

AFRICA NETWORK FOR ANIMAL WELFARE REPORT

Food Shortage Crisis in Kasigau: The
Western Kentucky University, University of
Nairobi and Africa Network for Animal
Welfare's partnership intervenes to avert a
human and environmental disaster

A Special Report



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Food Shortage Crisis in Kasigau: the Western Kentucky University, University of Nairobi and Africa Network for Animal Welfare partnership Intervenes to avert a human and environmental disaster

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Summary

In March 2009, the Africa Network for Animal welfare (ANAW) on behalf of the communities and people of Kasigau received \$2000 as food aid from the Western Kentucky University (WKU) and University of Nairobi (UoN) partnership. Half of this money came from the proceeds from the sale of baskets Margie Bowker purchased at Kasigau and resold at WKU. The other half is a gift from the WKU-UoN partnership. The funds received through bank after commission were US\$ 1990 that was changed to Kshs 157, 210. These monies were used for the purchase 36 bags of white Maize and 11 bags of Brown Beans from the local market in Voi town. The bags are 90kgs each. The food was then transported 70 km (40 miles) from Voi to the remote town of Rukanga in Kasigau. ANAW coordinated the activity and met the costs of transport and facilitation at Ksh 23,071. The local women leaders belonging to the local basket weavers groups were at hand to receive and distribute this food amongst themselves. The Kasigau communities have expressed their deep and sincere gratitude to the WKU/UoN/ANAW partnership for this act of compassion.

Introduction

Famine in Kenya: President Declares it a National Disaster

The government of Kenya declared the ongoing food shortage a national disaster on January 17, 2009. The total budgetary need to mitigate this food crisis in Kenya is somewhere in the regions of Ksh.37 Billion (\$490M). The most vulnerable are the women and the children. In his appeal for help, Kenya's President Mwai Kibaki said, "Our national assessment is that 10 million people are food insecure and require emergency support. These people will not be able to meet their minimum food requirements between now and the end of August 2009 without emergency measures". The rain forecasts for this year are less optimistic in bringing reprieve soon. It is prudent to encourage communities to invest their time and efforts in growing drought tolerant crops to avoid repeat food insecurity in the future years.

The facts at a glance

More than 10 million people living in Kenya are threatened with hunger.

Pastoralist livelihoods have been affected as their animals lack water and pasture.

Kenyan inflation has increased 31% and there has been a 100% rise in food prices since the beginning of 2008.

The areas of Northern, Eastern and Coastal Kenya have been worst hit, with 70% of the population affected by rising food prices and shortages.

In Turkana (northern Kenya), 28% of children are suffering from acute malnutrition, the highest in the country.

(Source: World Vision)

Fig 1: Drought disaster in Kenya -farmers losing as cattle die



The worst hit areas in Kenya are marginal districts in Eastern, Coast and Central provinces as well as pastoral and agro-pastoral areas of Rift Valley and North Eastern provinces. A number of livestock deaths have been reported.

In these areas, the food situation has been so grave that people have been eating tree barks, wild leaves and wild berries. Media reports indicate that some people have resorted to boiling mangoes for a meal. There are reported cases of human wildlife conflicts where wildlife and communities are fighting for watering holes and food resources.

Sustainable Alternatives to Bush meat trade

Communities in the area largely rely on poaching as a major source of livelihood thus the need for sustainable alternatives

In the past years, in collaboration with the University of Nairobi (UON) and Western Kentucky University (WKU), a presence has established in Kasigau region through community outreach programs. There are existent community projects aimed at providing alternatives to snaring of wildlife for bush meat trade and others targeted at avoiding environmental destruction through cutting of trees for charcoal, fuel and building materials.

These projects are meant to provide the people of Kasigau with sustainable incomes from alternative activities that do not lead to further erosion of wildlife habitats and destruction of related resources but instead encourage their conservation.

Examples of such projects include the making of modern bricks, weaving and basketry, building more eco-friendly housing, water harvesting and conservation, adoption of alternative energy sources– sun, biogas, as well as energy saving cooking stoves, Silk worm farming, and community cultural dances.

Successes and challenges

Community outreach activities in 2008 had a number of challenges. The post election violence that engulfed Kenya was quickly followed by drought which affected agriculture and food production. On top of these, communities in Kasigau region suffered many incidences where wildlife, especially elephants, invaded farming areas and destroyed drought tolerant crops such as cassava and pigeon peas. This largely eroded the people's ability to fend for themselves and stave off hunger in 2009. It is clear this region has suffered a severe period of food insecurity.

Successes so far attained include improved food situation in the area as residents' plant resistant and tolerant crop varieties. Poaching activities have also gone down in the area as more and more people go for alternative sources of livelihood.

Forgotten Citizens- Out of sight out of mind

Kasigau region is remote and far removed from the usual communication channels. Events happening in the region are usually far from the public eye and the media. Reports of people starving in this region of Kenya are simply not reported.

Sometimes it seems as if they have been totally forgotten by the government hence the recent food donation by the people of western Kentucky is commendable. It is food provision just in time. The donation is expected to last a number of weeks to a time when the farms can once again provide sustenance for the communities.

After months without rain, a single downpour lasting just 2 hours on the night of March 5, 2009, was enough to wipe out all the signs of a desolation wrought by the severe drought. It is difficult to believe that the Kasigau people are still starving and in need of food intervention. Despite the rain, their farms are still bare as evident from the picture and their pots still remain empty.

Fig 2: Kasigau looks deceptively green after only 2 hours of rain-but the farms are bare for another few weeks



Food Intervention – a timely act

Funds received - provision in kind

Purchases in Voi and transportation to Rukanga 70 Km away



Hand over to the women leaders

Fig 3: Kasigau women leaders receive food donations from the people of WKU



Figure 4: The Chairlady expresses gratitude for food Aid on Behalf of women groups in Kasigau

Long term Interventions

More often than not interventionist measures seek to address short term food security problems often resulting in a cyclic kind of food insecurity. What the people of Kasigau need is a long term initiative that will disentangle them from the long drawn web of hunger, starvation and perennial poverty.

It is important that future interventions look at ways through which permanent solution to this problem can be initiated. Growing of drought tolerant crop varieties is one such longterm solution. Rainwater harvesting through establishment of sand is another key area, this will ensure that the community has sufficient water all year round. The water could be harnessed for irrigation when rains delay.

Building the capacity of the community to better handle the situation will also go a long way towards enhancing food security.

Conclusion

Kasigau area is a potentially productive region but only with a proper mix of technologies and goodwill that will solve the food insecurity problem. It is hoped that with the help of strategic partners this is possible.

Measures to intervene should focus on working together with the people of Kasigau to promote food security in the area. The donation is just but a beginning, the beginning of a long journey towards food sufficiency and thus food security.



Annex 1:
Budgetary Spending