



Eco tourism venture guide book

**COMMUNITY
TOURISM GUIDE
OF LAIKIPIA REGION
IN KENYA**



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Cover photo: members of Twala group as they harvest the seeds of Aloe Secundiflora in the Aloe farm.

INTRODUCTION

Inside LPC

Joseph Lentunyoi, LPC director's

Laikipia Permaculture Centre (LPC) is a community based Trust founded in 2014 in partnership with 4 Self-Help Groups from Laikipia North and since then the partnership extended to other 9 groups, for a total of 13. The groups are mainly composed by women who work with LPC to utilise natural resources in a sustainable way and to provide a source of income for their households. Owing to diminishing natural resources and climate change, the pastoral way of life is no longer viable and conflict between communities over water and grazing land has become rampant.

While it is mostly the men involved in this conflict, women and girls are left most vulnerable. LPC works with the affected women in order to promote gender equality and uplift the voices of women and to help them to develop an agriculturally self-sustaining ecosystem to improve their food security and the environmental conservation where they live.

LPC helps these groups fence off their land to promote natural regeneration and plant certain species of trees and crops like aloe

LPC works with the women in order to promote gender equality and uplift their voices

LPC organises continuous training on permaculture, business management and marketing skills for the groups. Having access to land is enabling women to strengthen their social ties

and moringa that can offer the women income-generating opportunities. Moreover, LPC organises continuous training on permaculture, business management and marketing skills for the groups. Having access to land is enabling women to strengthen their social ties, cultivate organic vegetables and get an income from the sale of excess vegetables and processing of non-timber forest products (aloe, honey and opuntia stricta). These products are marketed both locally and internationally. Material gains aside, women have also gained confidence and have become more vocal when it comes to accessing or managing natural resources in their villages. The model of community-based efforts to look after and manage natural resources, as well as build indigenous knowledge to continue food production, is changing lives in Laikipia County. LPC is a holistic center that manufactures organic products in addition to acting as a research, training, and demonstration site for the region.

Joseph Lentunyoi While having been originally introduced to permaculture by Geoff Lawton in Tanzania in 2007, after completing his internship and teacher training with Geoff at the Permaculture Institute of Australia, he also went on to an advanced consultancy course with Warren Brush. Since then, Joseph has taught permaculture widely around East Africa and the USA, and within the projects supported by Laikipia Permaculture Center. In 2010 Joseph Lentunyoi Co-founded Permaculture Research Institute of Kenya, before he embarked back home in Laikipia to start Laikipia Permaculture Centre in 2014.



Group photo during project inauguration, in attendance the Director of AICS from the Nairobi office, Fabio Melloni, and Laikipia County Governor, Ndiritu Muriithi

Project "Farming the Future": a short explanation

Farming the Future is a three-year project started in 2019 funded in by the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation and implemented by IPSIA and CELIM NGOs, in partnership with Laikipia Permaculture Centre.

The intervention responds to the weaknesses identified among the agro-pastoral groups of Laikipia County: poor agronomic skills, limited access to water resources, poor profitability of business activities related to supply chains and tourism. Through a holistic approach originating from Permaculture principles, the project aimed at increasing agricultural production and profitability of business activities for 11 target groups (770 direct beneficiaries), improving in this way the economic conditions of the agro-pastoral groups of Laikipia North, and encouraging the resilience of the communities in the arid and semi-arid areas of Laikipia County.

The main actions consist of training and supply of equipment for agriculture, access to water for four communities, support to supply chains suitable for dry climates (honey, aloe, opuntia) and strengthening the tourism sector. All actions are anchored on environmentally friendly methods and principles to have a positive impact in mitigating desertification and encourage the protection of local natural resources. The transformation of opuntia stricta, in particular, is a suitable methodology to contain the proliferation of this invasive plant species, whose diffusion in the area poses a threat to



the community, causing injuries to people, as well as to both domestic and wild animals. The installation of 3 boreholes, 3 tanks, 1 rock catchment tank was an important concrete help because they enabled some groups to have an alternative and increased source of water. Although water availability is still rainfall-dependent, these infrastructures have allowed not only to start project activities but also to provide drinking water for domestic use to the beneficiaries. Indirect positive effects in favor of women have also been recorded, not least reducing the risk of being assaulted or abused along the route, reducing school dropout, and enabling them to devote time to income-generating activities. Due to these factors, the women's commitment and sense of ownership of the project, the self-help groups have begun growing aloes and producing honey. The results, at the conclusion of the project, were encouraging and showed a year-on-year increase in the production of cultivated aloe. This is also applicable to the honey supply chain, which has seen an increase in production compared to the pre-project data, although honey is dependent on external and unpredictable factors. Increased production also translates into increased income mainly from processing aloe, honey and opuntia. Three years after the project began, the women have seen a more than 50% increase in income from the sale of their products. One of the toughest challenges, moreover, involved tourism, which was affected from the beginning by the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. However, although the sector in the first two years took a hard hit, the third year showed a quick recovery surpassing pre-pandemic incomes. ●



Member of the group of Chui Mama during the harvesting of peas in the communal garden.

