

## Feature Kenya

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In Kenya, nomadic tribes, formerly enemies, now share water and pastures

DW-Desertification Series, Part 2, Long Version  
(Atmo, O-Ton kis. u.a.)

Lead:

Drought and starvation is why Northern Kenya has made international headlines, since the beginning of this year. But scarce resources are nothing new. Over the past few decades, pasture land has shrunk and there are only a few wells in the region. Kenya's North has also faced conflicts over grass and water. For years, the tribes in the region regularly confronted each other with raids, theft and criminal activities based on the motive of revenge. The district Marsabit is crossed by the transcontinental highway that runs from Kairo in the North to Cape Town in the South. Cattle drovers in the district of Marsabit, supported by the German non-governmental aid organisation GTZ, have launched a new peace process that is slowly beginning to benefit the environment. Maja Dreyer went to Northern Kenya and Nina Haase has adapted her report:

Text:

### 1. O-Ton Atmo: Animals

"Let's drive to the hell", our tour guides said. "You'll definitely be able to record the sound of goats there. They make the most noise as they push towards the water."

We're in Korr, a place in the North of Kenya, where there's still water. Korr is nowhere to be found even on the most recent of maps, because it rapidly grew only in the 1990s. But over the past few months, the number of animals in Korr has decreased steadily. 20 goats or so are what the woman, with the typical opulent and colourful necklace, has left. She's droving her animals to the well, where other families have come with their camels. But with few animal numbers, there is enough water for all of them.

### 2. O-Ton Atmo: conversation Kiswaheli

"Well, my cows, out of 70 I still have 11 left - so far. Because that's not it, the drought still goes on!" - "Yes, it goes on." - "They'll end up dying, all of them!" - "But you know the place we passed the other day, it's called El-Gade, oh... We were all horrified. The goats, imagine, it was like this one white spot full of carcasses."

In El-Gade, a further 100 kilometres North of Korr, the carcasses of animals are covering the ground on both sides of the road. As we make our way into town in our white four wheel drive a few men welcome us and tell us their stories...

3. O-Ton young man, Gabra Eng voice over:

"I'm not quite sure, but taking into account how quickly the goats died, there are maybe less than 50 of them left. And we used to have two herds, which means around 1,000 animals."

It's the same wherever we go: drought, animals, and hunger are THE dominating topics of conversations. The North of Kenya is hot and dry, and stock farming is about the only possibility to make use of the Savannah. In theory, each year has two rainy seasons. But it hasn't rained for almost a whole year now. In their struggle to survive, the nomads have to cover longer distances between grassland and water spots.

A few kilometres in front of Turkana lake, on the Western border of the district Marsabit, a cloud of dust on the horizon is signalling the approach of yet another herd. Together with their skinny cattle and goats, the shepherds are on their way to the large lake. Its salty water is the only spring that's left far and wide.

4. O-Ton shepherd boy, Gabra Eng voice over:

"We got underway at about 5 a.m. and we'll get back at 11 p.m. when we've found water and grass."

It's an eight-hour-walk to the water. And still, our companions are visibly cheering up. The young shepherds who are travelling together through the dust under the burning sun belong to two tribes, the Gabra and the Dasaanetch. For decades, these two tribes fought wars against each other, now, they pasture their animals together. And that's thanks to our tour guides, local members of the German non-governmental aid organisation GTZ.

GTZ has been active in Northern Kenya for 15 years, and its members have managed to counteract a dangerous tendency in this region. According to a study undertaken by the United Nations, violent conflicts have arisen in all regions where the environment is threatened and where natural resources like water and wood are becoming scarcer. And everyone in Northern Kenya has a story to tell about scarce resources.

5. O-Ton old man Kisuaheli Eng voice over:

"Dry, yes, it's dry now. Very dry. And much drier than in the past, yes, much drier."

The result of this problem, but at the same time also a cause, are the growing number and size of settlements in the region. In the past, all Nomad tribe members used to travel around with their animals. Now, most of them stay at home in the settlements, where they find schools, medical treatment if necessary and also nutrition aid in times of drought like now.

Nature suffers most from this development. Green fields have been turned into sparse desert through the search for grass for animals and timber for firewood and building. And still, despite all ongoing changes, the economic foundation for the people here has remained the same: they still depend largely on their animals.

6. O-Ton old man Kisuaheli Eng voice over:

"The animals are our wealth. We live off them, they're our money."

The old member of the Dasanetch tribe speaks on behalf of all the peoples in the region. Animals stand for security and pride, that's why in wealthy years the herds have grown massively. And the resulting overgrazing has made the drought problems even worse.

The GTZ came to the district of Marsabit in the early 1990s with the goal to stop desertification. Their aim was to introduce a local development project in the area based on a detailed plan designed by German development aid experts. But then things developed in a different way. Guyo O'Hara has been a member of the team since the very beginning.

7. O-Ton O'Hara Kisuaheli Eng voice over:

"When the GTZ first came here, we started with environmental topics. Resource management, improved livestock husbandry, etc. But when we started co-operation with the communities we noticed one thing: you can talk about nutrition planning and water, but as soon as a conflict breaks out, the plans stop working. So we got together with the elders and asked them what we, the people from the GTZ, can do. Because we didn't have a mandate on security issues or conflict solving. And the elders said: "If you could only bring us together, the people from all the tribes, then we could talk about both topics." And that's how we actually got ourselves into conflict management."

