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Population, Health, and Environment: Lessons From East Africa

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Edited Transcript – Kuntai Karmushu

Thanks a lot. I am Kuntai, and I come from the Il Ngwesi community. It's a community base, we are not really based on the resort. And it's our vision to work together on PHE, not really that we were contacted by anybody, but very much going through my presentation you'll see how fission drove us to PHE. We started with PHE last year when they were preparing the Ethiopia conference.

That's very much the community, and that land will be the focus – it's piece of land focusing on three main areas, the community, the pastoralism, and the communities being served – most of this I learned by the issues people need, and we have several things going on, and we will see them. We have tourism, community, livestock keeping and wildlife. And the work we study will go through Il Ngwesi group ranch.

An overview of Il Ngwesi you can read, but it's a community on land, it's a group ranch. Group ranch came under act of Kenya 1978 when the government put up some remote land and tried to divide it into land and the people own. And they task currently now 634 registered members, representing a population of 7,000. We look at them in households, and that's why we put them at 7,000 household represented. And collectively we really use our land to improve the livelihood of our society.

I've been talking to people, in most part in Kenya. We are in Laikipia District of Rift Valley. Covered land is 16,500 hectares. We have conserved 80 percent of our land for conservation and for those people who have been in Kenya because a number of people have been to Laikipia, we now fall under Laikipia District after the current administration.

As I said earlier, our vision and mission drive us to PHE because our vision is to integrate community development and sustainable environment management, and our mission is to improve livelihood by the generating of income through equal/fair activities in order to conserve wildlife and it's habitat, and to uphold Masai culture and develop local community. That's why I say the efficiency drives us, because one thing we are really, really considering



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development as one of our major components, and the main thing is the focus of income. As I said, we live in up-country. There is no road. There is nothing there, but now the community come together, work themselves, and try to improve their livelihood through their land. Our land is very dry and that's why all of a sudden we were found by PHE, and we are just starting talking and telling the community. But lately we are practicing it without it coming in place, and without that branding I think it's in order.

These are the projects, the small projects which are real and Il Ngwesi. Which is preserving the Masai culture, if you see my picture you can see all those people who are with them. We meet in our community. We have one picture there showing -- if you look some of my cats you love that is new program we are started on controlling HIV. We have wildlife, and one of my pictures also has -- we are starting marking some or observing some of the -- one of my picture up there showing the HIV/AIDS Day, which is first of December. We are able to create and take that message to the community, and they go around having these people going around and telling people what this is. And we have public health and HIV within the community. We have education, improved access to clean and safe water. Environment conservation is the key to tourism and income generating activities, and we have infrastructure developed.

I'll try to go one by one and, as I said, the vision drives us to PHE. We have public health and HIV programs. We have started capacity building. We are targeting first the population of 20,000 people. These are the populations we are targeting at least to have information on HIV/AIDS, have information on malaria, tuberculosis, and this is our population. And also, currently now we are working on having these people know this information and testing 5,000 people within that population for HIV/AIDS, and they live in and around people doing visits -- mobile visits and working on how to do it. There are tickets [spelled phonetically] [unintelligible] support and awareness creation and all these things. We do mobile house two hours, and we have a group we call peer educators. We trained them to have basic information on all this, what we do, and we send them on the ground and they are or coordinators who work with them. And that's very much self-explanatory, and that's what we do on the ground.

But the most important thing I really appreciate is the 2006 Il Ngwesi declaration on HIV/AIDS. This is the time when we started basing ourselves on the AIDS issue, and the HIV program is now one year old, although malaria, tuberculosis and family planning and reproductive health is six months old, so we are just starting and thinking how can we create,



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but just involving our vision to improve our livelihood, how can we get these people know this and have basic skills. And also, one of our targets doing this is bringing government closer to the people. Because our project works within our government, we try to link with the bodies which are doing that, and we bring them to the ground and they understand this is happening and how can we do this. And when we collaborate we are now working; also our vision to have this government in place in at two years' time and to start to institutionalize them, like especially here that's what we are trying to do now.

We go to environment and resource conflicts. When we mark our environment today and we start teaching people, because most of these people use firewood for cooking we try to make – we have a demonstration center to look at stuff which consumes fuel less than it usually does, and that's how we try to educate people on this. We have a number of projects and they are the main thing when I say to have all these things existing in that land, to have people doing well and to have livestock there, to have wildlife and all of us existing.

So, among the thing now we have done on environment. We have introduced black rhino actually in Kenya, it's the state rhino, and they were also diminishing years ago, but currently now we are managing to have one, and we have introduced a white rhino, which actually is an introduction from South Africa, and now we have three in Il Ngwesi. And they're forced to do grazing management. We are able to develop grazing bylaws. This we try to put our land in the [unintelligible] and look at how can we manage the grass that people can move to one area at one time being a pastoralism community.