NABULU:

- 22 females, 1 male
- SHG formed in 2008
- Working with LPC from 2014

TWALA:

- 203 females
- SHG formed in 1997
- Working with LPC from 2014

NAATUM:

- 32 females
- SHG formed in 2010
- Working with LPC from 2014

OSUGUROI:

- 33 women, 5 men
- SHG formed in 2013
- working with LPC from 2014

LIVESTOCK MARKETING ASSOCIATION (LMA):

- 7 subgroups for a total of 520 of which 474
- Women and 46 men
- Working with LPC from 2019

LEKIJ:

- 72 females, 35 males
- SHG formed in 2019
- Working with LPC from 2019

ERERI:

- 27 woman, 1 male
- SHG formed in 2018
- Working with LPC from 2019

MURAMATI:

- 8 women, 10 men
- SHG formed in 2019
- Working with LPC from 2019

MUKIMA:

- 10 women, 7 men
- SHG formed in 2017
- Working with LPC from 2019

AFFIA:

- 1 female
- Working with LPC from 2019

NAITABAYA:

- 32 females
- SHG formed in 2010
- Working with LPC from 2019



Member of the group of Chui Mama in the communal garden.

CHAPTER I

Where you are

Here you will find few general information about Laikipia and its different cultures, its nature and wildlife. It will help you understanding the area you are in, providing some key tools for the interpretation of the context

Purpose of this venture guide

Is it possible to do tourism that at the same time respects the culture, environment and natural resources of the place you want to visit? Of course it is, this practice even has a name.

It is called “Ecotourism” and can be defined as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserve the environment, support the well-being of local people and provide interpretation and education”. How does ecotourism work?

The principles ecotourism is based on are very basic: do not act against the community but for it; do not devalue the natural environment but enhances it and preserves it over time; it is not for “destructive” tourism but for conscious and responsible tourism.

How to implement these principles in practice? It must minimize negative impacts on the natural and socio-cultural environment: supporting the maintenance of natural areas used as ecotourism attractions, generating economic benefits for local

communities and raising awareness of the preservation of natural and cultural assets. Is it possible to adopt an Ecotourism venture in Laikipia? Experiencing ecotourism in the groups LPC works with is possible because all interventions are implemented in a perspective of environmental sustainability and preservation of the land. An example are the accommodation facilities which are built with local and natural materials, reducing the environmental impact. Moreover, the groups are promoters of clean energies, like solar and biogas systems, of innovative systems for the access and the storage of water, and of locally grown food and locally made products. You will not find people who want to make money but women who want to conserve their land and their traditions.

Introduction to Laikipia context

If you ask a Maasai what Laikipia County means, he or she will reply that Laikipia means treeless land: it is one of the 47 counties of Kenya, located inside the amazing Rift Valley in the central Region,

Aloe is a medicinal plant whose gel can be used to treat burns and when drunk has an anti-inflammatory and immune balancing effects

crossed by the Equator and demarcated by the Mount Kenya, the highest mountain of the country (5,200 mt). This county extends for 9,508 km² and it has a mixture of different landscape and ecological systems. It includes bare land, forests and undulating hills but of these only 20% could potentially be dedicated to agriculture. Laikipia in fact is considered an Arid and Semi Arid Land (ASAL) and it is particularly affected by the effects of climate change. According to the 2019 KNBS Housing and Population Census, the total population of the county stands at 518,560 people, who belong to different tribes. In Laikipia you can find the Samburu and the Maasai, tribes with colorful and fascinating cultures. But you can also meet other populations such as Kikuyu, Kalenjin, Turkana, Meru, etc.

The county capital is Rumuruti but there are also other two major urban centres: Nanyuki and Nyahururu. In 2017, Laikipia county was ranked 47th by the New York Times in its annual rank of the best places to visit around the world. It's not by chance that the county receives over 86,000 visitors every year and generates annual gross revenues of over KSh. 1,5 billion. The figures witness the amazing and beautiful scenery, which hosts a diverse and unique wildlife. Laikipia county has the highest concentration of endangered species and is one of the few areas where you can meet the big five (lion, leopard, black rhinoceros, African bush elephant and African buffalo) and the only county with the last two White Northern Rhinos in the world. Nevertheless, in recent years Laikipia is experiencing the worst setback because of the effects of climate change. From poor but well defined rainy seasons, now weather patterns are characterised by frequent and longer dry spells, unpredictable rainy seasons and poor rainfall distribution which in some cases can also last for years. According to data from the National Drought Management Authority (NDMA),

in 2021 Laikipia County received between 51-75% of rainfall during the long rains compared to the average in recent years, while in 2020 it had received 201-350% and in 2019 90-110% compared to the average. This has serious repercussions in the pastoralist communities, where pastures and water become more and more scarce, bringing different tribes to fight over the few and precious natural resources available.

