IMBIRIKANI WOMEN PROJECT

Empowering Communities Living with Amboseli Elephants: Turning Challenges into Opportunities
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Executive Summary

The Greater Amboseli Ecosystem located in southern Kenya plays a major role in Kenya’s tourism industry. However, its biodiversity, particularly the elephants, are threatened by habitat fragmentation and degradation, human-wildlife conflict, and poaching of elephants.

The Maasai people are the main inhabitants of the area and their primary source of income is derived from livestock, and increasingly from agriculture. Both livelihoods, as currently practiced, are unsustainable. Incomes from livestock production are highly irregular and tourism in the area has declined over recent years, in part owing to the worrisome security situation in the country. In terms of human-wildlife conflict, elephants are heavily persecuted due to incidences of crop damage.

In the Maasai culture men are traditionally recognized as the leaders of the household with women playing very little part in decision-making.

Introduction

Imbirikani Women project, titled “Empowering Communities Living with Amboseli Elephants: turning challenges into opportunities” is an initiative of Her Excellency Margaret Kenyatta, First Lady of the Republic of Kenya. WildlifeDirect is implementing the project through funding from the United Nations Development Program. Big Life Foundation is also a partner in this project.

This project is a community based project comprising three women groups: Osiram, Siana and Makutano from the Group Ranch Imbirikani. In just one year, the women have demonstrated their commitment to skills and enterprise development. They have registered a company called Oltome-Nadupo Women Group Company and have 147 women members. The company appointed 9 directors comprising 3 representatives from each group to manage the day-to-day activities of the company.

The overall goal of this project is to empower the women to identify, conceptualize, formulate and implement initiatives that support the sustainable use of natural resources whilst generating income.

The main objective of the project is to build the capacity of the women through enterprises that support livelihood, health and education and at the same time protect wildlife by turning challenges into opportunities.
Project Inception

During the implementation stage, a preliminary study and a needs assessment were done to gather data for the project. WildlifeDirect used open space technology (a method for holding meetings where people self-organize) to collect information and get a buy in from the community and women of Imbirikani.

In order to measure the impact of the project, a baseline survey was also conducted to assess the status of the three women groups and understand the knowledge, attitudes and opinions of the community in relation to wildlife.

Implementation

Project launch

On October 23, 2015, H. E. Margaret Kenyatta, the First Lady of the Republic of Kenya, launched the Imbirikani Women project. The colorful event was attended by high level dignitaries including diplomats, former UN Resident Representative Ms. Nardos Bekele Thomas, Cabinet Secretary Prof. Judi Wakhungu, Kenya Wildlife Service Assistant Director Julius Cheptei, Big Life Foundation CEO Richard Bonham, Area MP Katoo Metito, Governor for Kajiado County Dr. David Nkedianye, WildlifeDirect Board Philip Murgor, Kajiado County Women Representative Mary Seneta among others. The event also attracted over 2000 men, women and school children from Amboseli ecosystem and visitors from other parts of the country.

Trainings

1. Basic Business Management Training

The first training that the women from Imbirikani participated in was three-weeks basic business management training held from September 7-25, 2015. The aim of the training was to build the capacity of the women on business management. Many practical exercises were incorporated because most of the trainees were illiterate and had never gone to school. After the training, the women who come from three women groups (Osiram, Siana and Makutano) registered a company called Oltome Nadupo Women Group Company.

2. Business Plan Development Training

15 women representing Osiram, Siana and Makutano women groups received further training on Business Plan Development from October 15-20, 2016. After the training the participants developed a 5-year plan to guide the operations of their business. During the training different types of businesses were considered for investment, including: poultry farming, green house horticulture, dairy farming, tourism, beadwork among others. The main factors the women considered in selecting their business included; environmental friendliness, level of technical skills required and the required time span to make profit.
3. Training on development of new designs

In May and June 2016, a select group of women representing the three groups were trained on how to develop new designs for the beaded jackets. 20 women were trained on designing, beading, classification and packaging of the denim jackets. During the training, the women produced 24 quality beaded denim jackets earmarked international fashion shops in London and USA. After the training, the women were able to pass skills learnt to other group members. They also supervise the quality of all products the women produce for sale.

Ann McCreath, a fashion consultant from KikoRomeo Fashion International facilitated the training.
Project Results

Registration of Oltome-Nadupo Women Group Company

The Imbirikani Women registered Oltome-Nadupo Women Group Company as the name of their business. The registration provides the women with a legitimate avenue for doing business with trading partners and potential dealers in the beading industry in a transparent manner.

The women also opened a bank account at KCB Bank Loitoktok. The account has three signatories who are directors from the three groups. WildlifeDirect CEO is also a joint signatory and oversees business transactions and ensures that the funds are used for the intended purpose. A total amount of 1,000,000 KES was deposited to the women’s account at the inception.

The incorporation marks a departure from conducting businesses individually or in small groups and creates a platform for enhanced teamwork. 9 Directors (3 directors from each group) manage the company and are tasked with the responsibility of managing finance, production, sales and general administration. The directors meet on a weekly basis and hold a monthly general meeting to update the members on the company’s progress.

Website development

The women have set up a web-shop and website oltomenadupo.com as an efficient and effective way to reach both the local and international online shoppers and related businesses dealers.

