

## **Images and Voices of Change: Engaging Local Community in Assessing Impact of Millennium Villages Project in their Lives in Sauri Village, western Kenya.**

Dr. Mary Nyasimi.

mnyasimi@ei.columbia.edu

Dr. Nyasimi is a PostDoctoral Research Fellow at the Earth Institute at Columbia University, New York. Nyasimi attained her PhD from Iowa State University and she is currently engaged in ethnographically documenting the socio-cultural transformation occurring among ethnic groups in the Millennium Villages Projects in Sub-Saharan Africa. Nyasimi's research interests lie in the human-environment interface particularly in exploring the complex rural African livelihood and cultural systems, community development and, participatory research and development.

Joseph Okang'a

jonje67@yahoo.com

Okang'a is a research assistant based at Sauri Millennium Villages Project, Kenya. Okang'a is working towards his High National Diploma in Community Development at CEFORED Institute, Nairobi, Kenya. Okang'a research interests are in rural development with focus on community participation and empowerment.

## **Abstract**

The Earth Institute at Columbia University is implementing a development program in ten countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Referred to as the Millennium village project (MVP), the project aims to use a combination of science-based interventions and community participation to transform the livelihoods of African people and ultimately lift them out of extreme poverty. Involvement of local people is a critical ingredient and key processes of empowering them and ensuring sustainability of MVP. To engage local people in assessing the impact of MVP on their lives, a community led Photovoice project was initiated in the first millennium village, Sauri Kenya. In this project, local research participants used digital cameras and their own narratives to share their emic view of their changing world. The main objective of this photo essay is to share photographs and narratives from ten local research participants composed of different ages, educational levels and gender. The photographs and stories indicate that MVP is positively impacting on local people and it can be used as a monitoring tool for various activities. In addition, the research participants were enthusiastic about Photovoice and they provided a powerful insider visual interpretation of community changes. All the photographs and their stories will be shared in a community Photovoice exhibition later this year.

## Author's Note

One image that has become too familiar to African people is the increasing number of photographs taken of them by development workers, tourists and journalists. However, local people never get to see the photographs because they get published in foreign magazines, books and/or journal papers. When we began working among the local residents of Sauri millennium village, we witnessed the same influx of visitors who were busy photographing local people. During one village meeting that we attended, we were busy taking photos of people and one woman requested us *“Why don't you give me your camera and I will take photographs for you. I will provide you with personal pictures of our people engaged in various activities in Sauri Village. Since you do not live here and you visit occasionally, I can take photographs at all community events during the day and night, photograph children at the school, people in churches, markets and community center. Every week, I can provide you with photos that tell my stories, and you will have a better understanding of the impact of millennium project on Sauri people”*. There and then, the idea of Photovoice project dawned on us. We knew that we had to provide Sauri residents with cameras and note books and empower them to photograph their changing lives as they participate in the millennium project. We shared the idea at the next weekly village meeting and Sauri residents were quite ecstatic about the project. The Sauri people will be holding a Photovoice exhibition once every three months to share their photos and stories with other villages, government officials and other organizations.

Keywords: Photographs, personal narratives, Sauri village, Millennium Project

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### **Background - Images and Voices of Change Project (INVOCP)**

*'See our pictures and read our stories, our lives are changing everyday' Paul Omondi, Sauri Village*

The Millennium Villages Project (MVP) implemented by the Earth Institute at Columbia University is piloting a Photovoice project in Sauri village, western Kenya. The aim of MVP is to work in partnership with local people and national governments in selected African countries to harness packages of integrated solutions to transform the lives of African people and lift them out of the poverty trap (Sachs, 2005). To transform their economies, the Earth Institute is concentrating investment in growing more and diversified foods, improving health, supporting education, extending information and communications technologies, and building possibilities for new livelihoods (Sachs, 2005; MVP Annual Report, 2005). Since its inception in 2004, reports from four village in Sauri (Kenya), Koraro (Ethiopia), Mwandama (Malawi) and Mayange (Rwanda) indicate that about 120,000 people have increased their staple food production by three- to eight-fold, thereby eliminating seasonal hunger cycles of 3-4 months (Sanchez et al., 2007). Primary school enrollment has also increased as school feeding programs were initiated. Malaria infestation rates have also declined as villagers are sleeping under insecticide-treated, long-lasting bednets. To engage the local people in documenting the changes occurring in their lives, a community led documentation project – Photovoice- was initiated and piloted in Sauri village, western Kenya, with intentions to scale up to other villages in Sub-Saharan Africa.