A mosaic of cultures

If the Kikuyu ethnic group is the largest in Kenya (22%), Maasai are the best known African tribes in the world. They represent, in the western common imagination, the stereotype of African tribes, characterised by their traditional dress. Many travellers and tourists are greeted by maasai women dressed in their traditional clothes and outfits, which easily attract the attention and curiosity of passers-by. Their clothing does not go unnoticed. In fact, it is characterised by a multitude of necklaces, bracelets and jewellery in every shape, texture and

colour, each one with a specific meaning. Another aspect of this tribe is that they are pastoralists. This condition leads them to consider livestock not only as a source from which they obtain food but as a real resource that characterises their cultural aspect. Indeed, the size of the livestock also determines their social position. The traditional Maasai diet consists of six main foods: milk, meat, fat, blood, honey and tree bark. Milk is usually mixed with blood and consumed in special occasions like celebrations and religious rituals. The Maasai live in villages of about 5 to 6 families. A village consists of a group of huts built from branches and brushwood. Then they are covered with cow dung, clay and mud, a mixture that functions as an insulator. To protect the household and the livestock from attacks from wildlife the compound is then surrounded by a barrier made from thorny bushes and logs. This type of village is also common for another tribe: the Kikuyu. However they are different from the Maasai because they mainly live off agriculture. For this reason the typical traditional food of the tribe includes mukimo, which are mashed potatoes

Cattle blood is rich of protein and is considered healthy for people with weakened immune systems and useful to reduce the intensity of hangovers

and peas; githeri which is beans and maize. Irio which is mashed corn, dry beans and potatoes. Other types of food included beef, goat and chicken. In addition, they are the tribe more involved in commercial activities which has led them to adopting certain aspects of modern culture. One of these, for example, is the way of dressing, which has suffered from Western influences. It has led the Kikuyu to lose some of their traditions. Opening up to modernity has also brought the Kikuyu tribe to be one of the most important Kenyan communities supporting the fight for independence, which was achieved in 1963 also thanks to the Mau Mau (freedom fighters). Kenya's first president Jomo Kenyatta was in fact a Kikuyu. ●



*Member of the group of Lekiji in the apiary
established in the communal land.*

*Member of the group of Naatum during
the harvesting of Aloe Secundiflora
leaves in the communal land.*



CHAPTER 2

What we do and how you can interact with us

**How the Self Help Groups in Laikipia North
exploit their talents, promoting resilience
to climate change transition. An insight of
the main challenges faced by LPC in the area**

Agroecology

According to the FAO Director-General, Qu Dongyu, agroecology is of paramount importance to promote sustainable food systems that provide balanced and nutritious food, ecosystem services and improved climate resilience. These are the principles of agroecology that apply an ecological and social approach to agricultural systems and take into account the interactions between plants, animals and the environment. Agroecology can help protect natural resources and biodiversity while promoting climate change adaptation and mitigation. It can improve the resilience of family farmers, particularly in developing countries where hunger-related suffering is rife. It can also contribute to the production and consumption of nutritious and healthy food and stimulate local economies and markets. Two concepts that descend from agroecology and LPC successfully apply and promote to the communities are the ones of permaculture and agroforestry.

Permaculture is an approach that mimics and reproduces the design and beneficial relationships of a natural forest where all living things coexist and get a mutual convenience. The basic principle of this philosophy is that nature comes equipped with checks and balances. It has methods of controlling diseases, regulating its population, and healing itself. If we upset this balance, we often end up creating many unforeseen problems.

The main aim of permaculture is to encourage people to redesign their environments into self-sustaining settlements that are self-regenerative and can solve problems from within. Permaculture, precisely because it seeks to establish simple and sustainable relationships between the elemental triad of Nature, Environment and Humans, is perfectly suited to those contexts where initial investment is low, knowledge is lacking and few tools and undeveloped technologies are available. During a training in 2022 at the LPC centre, a beneficiary of the group remarked: “Thanks to

permaculture we are now able to elevate ourselves and have an alternative, so many women are now proud of themselves and the community itself is also proud of us”.

The chairlady of the Self-Help Group of Naatum, Jane, said: “We as Maasai women did not know about crop farming but overtime we have seen significant changes in our lives. We have seen ourselves rising up and now we can see that there are a lot of things that can help us”.