And also for us to appreciate conservation we really need to consider livestock as the priority, and how can we conserve this to have grass for them and to have that capacity-building. And the land set by conservation we use in dry seasons to feed our livestock and have them feed in patterns so that our livestock really don't die very easily, or all of a sudden when a drought comes and all this, and we have the Il Ngwesi Watch. And also we set up a wildlife monitoring and we have a scouting team, and these people do a lot of monitoring and security.

We also try to control our population, but our main vision there before is to buy land outside our group ranch through the income from tourism and try have our people go and resettle there. We are there slowly, but it's still something coming up, especially that we are just now starting the family planning, and reproductive health parts so it's something just we are



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beginning, and we are really not sure, what with that population also Masai and believing that children are a part of health.

Conservation and security, when you look at my first pictures we tried to do conservation and I told you we have a black rhino around the lake saving this old rhinoceros. The first picture there we are trying to put our recipient monitoring so we can monitor this rhino within our conservation area, and they are putting, and even you can look one of our security having the recipient monitor where the rhino is. Currently now we are monitoring rhinos and the cats, which are predators. You know, the most we have is predators, because they feed on livestock and as soon as they feed on livestock some of the people kill, some of the people poison, and that's why we have to put in such a kind of program, which we have security in place to do.

And the security also maintains the community bylaws. We have some bylaws, I mentioned. First, we have bylaws on grazing. We have also the group ranch, bylaws which also manage us and control everything, and wherever anything happens we have our security. Anything concerning or breaking of the bylaws, and that's very much the job of our security. And they also, as I said earlier, they monitor wildlife a lot. They have sick wildlife because we work closely with Kenya Wildlife Service. In case of anything, they can contact the Wildlife Service, and they can work with them and take the necessary action. They also link with other communities and also they assist the government. Because we work with the government, the security, some of them, are armed, and these are through government. We have those alliances, so they are supposed to assist the government.

I need to say something on eco-tourism; that's really the Ngwesi backbone. All our projects are being sustained by eco-tourism. So, we have Il Ngwesi Lodge, established in 1996. We are funded by USAID, through the program called COBRA. In Kenya they put bylaws saying that they realize they will never, never manage to conserve wildlife without having those people who live with the wildlife involved in doing this, so by then they came up with this program. And the only way they can approach communities is through I think they built something like a tourism activity and all that. And the Ngwesi really picked their first year summer as the first community in Kenya who did this, although now we have a lot of communities who really learned from Ngwesi and started doing it. It's six cottages with twelve beds.



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The other thing, as I said, that our vision really considers is that we really needed to target the number of beds because we are not really targeting on mass tourism. We really want to do responsible tourism where we consider the environment. When we have mass tourism everything will get destructed. We really encourage bush walks rather than driving all over. How we work is we take our people, elders, or our forum committees, to go and see that it matters that they drive all over the place and they destroy, then, small things in the environment that we need, and that's why we try to focus to make sure that we didn't, that we need everything in that habitat to exist, and that's why have tried to make sure that we are being responsible.

And the other thing we tried to do was create employment for our people. The lodge actually have 20 staff and 99 percent come in from the local community. When you get there you'll see all of them dressed mostly like me. This is our culture, and that's how the staff, all of the staff, dressed at the lodge. The lodge is really run by the community. The board members are the community members and we borrow some skills. Possibly we may need to co-opt somebody to assist us in some part, marketing and all this; however, marketing depends with the mouth to mouth, like this one. This is our big marketing.

And I will say this is a very big honor for the Wilson Center to have Il Ngwesi because we are not based on resort so less people know Il Ngwesi but we are there just doing a fabulous and a favorite deal but really less people and we depend on tourism. And, as I mentioned, this is our main source of income. It's really one of the big sources of income. I know we have friends, but this is the main. Now we are just in a crisis because of what's happening in our country. We really have less bookings; we were looking on our booking in June and all this there is nothing, and I don't know what we'd do. And that's our big revenue.

I know we are not based really on research. This is among the places we are now coming in, but we try to look how is our business doing. And this is more, like, sources of income. We have had the Il Ngwesi Lodge since 1996. We have a cultural boma where we look – it's very good to have one location that people can get to go to and see what we are doing. And we have a campsite. We have also a camera safari, and we have conservation fees. Actually, this helps us a lot in maintaining our security. And we have friends and development partners. We really have good-willers [spelled phonetically] who really realize we are doing; I didn't acknowledge, but we are working in the FHI through USAID and some people come in and they try to work with us in doing some part, which I said they look at how efficient we



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are really, but we are lacking this component and we get together and appreciate but all of us are on the most trying to achieve our vision.

