Former Enemies Unite Over Cows in Kenya

*Heifers for Peace* Transforms Pastoralist Conflict

Friends from the Samburu and Pokot tribes meet their new cow

Esther Lenosilale, a Samburu, can remember how the bullets whistled through the family compound when the Samburu and Pokot tribes last
fought over cows. It was so frightening that her children slept with their shoes on in case they were forced to flee for their lives.

The violence seemed a world away last week when Esther met Joyce Leiririo, a Pokot mother, and made plans to raise a cow with her. Esther will keep the cow until it gives birth, but the calf will go to Joyce. In the meantime, the two women expect their friendship to deepen.

Esther and Joyce were among 101 family members from the Pokot and Samburu tribes who took possession of 51 cows at a ceremony last Saturday deep in the hills of Kenya’s Rift Valley.

The cow handover rounded off several years of innovative peace-building in Samburu County by Children Peace Initiative Kenya (CPI), a group with deep roots in the pastoralist communities. The efforts have paid off - there has been no fighting between Pokot and Samburu since 2012.

CPI Kenya purchased the 51 cows with funds raised by Talley Diggs and Colleen Denny, two Peace Fellows from The Advocacy Project (AP). Iain Guest from AP attended the Sunday ceremony.

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CPI Kenya then builds on friendships made by children at the camps and offers their parents a cow if they agree to raise it with a family from the other side.

The project is known as *Heifers for Peace*.

"We're trying to give them an incentive not to return to fighting," said Hilary Bukuno, the founder and director of CPI Kenya. He explained that cows are highly valued by all tribes and reflect a family's standing. A young cow currently sells for about $200.

As peace has taken hold between the Pokot and Samburu, former warriors have turned from cattle rustling to tracking and returning stolen animals.

The two sides are also sharing pasture land and water. Esther and Joyce agreed that Esther will take their cow at first because the Samburu land gets more rain. In other signs of deepening cooperation, the two tribes are sharing government services and trading at the same markets.
CPI Kenya does not claim all of the credit for this transformation, but government officials described *Heifers for Peace* as a "model for others" and the best way to stop cattle rustling at the recent ceremony.

The greatest threat to this innovative program comes from drought, which has forced pastoralists to move into the land of other tribes and decimated herds. Some fear that this could make rustling more appealing.

![Peace Fellows Colleen, seen here, and Talley raised over $15,000 for Heifers for Peace.](image)

Encouraged by their success with the Pokot and Samburu, CPI Kenya hopes to take the model to Baragoi sub-county, where Turkana (top photo) and Samburu have fought for years. Several deaths have been reported from Baragoi this year.

* View the [photos of 2018 Peace Fellow Colleen Denny](#)
* View the [photos of 2017 Peace Fellow Talley Diggs](#)
* Visit the [website of CPI Kenya](#)

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