She continues: “When we get enough vegetables we sell them to the local community which means more income for us and when we get the money, we save it. At the end of the year we share it amongst ourselves”.

Regenerative agroforestry is a key aspect in the practice of Permaculture where trees are merged with agriculture for the different and complementary benefits they provide to each other. When done correctly and deliberately, the 7 wonders of agroforestry become a reality for the communities in the Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASAL's).

*Member of the group of Chui
Mama as she walks to fetch
water in the nearby water point.*



The term “7 wonders of agroforestry” is used by the team at LPC to refer to Food, Fibre, Fuel, Fruits, Fertilizer, Fodder and Foliage. These 7 wonders are what all communities in these areas desire to have and have to work together to achieve.

The environmental threats faced by the communities in Laikipia North as a result of land degradation, biodiversity loss, deforestation and climate change are the reasons why regenerative agroforestry is critical.

To counter these threats, LPC has established a tree nursery where 5,947 assorted seedlings were sowed and it has distributed over 9,000 seedlings to the community. This intervention is specifically designed to engage the women and see them as the sole protagonist of this process of change. Agroforestry means protecting the soil from erosion and helping it retain essential microorganisms and water, thus improving productivity and biodiversity. The end result is self-sufficient and empowered communities that enjoy the

7 wonders of agroforestry. The founder of LPC, Joseph Lentunyoi, during an important meeting on permaculture in 2021 mentioned that: “Climate change is becoming a reality with less water because of erratic and less rainfall and therefore we need to make decisions on how we are going to fix the landscape and how we have to live in harmony with nature. Permaculture is for sustainable human settlement. Meaning that we have to live with nature and not against it”. ●

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The issue of water

The typical climate of Laikipia County sees two warmer seasons and two rainy seasons a year. Due to these climate conditions water can often be a scarce resource as rivers and reservoirs are heavily dependent on rain. This threatens the food security of people and greatly negatively influences the lives of inhabitants, as well as human activities related to agriculture and pastoralism: dried-out water sources, livestock doesn't survive and harvest is poor. Add to this the major challenge of this century, climate change, which is affecting Kenya and the more remote areas of Laikipia County where FTF self-help groups live and work.

The data collected by the National Drought Management Authority (NDMA) show unequivocally this process. In fact in 2021 and 2022 Laikipia County received between 51 and 75% of rainfall during the long rain season compared with the annual average of the last years. Not surprisingly,

Kenya's President Kenyatta declared drought a national disaster in the year 2021.

These harsher weather conditions exacerbate the already existing tensions among communities to secure the few available water resources and pastures.

Precisely in order to mitigate the conflicts, FTF project and LPCT targeted actions that would make access to water stable and constant. These actions resulted in drilling of wells for Twala, Nabulu and Osuguori groups, construction of a rock catchment tank for Naatum group and construction of sand dams in the LMA area. The most drought-affected group is Naatum, which has not experienced rain for more than a year, making agriculture hard to practise. The solution found was suggested directly by the surrounding environment: from a hillside. If it is difficult to find water underground and if it rarely rains, why don't channel the little rain into tanks, so as to ensure a water supply that can last for several months? This is exactly what was done. Concrete channels were built on the nearby rocky



Women from the village of Ibolei as she waits to fill the bucket of water at the water kiosk of the group of Twala.

hill so as to collect rainwater that flows into the newly constructed tank with a capacity of 190m₃. This was the group that had the most difficulties, but thanks to the resilience of their members and the help of the Project, the women are now able to practise agriculture and other activities also during dry seasons.

The rocky hill is not only a source of water but a beautiful spot from which to enjoy a magical view of the landscape.

Similarly to Naatum, Chui Mama group faces severe drought despite being located on the banks of a river. The river however, due to climate change and unsustainable human practices has overtime changed from permanent to seasonal with very low water retention capacity.

Again, thanks to the help of the project, it was decided “to protect” the water from the sun, so as to avoid total evaporation. The water is stored in the sand bringing significant benefits to the surrounding communities and territories. Sand dams is the name of this technology and consist of

a reinforced concrete wall built on the riverbed to collect, store and use rainwater that would otherwise percolate to the ground. The stored water is then drawn through a surface well and used for human consumption, irrigation and livestock feeding.

Sand dams are considered the most efficient way to ensure water access in arid areas by providing a reliable source of water for community development. This technology not only has a favourable impact on surrounding communities, helping to reduce conflicts over access to water, but also has a positive influence on the environment, by reducing soil erosion and promoting regeneration of the landscape.