That's how we distribute the revenue. Currently now we have places for education too. This is not just we give out money, as I said. My first colleague mentioned these are the places in up-country; like this school, the closest school has around 300 kids and with six teachers, and this you just realize that they went to work and the Il Ngwesi come in and they have to have more teachers there, and we built new schools closer to the people because we realize most of the pastoralism community didn't get their kids in school because all schools are very far and most of the people they have to be a certain age to walk to school. And also we look at HIV awareness campaigns and actually last year when we started we managed to test 1,019 people and over 600 people did counseling and 2008 is now in progress.

We also look at conservation because we need wildlife, and that's why you see they take a lot of our money because it's taking a lot. That's main, the control of wildlife, livestock and maintaining bylaws. We also look at ideas for income generating activity. We tried to build small activities like traditional costumes and all this and tried to market. We look at infrastructure like when you know you go to Il Ngwesi we try to channel water to get to the people. We try as much as we can to improve our roads and all this – one of my colleagues was telling me when we were driving through Il Ngwesi he never, never imagined in his life having a road going that way or having the road in that place.

I'll go through how it works, community owning ideas and community-related programs. The whole idea is owned by community. When you look at my top picture, that's an annual general meeting. At least half of those people have to sit. Even today we agree we want to introduce something new in Il Ngwesi. We need to pay all the other committees and bodies just to make that policy. It will be endorsed by ADM, and that's why they want that process. You'll go there, read, and go through and agree and just put some part, "improve that and do that, remove that and that's" – they want everything because this is their land, and they have to decide what they do and how to develop a management system.

We keep monitoring, like we agree, "this is where we went wrong," "we need this body." Currently now we have, like, five committees running Il Ngwesi, but it was just one in the beginning. That's why we created an HIV program. We have a small task force doing that. The other thing is participatory decision making. There is no way to tell, "just make a decision, listen to this and do it." No, it has to go through all the processes. And all the time



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we work on developing the capacity of committees, the people who run, because we see the communities run, so that's why we do a lot of [unintelligible]. And also, the Masai culture, their lifestyle and all these, and the way they are respected at the meetings. And, also, equal distribution of revenue of contributed support from partners. As I said, we worked with them before from working with the KWS, and other partners have assisted also.

And those are very mighty success stories; we have now the lodge; we have been able to introduce the black rhino, which had diminished years ago; we also have a white rhino, which never existed in that land. And one of the big awards we have appreciated is through UNDP in 2002, where the UNDP recognized the work we are doing through using conservation to reduce the poverty of our people. And also we were able to create, as most of you know that there is sort of [unintelligible] now, we are the project are able to create 40 new positions for our people. Most, 99 percent, come from the local, and we have 17 other communities which come up because of Il Ngwesi. And recently, the new project is we are introducing holistic management where we try to feed the cows – when they feed on all the grass they will have the new grass.

And these are the challenges; we have human-wildlife conflicts, which is really a big thing because when the cow is eaten by a lion it's just a total mess (they'll try to kill the lion and most they'll mess it up); we have tourism marketing, we are not able to go all the venues and market ourselves in all this; and we have population growth rates. This population is coming always and the pressure is something, and we have old generations and the young. Sometimes we disagree on several things, which young generation like few things and other don't like. And we have also big challenges in government because the government doesn't know. When they make policies and we have no representation in it and they just bring another man. And we have other things, like inadequate resources, inadequate infrastructure, threats and international terrorism, management. There is one case which was ruled on in May 2007, there was one tourist who got just by accident crushed by an elephant and they sued the whole community and the lodge. Actually, the community lost the first round in May 2007, so in case they got a second round because we are working on appealing it and if they win it, we might sell all our livestock, our land, our lodge and everything to pay 150 Kenya shilling, which is approximately, I am not sure exactly in U.S., but it must be something like – it's really like one million U.S. dollars or something. And also we are now having a big challenge of political instability, which really, we had to close our season, and I believe most of you know what will happen.



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These are the key lessons we are learning and are sharing with friends. Participation and decision making are really one of the key things to help us succeed, and we have equal benefit of sharing. When you do this project you ensure that all communities are benefiting, they are motivated and all this. And good governance and partnership and flow of communication is very, very important, you know, in the community. This is their property. When you do anything wrong and without proper information they'll just say forget the project and disappear. And we have also democracy in how we elect our leaders. We just go to a general meeting and we are today changing our board and they'll just vote normally and have our leaders in place. And then they know and we divide that into different clusters, and the community ownership.

Thank you very much.



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