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Tangulbei Women Thrive through Agroecology, Financial Inclusion, and Education



Lilian Jaki, Member of Oasis Women's Group, stands proudly at their farm in Tangulbei.

In the arid and semi-arid landscapes of Tangulbei, Tiaty East, Baringo County, a remarkable story of resilience and transformation is unfolding. Supported by ActionAid Kenya through the Gender Responsive Alternatives to Climate Change (GRACC) Project, three groups of women are redefining their futures through innovative approaches to food production, financial empowerment, and community education.

Traditionally, the community in Tangulbei relied heavily on cattle rearing. However, the region's susceptibility to banditry and the challenges of over-reliance on livestock spurred a shift towards agroecology. Embracing this climate-friendly method of food production, a group of women has become pioneers in sustainable farming. With the support of the GRACC project, these women received crucial information, seeds, and the construction of Slam dams for irrigation.

A visit to their farms reveals various crops: sorghum, millet, green grams, beans, maize, watermelon, and pawpaw. This diverse cultivation not only ensures food security but also provides nutritional sustenance. The women share the farm's proceeds, serving as a model of success and inspiration for others. Their efforts are feeding families and preserving the environment for future generations.



Members of the Oasis Women Group at their agroecology farm in Tangelbei

“In this location, my people did not practice agriculture and only embraced cattle and goat keeping. Due to harsh climate conditions and banditry, we often lost our livestock. ActionAid trained our women’s group on growing crops that would endure harsh climate conditions. We are now practicing agriculture after being supported with seeds, slam dams, and information.” stated Lilian Jaki, Member of Oasis Women’s Group.

“The growing of vegetables, fruits, and grains has helped us supplement what we get from livestock. We get food for basic consumption, boosting nutrition for kids, and the surplus is sold for the group’s income. Our group also engages in savings through our Village Loans and Savings Group.” added Elizabeth Cheretei, Member of Oasis Women’s Group.

In a second determined group called Checkpoint VSLA, which started in the year 2020, 21 women have discovered the power of collective savings and lending. In 2023, they shared dividends amounting to Ksh 641,000, a testament to their commitment and ingenuity. The name Checkpoint is drawn from the insecurity reality on the ground as the area served as a checkpoint for security personnel who used the locality to check every vehicle and person getting to the small town of Tangelbei, which is about 3 km away.

The Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA) operates on a simple yet powerful principle, members contribute to a communal savings fund, which is then available for lending within the group. This financial support enables women to invest in income-generating projects, start businesses, or cover emergency expenses. The ripple effect of this initiative is profound, fostering economic independence and self-reliance among the women.

“Information on financial empowerment enabled us to start our VSLA, lifting us out of poverty thanks to ActionAid’s support through training and exchange visits. Poverty has been our greatest challenge, but with the VSLA, we have been able to uplift one another. I am able to support my husband in providing basic needs for our family, including paying school fees for our kids. The advantages associated with this VSLA have even seen my husband chip in by giving me money to increase my savings and shares.” said Mary Kiwanja, Member of Checkpoint VSLA.



Members of the Checkpoint VSLA Group engage in a savings and lending session, fostering financial empowerment.

“I lost my husband four years ago, and raising my kids became a challenge. Since joining the VSLA, I have been able to get information, and do menial jobs to earn income, which I save a little and borrow, proceeding to buy goats that I have sold and increased my shares in the VSLA. Through this, I am educating my children. The welfare within the VSLA also supports those who face emergencies.” shared Susan Losike.



Community members in Kitaleem participate in a session on ending FGM, advocating for girls' rights and promoting education.

Beyond agriculture and finance, another group of women is spearheading a crucial campaign against Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). They are dedicated to educating the community about the harmful effects of FGM and advocating for girls' rights to education.

Their efforts have gained significant traction, attracting allies such as cultural leaders, religious leaders, men, and boys challenging long-held beliefs. By fostering dialogue and changing perspectives, this group is creating a safer and more equitable environment for girls, ensuring they have the opportunity to stay in school and pursue their dreams.

"In my community, FGM means child marriages, teen pregnancies, and school dropouts. Child marriages lead to poor health for young mothers and perpetuate poverty as they cannot support their families and only depend on their struggling husbands. ActionAid has educated us on the evils of FGM, and with allies in the community, the fight against it is on. Despite backlash from those who haven't agreed to end the vice, we are slowly winning them over." stated Catherine Mata, Women and Girls Rights Champion in Kitaleem.

"As young men, we were made to believe that you could only marry girls who are circumcised. But after learning the evils of FGM, I have become a champion of girls' rights and speak to my fellow young men and our elders to support the fight to end FGM. Society is changing, and our young men are open to the idea of marrying girls who haven't gone through FGM. This has lessened the pressure among girls, thinking that they can only get married in the future if they have undergone FGM. I believe we will one day win this war." commented Shadrack Cheburet, Girls Rights Defender, Kitaleem.