A woman beneficiary of the project interviewed in 2022 by LPC said: “During the drought season, we travel 10 kms in search of water and it isn’t easy to do that because of the risk of attack by wild animals. Sometimes you go in the morning and get back home at 2 pm without any water”. Boreholes, sand dams, roof water harvesting,

rock-catchment tanks have helped reduce these distances, giving greater security to women and girls, who culturally have the responsibility of fetching water for the household. ●

It was decided “to protect” the water from the sun, so as to avoid total evaporation. The water is stored in the sand bringing significant benefits to the surroundings communities and territories

Agribusiness supply chains

Agriculture is the economic sector that employs the largest number of people in the world and the main source of food and income for many people living in poverty. For this reason, investing in agriculture is not only one of the most effective strategies for improving food security and promoting sustainability, but it is also crucial for the economic development of the Country.

The term agribusiness is used to refer to economic activities derived from or connected to farm products. It includes these types of activities: cultivation of crops, processing and trade of agricultural goods.

Agriculture dominates the Kenyan economy, according to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS), in 2018 the sector employs over 80% of Kenya's rural labour force and provides more than 15.5% of formal employment. In addition more than 80% of the Kenyan population, for the FAO, depend on agriculture for livelihoods and this makes agriculture a very important sector for

Kenyan citizens. However, in recent years, agricultural production has shown a downward trend mainly due to the effects of climate change. This has resulted in governments, development partners and communities to think of alternative ways of earning livelihoods. It is in this spirit that LPC came in to help the communities utilising the natural resources available as a source of income and promoting environmental conservation and sustainability. With LPC guidance, the groups have now established microenterprises in different value chains suitable for Arid and Semi Arid Lands, like Laikipia North.

One example is the group of Lekiji whose members are traditional beekeepers. From this knowledge, the group specialised in the sector and now they are not only shifting from traditional hives to modern hives, increasing therefore the quantity and quality of the honey, but they are also able to process it and sell the final product to the market, bringing alternative income to the community. Nabulu Self-Help group instead specialised on

another natural resource: Aloe Secundiflora. Aloe grows wild in the landscape of Laikipia and it is also farmed from the group for their own use in the production of cosmetics. In addition to the numerous medical benefits, this plant is also used for the production of natural soap, lotion, cream and shampoo. Products that the group produces and sells in the local and international market.

As on one hand LPC promotes honey and aloe production, on the other hand it works to contain the

Honey is used to brew a traditional beer called Muratina, composed by a mixture of fruits and honey left to ferment for 1 to 4 days. Muratina plays an important role in the social and cultural traditions of many Kenyan communities



Member of the group of Nabulu during the production of Aloe Secundiflora soap.

Opuntia Stricta was brought to Dol Dol in the mid 1950s to be used as a natural fence in the households. It became invasive very quickly and in 2 years killed 5,000 small stock

proliferation of an invasive type of cactus called Opuntia Stricta. The plant was introduced in the 1950s and quickly invaded the landscape, replacing grass and pastures thus remaining the only source of food for wildlife and livestock. Its spikes cause injuries and at worst the death of livestock, which, being the primary commodity for the Maasai economy, brings to the rise of the poverty levels of the pastoral communities.

Following the permaculture principle of turning a problem into a solution, LPC established a



Members of Nabulu group posing with their products.

transformation plant for the value addition of the Opuntia fruits.

The pulp is used in the production of wine, jam and juices while the seeds are pressed to extract oil for the cosmetic production. But it doesn't stop here, the pads of the Opuntia plant are also used as biofuel for cooking. These solutions have a greater impact for the environment by reducing germination and producing sustainable energy, and for humans by creating income generating activities. ●

Sustainable energy

Energy is sustainable if it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

This is one of the goals Kenya wants to pursue by 2030. In fact, Kenya has launched a series of policies to gather renewable energy activities and investments, combined as part of the long-term Kenya Vision 2030 strategy. Through this agenda, the aim is to make the country competitive and prosperous with a high quality of life and to reduce polluting emissions.

In pursuit of this goal, LPC has walked with the community to prove that it is possible.

Women from Twala Self-Help Group are now comfortably enjoying clean energy from a biogas which feeds exclusively from cactus pads. The pads are harvested and chopped with a custom-made machine which produces a slurry. The liquid is then introduced in the balloon where fermentation happens and gas is produced.

This innovation has not only helped the community to fight the invasive cactus in a sustainable way, but has also contributed in safeguarding the environment by reducing the need of firewood, thus cutting down trees.

Solar power is also widespread use among the communities and promoted in a wide range of interventions.

For instance, to keep wild animals away from encroaching the farms, LPC installed solar powered fences for Osuguroi, Nabulu, Naatum, Chuimama and Lekiji groups. Also the 3 boreholes in Osuguroi, Nabulu and Twala operate on zero power bills since they are equipped with solar pumps which as well require very little maintenance.

But the most interesting solar application is at Laikipia Permaculture Centre, run by a 30KwH photovoltaic system which provides energy to the numerous activities of the centre, including 3-phase machines in the transformation plant.

