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## **Children Bring Peace to Warring Tribes in Kenya**



**From tribal warrior to law enforcer: Kanye Kera with Hilary Bukuno from Children Peace Initiative Kenya**

For years, Kanye Kera, a warrior from the Pokot tribe in northwest Kenya, fought cattle raiders from the neighboring Samburu tribe and launched his own raids to steal Samburu cows. Many lives were lost on both sides.

Today Mr Kera puts his fighting skills to a different use, by retrieving stolen cattle from fellow Pokot and returning them to the Samburu. He credits his change of heart to [Children Peace Initiative Kenya](#) (CPI), a group of committed Kenyan peace activists who bring children together from both

tribes and build trust between their families.

As a CPI parent and beneficiary, Mr Kera is ready to take decisive action to preserve the peace, even if it means firing on fellow Pokot. He described how he had chased down Pokot rustlers and been denounced by them as a traitor for working with the Samburu enemy.

CPI is the brainchild of Hilary Bukuno, a member of the Gabra tribe who spent years working for peace in his own region before earning a Masters degree from the UN University for Peace in Costa Rica. The Advocacy Project (AP) has sent [Talley Diggs](#), a graduate student from George Washington University, to serve as a Peace Fellow at CPI this summer. Ms Diggs and Iain Guest from AP accompanied a recent CPI fact-finding team to the region.



**Peace Fellow Talley Diggs reflects on the drought, which has put pressure on all tribes and shown the benefit of cooperation**

CPI works in Samburu County, a vast area that is home to seven of Kenya's 42 tribes. The region has suffered for years from tribal feuding over cows, which form the basis for the pastoralist economy, and in 2012 forty-two police officers were ambushed and killed by Turkana rustlers in the sub-county of Baragoi. More recently, the herders have been pressured by drought and wildlife conservation measures which restrict their grazing land.

But there have been no violent clashes between Samburu and Pokot since 2012, when CPI began organizing peace camps for their children and exchanges between their parents. CPI staff are particularly impressed by the transformation in

warriors like Mr Kera, from fighters to law enforcers. "To find Pokot fighting against Pokot to protect peace with another tribe is simply unheard of," said Mr Bukono after meeting Mr Kera.



**Josephine, a Samburu businesswoman and CPI parent, takes order from her Pokot customers by phone**

Equally gratifying, the ceasefire has evolved into a relationship of inter-dependence which increases the prospects for a sustained peace. Josephine Lengapiani, a Samburu businesswoman and CPI parent, takes orders for maize from Pokot on her mobile phone (photo). She then grinds the maize into flour and sells it to her Pokot customers who trek over the hills to her village, Longewan.

The same self-interest drives Pokot women to seek treatment at the Longewan maternity clinic, which offers superior service to their own health center. But Naanyu and Diana, two Samburu teenagers, headed in the opposite direction. They decided to enroll in a Pokot boarding school to "get away from their families" and

study with the Pokot friends they made at a CPI peace camp.

In an effort to deepen the relationship CPI has paired 40 families from both sides under a project called Heifers for Peace, and given each a cow on the understanding that the first calf will be given to their partners. Joseph Lomna, a Pokot herder who has lost four out of his five cows to drought - a personal catastrophe - is awaiting his Samburu calf with excitement.

Asked whether the current drought will push herders to revert to cattle-rustling, Mr Lomna thought not: "We both understand that neither side is responsible." Indeed, in some ways the drought has brought the two communities closer together as CPI friends make their grazing land available to the other side during an emergency.



**The next challenge: CPI hopes to target 2,000 children from the Turkana (above) and Samburu tribes over 4 years**

Encouraged by this success, CPI is now turning to Baragoi, where Turkana and Samburu have faced off for years amidst hostility and suspicion. Of six schools visited by CPI and AP, only one has children from both tribes. There is no market for traders like Josephine.

As a result, conflict can erupt at any moment, and in April rustlers stole 219 animals in a series of massive raids. The frustrated police began seizing cattle from villages in an effort to force the return of the animals, creating further tension between police and community.

CPI feels that Baragoi is ripe for its intervention and hopes to reach 2,000 children over the next four years, leading to a permanent peace for over 10,000 villagers. "It happened between the Pokot and Samburu and it can happen here," said Mr Bukuno.

Peace Fellow Ms Diggs will spend the next two months helping to document CPI's work in the region and launch her own appeal to buy several heifers for peace. AP will also promote CPI's work from Washington.

*Drafted by Iain Guest: [iain@advocacynet.org](mailto:iain@advocacynet.org)*

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