For decades, anthropologists have used photography as a research tool to reveal and understand social and cultural realities that shape people's lives (Worth and Adair, 1972; Ruby, 1975). In recent years, this technique is embracing the voices of local people in a participatory action tool referred to as photo-essay or Photovoice (Hockings, 1995; Banks, 1992; Crawford and Turton, 1992; Wang, 1998). As a participatory tool, Photovoice has been extensively used

in eliciting community involvement and participation, raising critical consciousness, information sharing and as an impetus of social change (Wang et al., 2004; Henley, 1997). This is because Photovoice is a process and tool by which local 'people can identify, visually represent, and enhance their community' (Wang and Burris, 1997). It's based on three concepts; a) images teach, b) images can emphasize and spur collective action and social change and, c) images can influence policy makers (Wang, 1998; Wang et al., 2004; Rhodes et al., 2008; Oliffe and Bottorff, 2007; Carlson et al., 2006). Photovoice is currently being used in various development programs including health, biodiversity and conservation, water and sanitation, education and natural resource management.

Combined with other approaches, Photovoice has the potential for developing long term community involvement in social action to bring about real economic and social change within MVP across sub-Saharan Africa. Engagement of local people in the Photovoice project is expected to spur personal and social growth and put the whole community on the right highway towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The goal of Photovoice project is to involve local people in photographically documenting impacts of MVP activities in their lives, facilitate and critically understand their experiences and increase awareness about the complexity and diversity of impacts and effectiveness of MVP. Indeed, visual images are powerful representation of reality and they can lead to improving the creativity and efficiency of implementing MDGs elsewhere across the developing world. In the spirit of participatory action research, we also plan to disseminate the findings from INVOCP through creation of a photo-album collective that would have an economical and social value to local people.

### **Sauri Millennium Village**

The Photovoice project was initiated in Sauri village located close to the eastern shores of Lake Victoria in Kenya. Sauri village lies about 1450 meters above sea level with average daily temperatures of 24 °C (MVP Annual Report, 2005). The topography is undulating with ephemeral streams and a permanent river and receives an annual rainfall of 1800mm that is bimodally distributed. A total of about 5,521 people live in Sauri village and are mainly engaged in agricultural activities (MVP Annual Report, 2005). There are three and one primary and secondary schools, respectively. This is the first millennium village and local people have had more than three years engaged in various development activities.

Nine local research participants drawn composed of men and women of different ages and educational level were selected for this project. In addition, one woman who was the chairperson of the Sauri Executive Board for two years was purposively selected. Through their own eyes and voices, these ten participants were expected to provide a powerful insider visual interpretation of community changes. A local photojournalist was invited to train the participants on photographic techniques that included photography composition, outdoor and indoor environments, center of interest, subject placement, simplicity, viewpoint and camera angle and balance. The research participants decide on a theme and spend two weeks capturing images and writing personal narratives related to the theme.

For this photo essay, the research participants requested us to share two main themes that they have photographed. These are basic health provision and identification and support of vulnerable groups – the widows, girls and physically disabled people.

## Theme of Health Service Provision



### **Sauri Health Clinic**

The clinic was opened in 2005 to provide basic health care to the people of Sauri. The clinic provides testing, treatment, drugs and health awareness education to the community. At the clinic we also get antiretroviral drugs and condoms. There is a clinical doctor in charge with nurses and community health workers. Before the clinic was built in Sauri, we only obtained minimum medical care at the sub-District hospital. In most cases, we were treated by nurses and a doctor came occasionally. Most of us could not afford to purchase medicine and now we have our own Sauri pharmacy that is well stocked. The clinic does not have enough chairs for people to sit on or for children to sleep. As a community we also need to provide shade for patients from the strong afternoon sun. The clinic is usually filled with patients of all ages each day of the week. Some come as far as 8 kilometers away because they know they will get to see the doctor and get drugs (Photo and story by Paul Omondi, 2008).





**Patients lining at Pharmacy**

Having a well equipped pharmacy at Sauri health clinic is attracting a lot of patients. The pharmacy is well stocked with drugs that we need particularly malaria, diarrhea and antiretroviral drugs. The patient queues at the pharmacy are never long because the nurse dispensing drugs is very efficient. She does not want anyone to wait on the queue for more than 10 minutes because there is no shade (Photo and story by Leonida Owino, 2008).





**Patients arrive very early at the Sauri Health Clinic**

Patients start arriving as early as 6.00AM in the morning to the clinic. Patients come from far away and by 8.00AM when the clinic opens, the clinic is swarming with patients with all kinds of ailments. Both adults and children arrive very early so that they can see the doctor before it gets so hot. Some Community health workers assist in getting new patient's history such as age, married, and number of children. Sauri clinic has become quite popular with neighboring people because there is guarantee of medicine once the clinical doctor has diagnosed you. We can also get free male condoms at the clinic. Are there condoms for women that we can get at the clinic? We want women to take charge of their sexual behavior because some men might refuse to use a condom (Photo and Story by Roseline Adhiambo, 2008).