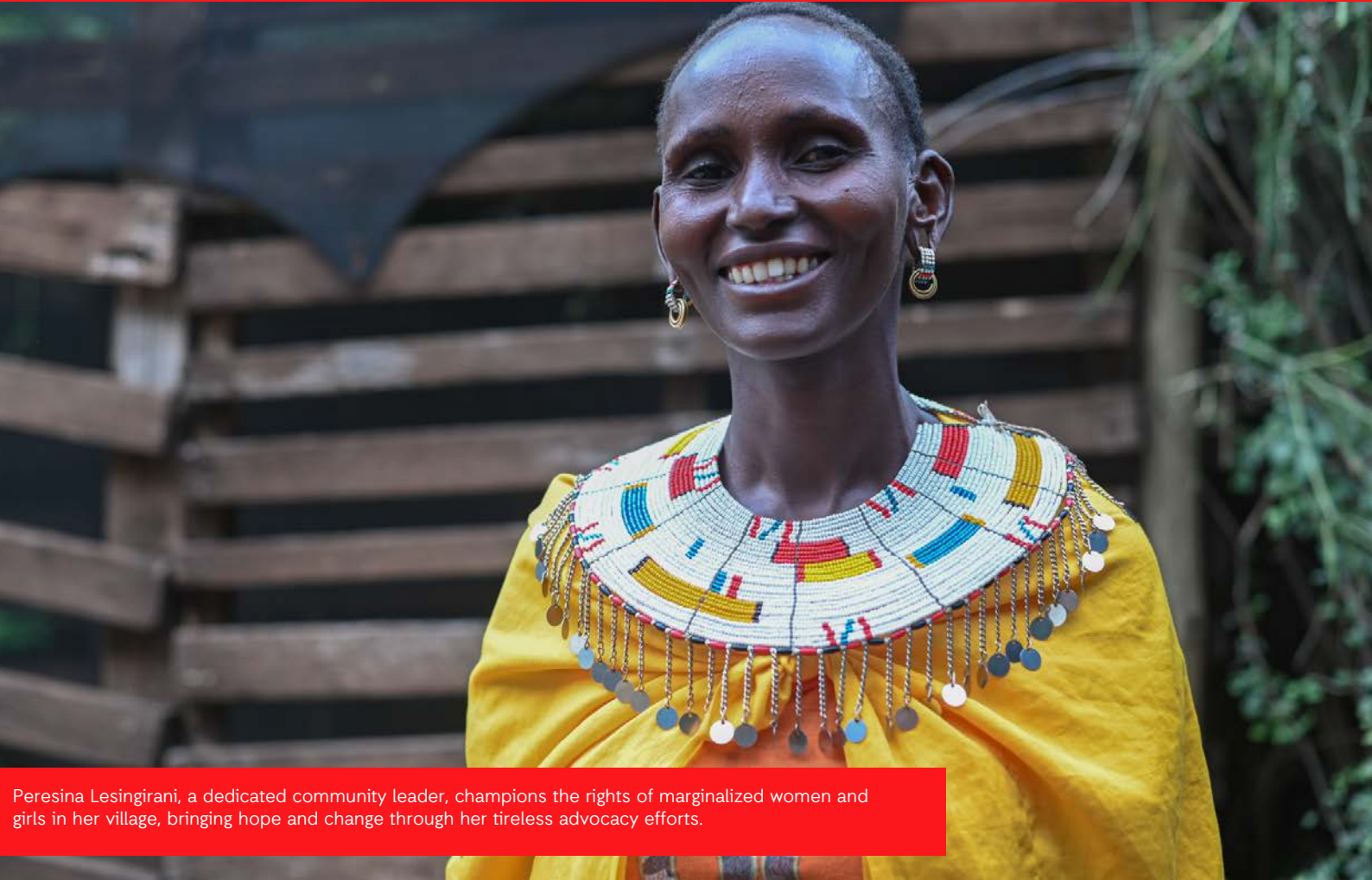
"I underwent FGM, and as a cultural norm, I had no option but to let my first girl also undergo it. But when I got into contact with people teaching us about the dangers of FGM, I got the courage to spare my other daughters from it. As a mother, I experienced challenges with FGM. I am now more informed and will always protect my girls. My husband has also supported my decision and allowed them to go to school and not get married. I believe that they will still get married despite not having undergone FGM because society has changed, and I see young men advocating for an end to FGM." shared Cheptengor Nambili, FGM Survivor and Parent, Kitaleem.