Through these small but fundamental measures, a twofold objective is achieved in one fell swoop: on the one hand, electricity is offered to those areas



Members of the group of Twala as they grind the Opuntia leaf to produce biogas.

where it is impossible to get electricity due to lack of suitable infrastructure, and on the other hand, environment protection is promoted with the supply of renewable and clean sources, ensuring sustainable production and consumption models. Use of renewable energy is expected to grow, especially due to favourable political good will from the Kenyan Government. When President William Ruto was sworn in as the fifth president in September 2022, he used his inauguration speech to demand an end to humanity's "addiction to fossil fuels" and reaffirmed Kenya's commitment to reach 100% clean energy by 2030. ●

The most interesting solar application is at Laikipia Permaculture Centre, run by a 30KwH photovoltaic system which provides energy to the numerous activities of the centre

Human rights

Female Genital Mutilation is still a reality in Kenya. FGM is still a socially widespread and accepted practice, despite being condemned as a violation of the human rights of women and girls by the international community and by the National Government. The Unicef's report of 2020 states that more than 4 million girls and women in the country have undergone FGM, mostly in the North Eastern Region.

The main reason is socio-cultural: it represents an obligatory rite of passage, initiating girls into adult life; and it is related to the ideal concept of beauty, cleanliness and female purity. Although FGM is not intended to cause pain, women who undergo the procedure, under poor hygienic conditions, suffer greatly both during and after the practice. It is a source of long-term psychological and physical problems that compromise the natural functions of the female body.

Women and girls are subject to strong pressure to be circumcised in order not to be disowned by their families and communities.

Twala women's group has been fighting against this practice for years. Twala is a women's group founded in 2007 that to date has more than 200 members. Thanks to the donation of 40 acres of land from the community, the self-help group is able to create employment opportunities for its members, thus promoting women's empowerment, which is essential to countering FGM. Farming the Future project strengthens aloe and honey value chains and the tourism sector to increase women's income and enable them to be more independent.

"When a woman cannot put food on the table, it's very hard for her to remain behind -are the words of Rosemary Nenini, the manager of Twala group of maasai women involved in Farming the Future project-. When she cannot support her daughter to go to school, it is very hard for her not to say 'my daughter cannot be married off when she is

young' but when we become economically empowered gender based violence stops completely”.

These are the words from a woman who has experienced firsthand the tragedy of mutilation and early marriage. The words of one who has been fighting against this practice for years with important results and giving many young women an alternative way of living. In fact, she, together with Twala group members, has succeeded in getting the girls to decide independently and consciously whether to undergo this practice after completion of school. Connected to this practice are early marriages. Kenya ranks 18th in the world in the absolute number of women married or joined in marriage before the age of 18. Marriage at an early age brings with it disastrous economic, social and psychological effects all to the borne by women. Most of them experience domestic violence, drop out of school, end up losing their autonomy and have an early pregnancy, therefore dangerous for



Member of the group of Naatun in the communal garden.

themselves and the child. The main cause of this practice is related to poverty: a young married girl is one less person for the family to care for. About 80% of the members of mutual aid groups are women. This factor has helped women gain their own personal and economic independence. In this way, daughters are no longer seen as mouths to feed but become a resource for the family itself. ●

Groups' culture and daily life

If we want to give an adjective to our communities, we shall definitely think of: hospitality. This is what characterised them most. In fact, when you meet them they really celebrate your arrival with a very unique and engaging ritual. This consists of a warm and colourful welcome through songs, music and dances in the traditional Maasai dresses and garish necklaces and bracelets.

By moving and dancing, the women wearing the ornaments produce a melody that accompanies their voices in a sweet and lively tune.

The women then move, dancing, towards the guests to welcome them and include them in this fantastic ritual as they generously donate a handmade ornament.

If you want to learn more about the traditional dances of the Maasai, Esonkoyo Youth Group is the perfect place to practise. On the other hand, if you want to know more about the jewellery and the ornaments, Twala women will present a wide

range of objects, carefully designed and hand-crafted.

With perseverance and dedication, they spend part of their day threading each bead, of a specific colour, into the thread, paying extreme attention to the patterns they want to make.

If you feel like experiencing the real Maasai life, they also offer accommodation in the Manyatta, the traditional Maasai house made of timber sticks and mud.

Male-dominated is another adjective we think of as we talk about Maasai community. The man is the person responsible for the most valuable asset in this community: the livestock. The women instead are responsible for the house and in charge of fetching firewood and water, taking care of the children and of the small animals that do not migrate. Modesta, from Chui Mama Self-Help group, has though seen a change with the interventions of Laikipia Permaculture Centre and after three years of collaboration, in 2022, said “now in terms of community and culture, we are respected. Now we have our own voice!”.