### **Community Health Worker (CHW) at every Doorstep**

These are the most important people in our village right now. A CHW does not have a scheduled time to help with sickness in Sauri village. All CHW work everyday of the week, very committed to their community work. Anyone in Sauri can visit a CHW at their home anytime there is a medical crisis or emergency. CHW also checks in our house to ensure that every sleeping space has a treated malaria bednet and that the house is clean. If they find that there is no bednet, they threaten to report to the Assistant chief. CHW also helps to keep medical records at Sauri clinic, helping in taking the weight and height of patients. this month is the busiest period at the clinic because it is malaria season and most of the CHW come to help because people from neighboring villages are coming for treatment at the clinic. CHW also advises pre and post-natal mothers and teach the whole community on importance of sanitation. There are male and women CHW of different ages so that every person in the community can easily approach a CHW of their age and discuss private issues affecting them. CHW also keep minimum records and information they discuss with Sauri people in notebooks and report back to the MVP health team (Photo and story by Paul Omondi, 2008).





**We are NOT Afraid of AIDs Anymore**

This woman has AIDs but she is not afraid of letting everyone know that she has the disease. This is because people in Sauri are not afraid of AIDs anymore. Anyone with AIDs now has a future, including children with mothers who have AIDs. We have ARVs (Antiretrovirals) right at our door and it is saving a lot of lives in Sauri. People are not ashamed to talk about AIDs, or tell our children how to safeguard themselves against AIDs. We now know that AIDs is not a curse. Community Health workers are doing excellent work sensitizing Sauri people about AIDs and everyone is openly talk about sexual behaviors and how we can change. Through intensive AIDs programs in our village, MVP team has enabled us to readily accept people with AIDs, help them when they require help and even collect medicine for them from the clinic. We attend nutritional session organized by MVP team because all of us have someone who has AIDs and hence we need to know the right foods to cook for them. More and more people are also readily enrolling at the clinic to get ARVS. I encourage women who has AIDs and have children that they ensure they do not transmit the virus to their children (Photo and story by Monica Okech, 2008).



**Responding to Medical Emergencies Faster - the Community Ambulance**

Before we started working with MVP, we used to transport the sick to Yala Sub-District hospital using bicycles. Even now villages that are not included within the project target area still using bicycles to transport the sick. We now have a community clinic ambulance that in case of medical complications, it transports the patient to the district hospital, particularly for women who are delivering a baby and require caesarian operation. Most women especially young teenage girls cannot die during childbirth. The community ambulance is also used to carry patients who cannot walk to the hospital. It is on standby the whole day and night in case there is an emergency. Unfortunately, there is no nurse or medical officer accompanying the ambulance when its carrying a patient (Photo and story by Shadrack Rading, 2008).





#### **A father taking a Son to Sauri Health Clinic**

Before MVP built the Sauri health clinic, men hardly carried their sick children to the sub-district hospital. This was a job mainly left to mother of the child. Since MVP initiated its activities, more men are engaging in activities they considered 'women's job' such as carrying their own sick children to the hospital. Young and middle aged men in Sauri village are realizing the importance of helping their wives in household duties, particularly taking care of children. Since all young girls are attending school and not available to care for the child, the men have to take up that responsibility. As a young man myself, I know its our responsibility to change because the rest of Kenya is pushing ahead with development while in Sauri we will languish behind. Through MVP I have had opportunity to travel to other places in Nyanza among the Kipsigis people in Kericho and saw men engaged in farming activities more intensely than women, especially in raising vegetables for the market in Nairobi. I was encouraged and decided to assist my wife in establishing a vegetable garden so that we sell vegetables at Kisumu market , which is 35 kms away from Sauri village (Photo and story by Aggrey Ranyondo, 2008).





**Sauri Theatre Group Disseminating MVP Information**

A group of young men and women felt the need to form a theatre group to share information about MVP activities to the rest of Sauri community. This group has become important to us because they get information in English and then translate it into Luo and use drama, short plays, poems and games to share it with the community. I am a member of this group and we target adults and school children. We perform our shows to audiences at the primary and secondary schools, health clinic, churches, village meetings and at funerals. Our topics range from prevention of AIDs, sanitation, stop of early marriages of teenage girls, protecting the environment, improving soil fertility, use of latrines and stop culture of beating women (Photo and story by Samuel Ougo, 2008).



## Theme B: Targeting of Vulnerable People in Sauri Millennium Village



### **A Widow in Sauri is Triple Disadvantaged**

For a long time, widows suffered a great deal in Sauri village. They were triple disadvantaged, never seen nor heard. First, they are women; second, they are widows; and third, have refused wife inheritance. Now with MVP widow can be seen and they are readily getting help. However, more work needs to be done to assist widows escape poverty. I am requesting MVP to include a 9th MDG which is: to provide quality shelter particularly to widows. This is because widows are shunned by the community and most men do not want to help them (Photo and story by Monica Okech, 2008).