The initiatives by the three different groups of women showcase the true meaning of rooted resilience. Through agroecology, financial inclusion, and education, the women of Tangelbei are not only transforming their own lives but also creating a ripple effect of positive change throughout their community. With continued support and collaboration, their journey toward empowerment and sustainability shines as a beacon of hope for others facing similar challenges.

"Tiaty, Baringo County has long been associated with insecurity due to banditry, FGM, and climate shocks exacerbated by climate change. However, through our targeted interventions, supported by various stakeholders, we are changing this narrative. We are committed to empowering communities with essential information, skills, and financial support, enabling them to transform their lives and foster sustainable development." stated Kitasi Wangi, Programme Manager – Resilient Livelihoods and Emergencies, ActionAid Kenya.

The Gender Responsive Alternatives to Climate Change (GRACC) Project is supported by the Australian Government through ActionAid Australia and the project is implemented in Kenya by ActionAid Kenya.

Breaking the Silence: Peresina Lesingirani's Fight Against FGM



Peresina Lesingirani, a dedicated community leader, champions the rights of marginalized women and girls in her village, bringing hope and change through her tireless advocacy efforts.

In Loruko, Isiolo County, a powerful movement is taking root. It began with a single, courageous voice, Peresina Lesingirani, a survivor of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), who decided that silence was no longer an option. Despite facing backlash from her community, Peresina spoke out, driven by an unwavering determination to protect the next generation of girls from the pain and trauma she endured.

“For years, I lived with the physical and emotional scars of FGM,” Peresina shares. “But the thought of other girls going through the same horror gave me the strength to speak up. I could not stay silent.”



Peresina Lesingirani engages in a reflective session with fellow women from Isiolo County, fostering community dialogue on women's and girls' rights.

Her bravery was met with resistance but also sparked a wave of support. Over the past year, Peresina has gained allies who recognize the deep-seated harm caused by this practice. Fellow women, the Men for Change group, some cultural leaders, and organizations like ActionAid Kenya through the Girl Generation Programme, a programme under the Africa Led Movement to end FGM/C have rallied around her cause. Together, they are challenging long-standing traditions and advocating for the rights of women and girls.

"FGM is not just a cultural practice; it is a violation of human rights," Peresina asserts. "With the support from ActionAid Kenya and our community allies, we are making strides towards a future where every girl can live free from the fear of FGM and realize her dreams."

The Men for Change group has been instrumental in shifting attitudes within the community. These men are breaking the cycle of silence and becoming vocal advocates against FGM, emphasizing that it is not a cultural necessity but a harmful practice that needs to end. Cultural leaders who once upheld the tradition are now joining the movement, recognizing the importance of protecting their daughters and granddaughters from harm.

"Seeing men and cultural leaders stand with us has been incredibly empowering," says Peresina. "It shows that change is possible when we unite for a common cause."

According to the Kenya Demographic Health Survey 2022, the prevalence of Female Genital Mutilation declined from 38% in 1998 to 15% in 2022. This significant decrease is a testament to the impact of advocacy and education efforts.

Peresina's story is not just one of survival but of resilience and transformation. Her journey from silence to strength is paving the way for a new era in Loruko. Through community outreach, education, and advocacy, she and her allies are creating a safer, more hopeful future for girls.

"As a community, we are breaking the chains of FGM and empowering our girls to chase their dreams," Peresina declares. "The road ahead is long, but with unity and determination, we will succeed."

Peresina Lesingirani's fight against FGM is a testament to the power of speaking out and the impact one person can have in driving social change. Her story inspires hope and underscores the importance of collective action in the battle against harmful practices.

"Together, we are paving the way for a future where every girl can live free from the fear of FGM and realize her dreams," Peresina affirms, her voice strong and unwavering.

In Loruko and Isiolo County, a new dawn has broken, a dawn where silence is no longer an option, and the voices of survivors like Peresina Lesingirani are leading the charge toward a brighter, safer future for girls.

National Alternative Justice System (AJS) Conference Advocates Inclusive Solutions to Accelerate Access to Justice



ActionAid Kenya Team and partners at the National Alternative Justice System Conference held at Kabarak University, Nakuru County.

The third National Conference on the Implementation of Alternative Justice Systems (AJS), organized by the National Steering Committee (NaSCI-AJS), took place at Kabarak University, in Nakuru County from June 4th to June 7th, marking the first time the event was held outside Nairobi. The conference, under the theme “Accelerating People-Centered Justice in Kenya: Engaging, Expanding, and Retooling AJS,” brought together a diverse group of participants including judicial officers, academic experts, civil society representatives, state officials, and members of indigenous communities.

Chief Justice Martha Koome, leading the initiative under the Social Transformation Through Access to Justice (STAJ) framework, emphasized the critical role of Alternative Justice Systems in promoting cohesive and peaceful communities.