The conflicts are often triggered by incidents where cattle is stolen – often it's enough if somebody simply decides to keep a few goats that have run away from the neighbours. In the worst case this can lead to gruesome acts of revenge, like in the year 1997, where there was an incident between the Dasanetch and the Gabra who live next to one another on the Turkana lake. Philipp Diba is one of the Dasanetch and he recalls the events:

8. O-Ton Diba Kisuaheli Eng voice over:

"It was all about just a few goats, maybe 50 of them, that the Dasanetch wanted back. They gave the Gabra a deadline of one week, and when this had passed, they attacked. And killed. Also women and children. And they took cattle with them, maybe 5,000 of them, cows, donkeys, and goats."

9. O-Ton Racha, Gabra Eng voice over:

"Yes, the Gabra and the Dasanetch, our life in the past - that was like cats and dogs."

... says Yatiani Racha, who belongs to the Gabra, and the man on his left, a Dasanetch, nods. The men sit next to each other peacefully. They have gathered with the young shepherds and some women from the villages, and it's already their fourth peace talks, that we have come to witness.

10. O-Ton / Atmo: Treffen

At the beginning of the meeting the rules are laid down. Other people's opinions are to be respected. If a person talks, the others listen. Lies are undesired.

As a first item on the agenda the shepherds report about positive changes. Both sides have an equal say, and both sides say the same things:

11. O-Ton shepherd Dasanetch Eng voice over:

"We now live in peace, we drink tea together, we visit each other, we slaughter our goats together. We could be sitting here until tonight, and we wouldn't be able to list all the advantages!"

But probably this official meeting wouldn't be taking place if it wasn't for the problems that persist.

12. O-Ton / Atmo: Streit

A few young shepherds have started arguing about some runaway goats. Tension is in the air, but it can't shake peace between Dasanetch and Gabra, says the peace committee.

13. O-Ton N.N. peace committee Kisuaheli Eng voice over:

"Today, they argue about small numbers of animals. One is missing two goats, the other five, or three donkeys, cases like that. We from the peace commission take this into our hands, talk with the shepherds and normally we manage to secure the return of the animals to their rightful owners."

It was a long way until it was possible to hold comparably peaceful meetings like this. And for the GTZ this was a risky move. The organisation traditionally takes care of technical development aid and suddenly they were thrown into a position where they had to bring peace on its way.

So the first peace meeting was also the most sensitive. The land east of the Turkana lake is shared by the people from eleven regions of the Marsabit district, and their elders were invited to the meeting. Guyo O'Hara from the GTZ:

14. O-Ton O'Hara Kisuaheli/ Eng voice over:

„We were all scared because we didn't know what was going to happen. When the groups arrived they were equipped like guardsmen. Every single one was carrying a weapon and there was terrible tension. Even at mealtimes they were nervous. But eventually it all worked out fine.“

The meetings were later also held at many other places. And gave people the opportunity to get to know their neighbours. What happened outside of the formal agenda was often decisive for the success of the meetings. Edward Lentoror recalls an incident between the Rendille and the Gabra:

15. O-Ton Lentoror Kisuaheli/ Eng voice over:

„On the first night a young Rendille shepherds decided to dance and sing on a square in the Gabra town of Maikona. But the Gabras couldn't join in, because they were the enemies, right? So they watched from a distance. Later, after one or two days, they went a bit closer, because the Rendille are really good singers. And

eventually they all got together and sang together. A Rendille song, and then a Gabra song, which they taught each other."

And even in the official talks they got closer and discovered similarities.

17. O-Ton O'Hara Kisuaheli/ Eng voice over:

„They began to understand: „Oh, look, we have the same problem! We are fighting a war just because of one problem!“

A problem that everyone here can immediately point out: water and grass. And so the tribes laid down rules. Anyone looking for grass on a piece of land that is traditionally used by the neighbouring tribe has to register with the local environment committee to have land allocated to them. And owners of stolen or slaughtered animals will receive a certain compensation.

Now that they're living in peace the nomads can also move to remote areas without being afraid of becoming the victims of attacks. They can also travel to water sources together and help each other out with transport and food. And, as Gindole Katelo from Maikona reports, the new laws were soon extended:

18. O-Ton Katelo Kisuaheli/ Eng voice over:

„People used to cut down many trees, palm trees for instance, for make straw mats to sell. But now we have established rules, also for people who want to build a house. If you cut down a tree you need the environment committee's permission. And if someone cuts down a tree without permission they have to pay a fine.“

The results can be quite striking. One example is Korr, the place where we had looked for animals at the well. It is difficult to recognise the place if you've been here before. Instead of the sandy desert that used to be here the settlement is now framed by the bright green colour of the thorn acacia that typically grows in the desert.

But in times of severe drought like now, these first signs of progress in the battle against desertification seem to be but a drop in the ocean. For the time being, the people in Marsabit just like everywhere else in the Horn of Africa, depend on the quick delivery of food aid. In the meantime, they pray and sing for the longed-for rain.

19. O-Ton / Atmo: Regenlied

Marsabit has now become a model for other regions. For a couple of years now, the GTZ has made conflict management a decisive component in all their development aid projects in Kenya.

20. O-Ton Garawaleh Kisuaheli/ Eng voice over:

„There wouldn't be development without peace. Nothing good can be done if we don't have peace.“