

## PROVIDING WATER, EMPOWERING THE SAMBURU WOMEN

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### **Introduction & Background**

The Samburu are a pastoralist community from North Eastern Kenya. This area is mostly arid and semi-arid. Being a pastoralist community, the Samburu often have to move from place to place in search of pasture and water for their livestock. As a community, the Samburu people are plagued with such problems as HIV/AIDS, minimal infrastructure, and a drought which has killed over 60% of cattle in recent years.<sup>1</sup> However, the persistent problem that they face is the lack of clean drinking water. Since the community's cultural gender roles dictate that women are in charge of domestic matters, it is the girls and women who bear the burden of searching for water, often walking more than 12 miles daily only to return home with empty containers. For this population, a good portion of each day is devoted to the pursuit of water, leaving little time for income generating activities, academic pursuits or even playtime for the younger girls. It is not enough that they must sacrifice these 'luxuries' which many elsewhere may take for granted, they also face the constant threat of being attacked by wild animals.

Alice Lenanyokie, a Samburu native, knows what it means to trek for hours late at night or early in the morning so as to make it to school during the day. She has faced wild animals and had to move away from her village, interrupting her studies for a month, to go upstream where the water could be reached. During one of the many severe drought periods while her mother was away, Alice had to queue for hours to get some of the government rationed water, risking brutal police beatings when the thirsty crowd got out of control. It is with this experience that, in the past semester, we decided to try and raise funds to make the search for water less time consuming for the girls and women of the Samburu District. Thus far, with the sponsorship of the African Student Union at St. Lawrence University, we have raised \$90.00 by selling water at an on-campus event. This money was given to the Samburu Water Project organization, which is working to drill 25 wells in the District. This non-profit organization was founded in 2005 with the aim to empower Samburu women. The founder, Kristen Kosinski, was inspired by the courage of the women of Umoja, the only women's village in the District. This village was formed as a sanctuary for survivors of rape by British soldiers in the region (some of whom were discarded by their spouses as a result), other survivors of domestic abuse, and widows who lack property rights. Kristen noted that their greatest problem was the lack of water. Like her, we believe that once the water problem is resolved or at least minimized, the women of the Samburu District will be able to truly focus on activities that can benefit them as individuals and, more importantly, as a community.

### **Project Description and Expected Outcomes**

How does the proposed project promote peace? Peace, for us, is manifest in a high quality of life in which the most basic needs are met. The availability of water affects every aspect of the Samburu people's lives. Since women are the primary care givers, a steady and easily accessible water source will allow them to focus on community building activities – the lack of water will cease to be a deterrent. This project will give women more freedom from potentially abusive and

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<sup>1</sup> [www.thesamburuproject.org](http://www.thesamburuproject.org)

controlling spouses and allow them a more peaceful life. Water is life, what better way to foster the spread of quality life and peace than to provide water?

We propose to use the funds to drill a well in the Samburu District. This well will serve up to 1,000 people and will take about three days to build. We intend to work with The Samburu Project and have been in constant contact with the founder who has offered the organization's support if and when needed. Since the scarcity of water is a major obstacle in the women's pursuit of other interests, the organization's main goal is to address the water issue and then focus on how to further empower these women to be independent. Although its initial inspiration came from the women of Umoja, The Samburu Project is geared toward the emancipation of **all** Samburu women. We intend to work with the community members in land clearing prior to drilling and later to clean the water and do all the necessary plumbing before the pump is installed. Further, we will assist in water sanitation workshops to ensure that the community can keep its drinking water clean.

The exact project work plan and timeline prepared with the help of Kristen Kosinski is tabulated below:

Day(s)	Activity
1 & 2	Well site selection and community mobilization
3 & 4	Work alongside the community to clear road and collect materials (rock, sand and hardcore)
5	Drill well
6	Well construction and pump installation
7&8	Community hygiene/sanitation and well maintenance/repair workshops

### **Prospects for Future Impact**

Building wells and providing easier access to clean water is simply the beginning of female emancipation in the Samburu District. By allowing women to have more free time, we expect that, with the support of The Samburu Project, they will be able to engage in more income generating activities. In the long term, there will be more girls attending school and pursuing their academics beyond the elementary or high school levels, making them better equipped to compete in a variety of careers.