In her opening speech on June 5th, she highlighted the importance of Article 159 of the Constitution, which supports AJS as a method to provide affordable, flexible, and effective justice solutions, thereby reducing congestion and backlogs in the courts.

“The NaSCI-AJS has sustained this movement, which has now come to fruition. AJS is an affordable, flexible, and effective process in reducing congestion and case backlogs in our courts,” said Chief Justice Koome.

She underscored the significance of county-based actions and collaborations in enhancing the justice system across the country.

ActionAid Kenya and its partners from Taita Taveta County played a pivotal role in the conference by participating in panel discussions, where they contributed ideas on innovative measures to ensure justice remains people centered. The organization emphasized the necessity of collaborating closely with grassroots actors, including cultural and religious leaders and organized social action groups, to facilitate effective and inclusive justice mechanisms.



Pauline Atieno, Local Rights Programme Coordinator for ActionAid Kenya in Taita Taveta County, shares her insights during a panel session

“As an organization, we believe justice should be accessible and affordable,” stated Pauline Atieno, ActionAid Kenya Local Rights Programme Coordinator in Taita Taveta County. “The Alternative Justice System (AJS) embodies these principles, offering a transformative approach to dispute resolution.”

Drucilla Ngele, a chief from Mbololo, Voi, Taita Taveta County, shared her experiences with AJS, stating,

“I have handled 14 land disputes, 25 child neglect cases in my area, amongst other disputes, and I appreciate that the judiciary recognizes my efforts as an alternative justice for justice seekers.”

The event also featured submissions from various sectors, showcasing the integration of cultural diversity in handling justice cases. This diverse representation aimed to highlight and reinforce the theme of “People-Centered Justice in Kenya,” showcasing how different communities approach justice in ways that resonate with their cultural practices.

The conference concluded with various actors exhibiting their cultural approaches to justice, reinforcing the idea that justice systems should be inclusive, accessible, and reflective of the people they serve.



Participants follow discussions at the AJS Conference.

and recovery.



Kenyans connect with ActionAid at our booth during NGO Week at KICC grounds

ActionAid International Kenya (AAIK) took center stage during this year's NGOs Week celebrations held at the Kenyatta International Convention Centre (KICC), Nairobi. The event, themed 'Building Synergy for a Sustainable Future,' saw participation from numerous NGOs, government officials, and the public, fostering an environment of collaboration and shared learning.

He captivated the audience with his story, detailing how ActionAid's education sponsorship and village programs had profoundly transformed lives in his community. His testimony underscored the enduring impact of AAIK's initiatives.

A highlight of the week was the heartwarming encounter with a man who had been a sponsored 'child' through ActionAid in the 1980s.

ACTIONAID INTERNATIONAL KENYA



The Public Benefit Organizations Regulatory Authority Board Chairman Hon. Mwambu Mabonga (R) speaking with ActionAid International Kenya's Daniel Odinga (L) on June 18, 2024, during the NGOs Week.

The ActionAid booth also welcomed former staff members who had left the organization decades ago, as well as more recent alumni and partners, both past and present. These reunions provided a valuable opportunity to exchange knowledge on various sustainable programming models, evaluating what has worked and what needs improvement.

The event was an interactive platform where many attendees, curious about AAIK's community work, sought advice on how the organization could help address pressing issues in their regions. Notable challenges identified included empowering out-of-school girls, supporting teenage mothers and women in rural areas, building capacity for youth groups, and sensitizing communities in the informal settlement.

The week concluded on a high note, with productive conversations that hold the potential for future partnerships and collaborations. ActionAid looks forward to building on these interactions to extend their impact.

The 2024 NGOs Week was presided over by Principal Administrative Secretary for Security Njenga Miiri, who read a speech on behalf of Principal Secretary for Security and Interior Coordination Raymond Omollo. In his address, Omollo praised the efforts of NGOs during the devastating 2024 floods, where they provided critical emergency relief including food, clean water, medical supplies, dignity and hygiene kits, clothing, and temporary shelter to affected populations.

Omollo emphasized the pivotal role of the PBO sector in advancing Kenya's sustainable development agenda. He expressed the government's gratitude and reassured attendees of the government's commitment to upholding a safe and favorable environment for NGO operations following the operationalization of the Public Benefit Organizations (PBO) Act in May.

The 2022/2023 Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) report launched during the event highlighted that NGOs spent KSh197.9 billion, with KSh124 billion directed towards projects, KSh73 billion on administrative costs, and KSh49.1 billion on personnel and monuments expenses.

As the 2024 NGOs Week concluded, it left a legacy of strengthened ties and a renewed commitment to collaboration for a sustainable future, reinforcing the crucial role of NGOs in addressing Kenya's societal challenges.



The public following proceedings during the launch of the NGOs Sector 2022, 2023 report on June 18, 2024, at the KICC during the NGO Week 2024

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