**A New Home for a Widow**

One of our cultures is wife inheritance after the death of a woman's husband. The widow has to be inherited before the dead husband is buried. However, with increasing cases of AIDs infection, many widows are refusing to be inherited. Since this widows do not have a man to build a house for them or even repair the old one, their houses collapse. When MVP initiated community activities, we realized that widows do need help in rebuilding their houses. So, we requested support from MVP and this is one of the homes that Sauri community with help from MVP built for widows. The houses have iron sheet roofs and they have a gutter to direct rain water into a huge storage tank. This widow does not need to go to the protected springs to collect any water. She can use the spare time to do other jobs in the house or just rest or meet her friends. Not all widows have benefited from this generous gift but we are requesting our local leaders particularly our chief and assistant chief and Member of Parliament to assist these widows. There is constituency funds that can be used to rebuild houses for widows and we want our local Member of Parliament to allocate some funds. We cannot depend on MVP all the time because they will be here for a short time and we need to continue the work we begun together (Photo and story by Shadrack Rading, 2008).





**My Close Friends Provide a Safe Haven and Comfort**

These are my friends who support me. Two of these women are widows who really need our support especially social and emotional morale support. We depend on each other to borrow household foods such as salt, sugar, maize flour and soap and also to provide a safe place when our husbands beat us. Our doors are open to each other day and night. We have formed a silent women group that includes both widows and women with husbands because we need each other. These women have assisted me getting fertilizer and maize seed on loan. We attend village meetings together at Sauri centre where we get information from the Assistant chief or MVP team (Photo and story by Pascalina Odando, 2008).





#### **Young girls Engage in Household Work and Attend School**

The problem of being a girl in Sauri is that we are expected to attend school some days and stay at home to help our mothers. This girl is my friend and classmate at Sauri Primary school but she did not come to school today (a Thursday). I came to check on her thinking that she might be sick. Her mother informed me that she had gone to collect water from the spring. I found her returning home with a pail and jerrican of water on her head and hand. Despite having free primary school and the school meals, some parents do not send their daughters to school everyday and instead involve them in water and firewood collection and other activities around the home. All parents should enroll girls and ensure that the girls attend school everyday (Name withheld to protect identity of photographer).





**Physically Disabled People are Actively Engaging in Community Activities**

Physically disabled people in Sauri have been neglected by the community for a long time. I can remember a long time ago that physically disabled people were supported by the community and provided with food and clothing. However, in recent years disabled people became ignored and lost within Sauri. Now MVP has raised our awareness of these people. We help them plant their crops and harvest as well. We have created a special seat for them in the Sauri Executive Committee so that they have a representative who can voice their concerns (Photo and story by Jackline Odindo, 2008).



**A Widow consumed by Jiggers (*Tunga Penetrans*)**

This woman's husband died and her house collapsed. With the help of community members particularly the former Sauri Executive Chairlady, Monica Okech and MVP helped her build a new one but forgot about cementing the floors. With poor hygiene and sanitation, jiggers invaded her house and attacked her feet and fingers. She does her swept her house regularly or even keep it clean, so jiggers decided to make a home there. The community health workers could like to target her and assist her, but everyone in Sauri village thinks her late husband is cursing her. So many people are keeping away from her. Even me I was scared of taking the picture but I want the MVP team to see what is happening to this woman and they can plan on how to assist her with medicine. She cannot walk to the clinic because her feet are very painful (Photo and story by Pamela Adhiambo, 2008).





**Offering Hope and a Home to Orphaned Children of Sauri Village**

In the past 12 years, a lot of people have died in Sauri village leaving behind orphans. Traditionally some of the orphans could be taken care of and supported by immediate family members such as uncles and aunts. However, since AIDs hit our village, you find that this people have also died or have limited resources (land and cash) to take in more mouths to feed. With wife inheritance practice and other rituals that we perform, many adults in Sauri contracted AIDs and died. So, orphans were left to fend for themselves. Some were too young and ended up as street children in Kisumu, Kakamega and Siaya towns. They did not attend school at all and never had a responsible adult to guide them through life. Since MVP started and we recognized the need to support orphans, we started placing them under care of an adult not necessarily an immediate family member, but someone willing and ready to provide a home and guide them. Targeting of orphaned children in Sauri has offered a beacon of hope and opportunities for orphans to attend Bar Sauri Primary school where they get a nutritious school meal at lunch. Once someone agrees to take care of orphans we ensure that they get medicine from Sauri clinic, nutritious food, second hand clothes and shoes (Photo and story by Roseline Adhiambo, 2008).

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