Members of the group of Chui Mama during their traditional dances.

Also Joseph, the director of LPC, confirms that “women are the backbone of the family. They are our sisters, our mothers, they are part of us and therefore we need to support them whatever way we could”.

This is what happened, and from 4 women SHGs they started with in 2014, LPC is now supporting 15 SHGs for a total of 960 individual farmers or herders improving and strengthening the voice of

Former President Daniel Arap Moi was always seen in public with an elegant gold or silver tipped ivory rungu. In 1981 the ivory baton fell and broke as he was leaving Los Angeles to Australia. A new baton was brought to Australia before Moi landed there

women in Laikipia North. Women who are formally united under the legal form of Self Help Group, governed by an elected committee of an odd number of members to allow the voting process. The committee is comprised of nine or seven members, including: chairperson, vice chair, secretary, treasurer and 5 simple members. The committee represents and makes decisions on behalf of the Self Help Group of women. ●

Wildlife

Close your eyes and try to imagine this situation. You are at home in your garden, you are cultivating, and at some point you hear an elephant's barb. Initially you are surprised and a little amazed when you think: "how nice an elephant is near my house". But suddenly you realise that maybe it is not exactly a peaceful situation. An elephant, especially the African species, is a giant, territorial animal and it is considered one of the most dangerous and aggressive animals in the world. Elephants devastate everything around them, eating up to 450 kg of food a day. They are messy eaters, uprooting and scattering what is eaten. This is the situation members of Nabulu group, one of the mutual help groups, are used to witnessing. The group has experienced the destruction and power of this animal several times. One of the first interventions that FtF project has put in place is the securing of the group's land through a solar-powered electric fence. However,

for Nabulu, this was not enough to make the elephants demur to destroy the fence and devastate the community gardens, greenhouses and crops. The group's leaders have put in place preventive measures ranging from growing chilli peppers along the fence and patrolling the grounds both day and night. The latest solution adopted in Nabulu, which seems to be working for now, is the installation of an audio alarm that goes off when it senses the presence of elephants in the surrounding area.

The problem is serious, involving not only the destruction of entire lands that are a source of livelihood for small-scale farmers, but also affecting human lives. Between 2010 and 2017, an estimated 200 people in Kenya died as a result of human-elephant conflict.

Finding a solution like the one proposed by the project is a solution that goes in the direction of coexistence between humans and wildlife. This coexistence is increasingly exacerbated by climate change, particularly drought, which leads to the

sharing of scarce resources, forcing animals to move closer to the villages in search for water and food. Elephants are not the only animals posing these threats. The Osugoroi group, to take one example, must battle monkeys.

This issue has led the group to modify the crop calendar by planting plants that are compatible with the presence of monkeys and reducing cultivation outside the greenhouses.

Nature is not only made up of fauna but also flora, and in recent years these places have seen the proliferation of a type of cactus that is not native and is very invasive. Its scientific name is *Opuntia Stricta* native to Mexico and was first introduced in the 1950s in Laikipia for ornamental and hedging (live fencing) purposes. But, within a few years, it has spread to become a problem in Kenya and throughout East Africa. In fact, if you just find yourself walking through one of the self-help groups, you can't help but notice its presence.

This plant is not only causing the reduction of pastures, as it grows instead of grass, but also

the deaths of animals which feed on its fruits. In particular, livestock is in danger and being a primary commodity for the Maasai economy, it raises the conflict between communities. To reduce its proliferation in the landscape, the project promoted its utilisation by using the fruits, the seeds and the pads. Jams, juices and wine are made from the fruits; seeds are pressed to extract oil and the pads are used as biofuel for cooking. These solutions have a greater impact for the environment by reducing germination and producing sustainable energy, and for humans by creating income generating activities. ●

Wild elephant crossing the road in Laikipia North.





Conference Hall in the group of Osugruoi.

CHAPTER 3

Go and explore

**Visit our amazing county sharing the experience
of Laikipia Permaculture Centre and plunging yourself into Maasai culture**

Our ecotouristic offer

Have you ever imagined living in a self-sufficient community with organic agriculture at its core? One mimicking the circularity of nature and based on the values of people care, earth care and fair share? Your stay at Laikipia Permaculture Centre (LPC) will give you a taste of that, and much more. Based on the principles of permaculture, and designed by the communal effort and visions of both Kenyans and internationals, LPC represents a real-life example of what a sustainable future looks like. The centre aims to let its visi-

tors explore permaculture practices and circular living by providing training, food and accommodation. Indeed, LPC hosts a number of yearly courses on permaculture, composting, resiliency and pest management aimed at raising awareness on sustainable practices. Furthermore, the centre offers a set of biocompatible cottages built with COB -a mixture of sand, clay and straw- complemented by compost toilets and by access to water and light. The restaurant gives visitors the opportunity to eat organic produce coming straight from the garden, in line with the principles of self-sufficiency. The preparation of



