

HIGH FIVE CLUB

changing lives, £5 at a time

“Cows Save Lives Initiative” - Kenya

It is with great anticipation that this month we are together supporting the inspiring work of Kiaru, a grass-roots community development organisation based in Kenya’s world famous Masai Mara. Kiaru was set up and is run by Ben Longisa, a local Maasai elder that High Five’s Cheryl Mvula works with on her Maasai villages’ responsible tourism initiative in Kenya (see the pro-poor tourism page of www.tribal-voice.co.uk). Kiaru addresses health and sanitation issues in its community, along with trying to change attitudes towards the traditional practice of female circumcision, referred to by some as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). For High Five Club founder members, you will remember that the very first project we supported was a Kiaru health and sanitation project showcasing long drop toilet and chimney construction.

Background

The practice of female circumcision is widespread in Kenya, with 50% of Kenyan women being circumcised. In some areas, including the Maasai Mara, this percentage is as high as 95%, with the majority of those circumcised being young girls aged between 10 and 15 years. In areas where female circumcision is practised there are higher rates of teenage pregnancy and school drop outs, as men regard these girls as mature women, ready for sexual relationships and marriage.



A young circumcised Maasai girl at her marriage ceremony

The argument for female circumcision continuation is that the practice is a traditional cultural rite of passage. To many others it is a violation of human rights that both physically and psychologically damages females and causes reproductive health issues and acute urinary tract infections.

Despite the majority of Kenyans agreeing that female circumcision is no longer a necessity, it is still a cultural practice that some communities are not ready to

abandon. An uncircumcised Maasai girl, for example, fetches a lower bride price and a girl who refuses to be circumcised is hence a threat to the would-be wealth her father expects on her marriage. In Maasai culture this wealth is in the form of cows.

HIGH FIVE CLUB

changing lives, £5 at a time

High Five Club Support:

Kisaru is working hard within its own community targeting young Maasai girls with information about the practice of circumcision, and giving them the confidence to say “no”. Statistics show that armed with



Cheryl at a Kisaru meeting with local women to discuss the “Cows Save Lives” idea

the right information and some formal education an uncircumcised girl can withstand the pressure she is likely to face from family, school mates and young boys. Discussing the merits and demerits of the practice openly at village meetings and in schools has already resulted in success for Kisaru, with several girls and their families denouncing the practice.

Kisaru and the High Five Club are together to launch a ‘Cows Save Lives’ initiative in the Masai Mara within Ben’s community as an extension of

Kisaru’s on-going education and awareness work. The idea is that girls and their families who denounce the

practice, will be rewarded with the gift of a female cow. Cows as many of you will know are a measure of a Maasai’s wealth and for many are their most cherished possessions. The first female cow born to each gifted cow will be returned to Kisaru, for gifting to another girl and her family (all other calves will belong to the girl) who have the courage to denounce circumcision, thereby enabling this pilot initiative to become self-sustaining and extend its reach.

Kisaru will monitor the pilot and evaluate its success in terms of its contribution to winning the battle against female circumcision.

Together we are purchasing 5 heifers to kick-start this innovative initiative, at a cost to us of just £400.

For further information on this initiative contact Dr Cheryl Mvula on Cheryl@highfiveclub.co.uk

