is that they should consider increasing girls in this programme so that more and more pupils can abandon some of these harmful practices which are common in our community."



**Fr Jeremy Kabuga**  
Isiolo Catholic Diocese

"The Samburu is the predominant community here though we still have Turkana. Over time, we have witnessed girls being married off at an early age while others spend the day herding, denying them a chance to be in school. But since SWT initiated the mentorship programme, which I personally participate in, we have noticed some positive changes among the girls.

The training has been helpful to the girls since they are now courageous out there in their homes even as they learn in school. They now talk confidently and know education is their right. They can now say no to FGM, early marriage and herding. When I engage them, I realize that they have been discussing about their rights among themselves, a pointer that this programme is bringing about the desired social change. As one of the mentors, I would call for its expansion that a big number can be enrolled and later take this gospel to their respective villages and that way we shall have begun a process of molding future leaders of this nation."



Samburu Women Trust  
Gefro Imani Hse, 3rd floor, Room 16  
Park Road, Nanyuki - Kenya

**Phone:** +254 (0) 755 555 211

**E-mail:** [info@samburuwomentrust.org](mailto:info@samburuwomentrust.org)

**Website:** [www.samburuwomentrust.org](http://www.samburuwomentrust.org)