The website facilitates daily online sales and creates an opportunity for the women to share personal stories. All the project documentations and product catalogues are available on the website.

African Tourism Association Conference-2015

Three women from Imbirikani project participated in the African Tourism Association Conference, 2015 which took place from the November 4 - 7, 2015.

This was the first time that the women had participated in this kind of conference. Their participation was facilitated by ATA who provided an exhibition booth for the women to showcase their wares.

They sold merchandise worth 56,000 KES during the three-day conference.

The conference was an eye-opener as the women were able to learn from other women-led enterprises from various parts of the country.

Business partnerships

Since incorporation, Oltome Nadupo Group Company has signed four major partnership agreements to enhance product sales and entry strategy to new markets. The companies include: KikoRomeo International Fashion Company, Ol Tukai Lodge in Amboseli, Oldonyio Wuas Lodge located in Chyulu Hills National Park and Pink Skink in Karen, Nairobi.

Partnership with the County Government and Wild Lives Foundation.

The County Government of Kajiado, through the office of the Women Representative gave financial support to Oltome Nadupo Women Group Company as part of the county women empowerment program. The County Government issued a grant of 600,000 KES to the women to repair and upgrade the group’s business facilities in Imbirikani.
The women have attracted international interest and will receive a grant of 17.5 million shillings from Wild Lives Foundation to market their products internationally through fashion companies and scale up the business.

Sale and business progress

Oltome Nadupo Women Group Company has so far settled on two businesses; beading (jewelry and denim jackets) and the cattle brokerage.

The cattle brokerage business entails buying bulls from Kimana and selling them at Emali market. Though a male-dominated business, the women have gained respect from their male counterparts and success in the business earning a gross income of 111,000 KES in its first month of operation in April 2016. Following an outbreak of the foot and mouth disease in the area at the end of June to July, the cattle business was put on hold until further notice by County Department of Livestock. Between April and June 2016, the women sold 9 denim jackets and had a gross income of 80,100 KES (gross, inclusive of the retailer 33% and 16% VAT). In total, the company had a gross income of 191,100 KES from both cattle brokerage and denim jackets sales. This reflected 57% increase in gross income compared to their average income of earlier years (according to the 2015 baseline survey).

The entrepreneurial women have created space for women leadership in the area and won two business tenders; to be the main supplier of beef cows to Food Tech-a Beef Company that owns an abattoir in Imbirikani and second tender is to run a restaurant business within the slaughterhouse premises.

Project monitoring and documentation

All stages of the project implementation have been documented in video, photographs and reports to the donor UNDP. WildlifeDirect Project Manager visits the project site in Imbirikani on weekly basis for meetings and to monitor the project’s activities.

Women in conservation and change in attitude.

The women involved in this project are becoming keen conservationists; when they noticed that an unknown garbage collecting company was dumping waste polythene bags along Emali-Loitoktok road, they reported the matter to the authorities and followed up to ensure the culprits were charged in court. They have also weighed in to address the rising incidences of human-wildlife conflict. The women are engaging the government in an effort to address the situation and have written to the Kenya Wildlife Service seeking audience with the Director General to discuss ways of mitigating the issue of human-wildlife conflict. They have requested to be included in future discussions on wildlife conservation.

Women from Imbirikani make pledges to protect and conserve wildlife.

The women have started a campaign called ‘Oltome Women and Conservation’ and use local barazas and churches to sensitize community members on the importance of community participation in conservation. This campaign is the only of its kind in the region.
Appendix 1: Letter to KWS Director General

Director General  
Kenya Wildlife Service  
P.O Box 40241 - 00100  
Nairobi, Kenya

Cc: Assistant Director Southern  
Mr. Julius Chepulai  
Cc: Senior Warden Amboseli National Park  
Ms. Zainabu

Dear Sir,  
Re: Amboseli Oltome Naipso Women Group Concern on wildlife Conservation Matters in Amboseli Ecosystem

Greetings from Imbirikani! We trust this letter finds you well. We are groups of women from Imbirikani group ranch united to empower each other and help each other overcome both socio-economic and environmental challenges faced by the Maasai women. We committed to work with wildlife conservation organizations and authorities to address the common issues of human wildlife conflicts.

Following the several incidences of spearings of an elephant within the ecosystem and the lions killed at Koko and Imbirikani group ranches in the past month, we would like to firmly inquire on the measures put by KWS to control the same situations from happening again, also, would love to ensure the KWS management of our full support on the way forward including activities that channels or reporting wildlife related conflicts and crime (effective community policing). It is therefore on this regard that we request for Meeting with you or your able team to discuss on this matter. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours Sincerely,

Amboseli Oltome Naipso Women Group Directors

The success of this project is a testament to women helping each other

How You can help

- Go to Pink Skink or KikoRomeo shops in Nairobi and buy one of their products,
- Visit the oltomenadupo.com website follow their progress and place an order,
- Visit the women's beadwork centers near Amboseli,
- Share this information with your friends via website on Facebook and Twitter,
- Make a donation so that we can train more women by visiting wildlifedirect.org
WildlifeDirect is a Kenya and US registered charitable organization founded by Richard Leakey and Chaired in Kenya by Senior Advocate and former Director of Public Prosecutions, Philip Murgor. WildlifeDirect is committed to Justice for Wildlife by changing minds, behavior and laws to ensure Africa’s magnificent wildlife endures forever.