traditional Kenyan dishes -among which chapati, ugali and mukimo- renders the experience especially enriching. Since 2014, LPC has been partnering with a variety of organisations and local communities, which have rendered the place a centre for akin minds to meet and share visions. The centre provides two stations for the processing of food as well as offices and a meeting hall. The historical collaboration with the local communities, based on the development of skills like honey making, aloe production and prickly pear processing has resulted in the socio-economic development of villages and on the enhancement of commu-

nity resilience to climate change. Want to try out the women's groups products? You will find a variety of them at the centre's gift shop, which remains stocked with aloe soaps, creams, jelly, shampoo and body lotion, as well as honey and prickly pear jams. The financing and up-skilling of Maasai communities by LPC has enabled a variety of villages -scattered across the Laikipia's savannah- to share their customs and traditions with visitors from around the world. One must say that exploring Kenya without experiencing one of its last remaining traditional tribes represents a rather incomplete journey. Indeed, the Maasai community does not only hold roots in humanity's common history, but it also remains strikingly attached to the present, given the many challenges faced to date. Nowadays, land tenure and climate change constitute the main issues impacting livelihoods of rural communities in Kenya and no book couldn't explain that more than a co-living experience would do. Twala is precisely the place that might do it for you. Positioned in a community-owned land, the Maasai women's group present in Twala offers a variety of cottages able to host tourists along the year. The community also



Inside and outside views of the cottage in Twala group built with natural stones.

enables visitors to live in a typical manyatta accommodation, the traditional living-space of Maasai families. With a field of aloe plants, a number of bee hives for honey production and a green-house for the sustainable production of food, the Twala community represents an example of the successful shift from pastoralism to organic agriculture for climate resilience. In our opinion, the beauty of the Twala experience remains rooted in the ability to interact with Maasai members and to listen to the history, struggles and living traditions of the Maasai tribe. In Twala you will also be able to go on a baboon walk -a stroll around the



village accompanied by baboons, yes baboons!- and to access the original bead-work done by the Maasai women. And let's not forget about the journey to get there! Immersed in the dry savannah, the village is only accessible through a trip by car, characterised by terrific yet nearly inhospitable landscapes and by frequent wild animals encounters. Together with Twala, the Natuum women's group has also been able to offer accommodation to visitors, while conference halls have been built in both Osuguroi, Nabulu and Natuum, offering the ability to host meetings and providing capacity-building experiences. ●

Other places to visit

Ol Pejeta

Ride horses or cycle while encountering wildlife in the Ol Pejeta private wildlife conservancy.

www.olpejetaconservancy.org

Ol Jogi

A 235 square km private wildlife conservancy aimed at both conservation and the involvement of local communities.

www.oljogi.org

Samburu National Reserve

Hike, experience horse-back riding or hot air balloon safari and meet the Maasai community in Samburu National Reserve.

www.samburureserve.com

Animal Orphanage

Encounter animals that have been recovered from the wild and get a chance to feed them in Nanyuki Animal Orphanage.

www.fairmont.com/mount-kenya-safari

Mau Mau Caves

Explore the history of Kenya's struggle for independence while enjoying a walk in nature.

kongonicamp.com/2020/mau-mau-caves

Aberdare

Hosting a series of high peaks, like Mt Satima and Mt Kinangop, the Aberdare mountain range is the perfect fit for hiking lovers.

www.kws.go.ke/content/aberdare-national-park

Ngare Ndare Forest *

Visit the still pristine forest of Ngare Ndare, take a dip into the blue pools and try out its canopy walk.

Mount Kenya *

Hike the tallest mountain in Kenya and second tallest in Africa.

Choose between a half-day hike or a 2-3 days walk to the mountain's peak.

Thomson Falls *

View a 72m equatorial waterfall at the far northern end of the Aberdare ranges from the multitude of viewing areas along the rim of the gorge.

** The trip to these three locations can be organised by LPC specifically*



Members of the group of Muramati working at the garden

Are you interested in learning more about permaculture, natural building, earthworks, land regeneration, community building, or do you have some ideas that could help us grow? Come volunteer with us!

**TOGETHER
WE ARE
STRONGER!**

The Laikipia Permaculture Project is a young project started not too long ago, where there is still a lot of innovative projects to implement and crazy things to do. We are not perfect, but we are doing our best to make a better world. At least a sustainable one. But sometimes we just lack the idea, the little something that could be revolutionary.

We can't do it alone, we need you! Come and share your knowledge, share your time, share your passion. Help us by supporting our community, distributing our products or adopting a baby cactus! You don't match with the previous criteria?

No worries, there is always work to do.

More info: <https://lpct.or.ke>

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