

Children Peace Program in Northern Kenya Through Rotary.

Marsabit County is located in Eastern Province stretching across 66,923.1 km². It borders Turkana county to the West, Isiolo county to the South, Wajir County to the East, Samburu county and Ethiopia to the North. The biggest town in Marsabit County is Moyale which is a border point with Ethiopia. According to the 2009 Kenyan population census, Marsabit County is sparsely populated with a total of 291,166. The area is inhabited by Rendille, Turkana, El Molo, Samburu, Burji, Gabbra and Borana. On average, close to 40% of the people in Marsabit are Christians while 32% are Muslims and other 28% believe in traditional religion.

Pastoralists communities in Northern Kenya have experienced inter ethnic related conflict for decades. Researchers and scholars who have studied the nature of inter ethnic conflict in this region have affiliated it to many factors ranging from competition over diminishing resources, cattle rustling, political incitement among others. However, a baseline survey conducted by Children Peace Initiative Kenya (CPI Kenya) some years ago, hypothesized that, lack of interaction/contact among these communities could be playing a major role as to why the inter ethnic conflict in this region has been protracted and intractable. The results of the survey showed that most of the targeted population (Std. 6 children and their parents) had never interacted with members from their neighboring communities and as such perceived them as an enemy community. The children from these communities had grown in fear based on the stereotypes they heard from their parents regarding the neighboring communities.

In our efforts to contribute to peace, CPI Kenya designed a module for peace with children as the key actors through whom the parents and the larger community members are involved. The module has several inter-related and connected programs that build on one another. The children peace program entails organized inter community children and parents programs geared towards promoting interactions and nurturing friendship among the neighboring communities. As a result, through CPI Kenya peace program, many children and parents have got an opportunity to interact and cultivate friendship with each other. This friendship has trickled down to the larger families of children directly involved in the program and their communities at large. Moreover, these interactions have resulted to a new narrative of friendship and peace, thus gradually clearing the stereotypes that existed.

Children and Parents Inter-Community Peace Program supported by Rotary

At the beginning of this year, 2014, CPI Kenya through the support of Rotary organized 2 inter community children and parents twinning among Gabra, Rendile, Turkana, Samburu and Elmolo communities from Loiyangalani, Gas, North Horr, Kalacha and Kargi in Marsabit County. One event was hosted in Kargi, involving the

Gabra and Rendille communities while the other one was hosted in Gas and North Horr involving Turkana, Rendile, Samburu, Elmolo and Gabra Communities. During this event, 208 participants benefitted and 104 families were twinned.

Parents and children twinning program involves reaching out to families and communities through friendship steered by children for sustainable peace. After children have developed friendship with children from neighboring communities, they invite their parents to meet their friends and in the process the two families become friends, for peace sake. Thereafter, the parents from the participating communities discuss peace and conflict related agendas with children's interest as a key priority.



Gabra and Rendille Communities during the Inter-Community Children and Parents meeting supported by Rotary in Kargi

Objectives of the children and parents meeting program is to enhance intercommunity interaction, strengthen the bond of friendship between the involved families and to involve the wider community in propagating peace on their own.

It was the first time for the Turkana, Samburu and El Molo participants from Loiyangalani to visit their Gabra family friends in Gas. They shared experiencing new culture and hospitality that they hadn't imagined. One of the Gabra elders, Mr. Huka Chepe encouraged the visiting parents saying that their presence in the Gas community had a very deep peace meaning and a sign that the two communities can co exist. He shared the role each of them has to play in their own simple ways to contribute in peace building. Among the ways he mentioned were: supporting their

friends in the peace program, taking initiative in communicating with their twinned families irrespective of the network challenge quoting that where there is will, there is way.

One of the parents from El Molo excitedly expressed her surprise on the reality that dawned on her. Before the visit, there were tales of animosities among the Gabra communities. To her surprise, the hospitality of the hosting community transformed her perception and the gifts she received were a sure proof to her family back at home that she was received warmly. As the meeting ended, CPI Kenya was implored to engage warriors directly in the program as the few incidents of conflict reported in the recent past were initiated by warriors in the fora.

Family twining between the Rendille and Gabra communities was hosted in a Rendile village called Kargi. During this event, something unique took place. Children had mobilized their parents enough ahead of the program. The parents and children from both communities were prepared to welcome each other. They were ready with gifts that ranged from clothing, artifacts, foodstuff, confectionaries, money and most of all goats. This was the first time for most parents to visit their neighboring communities. Children had visited each other and they invited their parents to visit their friend's families. The Rendile parents welcomed their Gabra friends in their *manyattas*, fed them and most of all hosted them for the two days the parents meeting took place.



Some of the goats and food stuffs that Rendille Community gave to their Gabra friends as gifts during the parents meeting in Kargi.

Over 25 goats were given out as gifts by the Rendile community to their Gabra friends. Interesting enough, it was amazing that when quantified, goods worth Ksh. 138,850 were given out by the Rendile community. Parents expressed gratitude for the opportunity that CPI Kenya organized for them to meet, interact and get to know each other more. Senior Chief Wambire said, *“ Thank you CPI Kenya for bringing us here together. Pass our gratitude to your donors and supporters. Now we can continue from there and initiate inter community peace meetings on our own.”*

Through this program, communities are gradually restoring trust and confidence among one another. They have awakened in them the spirit of a peaceful village where children can grow without fear of attacks and one can feel free to visit the neighboring village experiencing a sense of belonging through the twinned family.

Children gladly expressed that with the interactions among their communities, there is hope that they may not experience the hatred, and ethnic violence their parents have experienced. As a result, they will have a safer environment to live in and shape their future. Long live Rotary!



A Gabra Girl Wearing a Turkana Attire given by her Turkana Friend During Children and Parents Meeting in North Horr



Rendille Girls Welcome their Gabra Friends During the Parents Meeting Supported by Rotary in Kargi



A Rendile and Gabra Boy with their parents during parents and children meeting in Kargi



A Gabra girl on the Sand Dune with the Turkana attire in North Horr during the Children and Parents meeting supported by Rotary.