



**FREE THE CHILDREN**

children helping children through education



# Ngosuani

## COMMUNITY PROFILE

Ngosuani is a rural Kenyan village situated in Lemek, a sub-location within Ololunga Division of Narok South District. Ngosuani has a population of 1881, including more than 500 school-going children. The area is largely populated by the Maasai, a vibrant group of semi-nomadic pastoralists. The Maasai people, native to Kenya and northern Tanzania speak the Maa language.

There are several challenges faced by the community members including severe illness, malnutrition, early marriage, alcoholism, high unemployment rates amongst post-adolescent youth, and domestic violence. The village has faced recurring drought, with famine hitting the villagers in 2000, and 2009

Cattle farmers by tradition, incomes of people in the Ngosuani community can be extremely vulnerable to drought. As a result, a few community members are beginning to break into industries like tourism but these require extended education. As the community expands and young people move into other industries, access to a quality education becomes increasingly important.

## Education

With literacy rates at 10 per cent for men and two per cent for women, improving the state of education will be the key to the future success and the decrease of poverty for the community of Ngosuani. Unfortunately, the current education system is overwhelmed and cannot meet the needs of the children here. Presently, four local teachers are responsible for educating more than 400 children in a building with little to no resources. The school is so overwhelmed that an additional 110 children are forced to leave Ngosuani and travel more than eight kilometres to attend school in another village.

Having been afflicted by drought, famine, illness, and with little extra income for school fees; the people of Ngosuani struggle to send their children to school. For boys, school fees and poverty are two of the major barriers keeping them from attending classes. For girls, early marriage and pregnancy, dowry payments as well as requirements in the home make it difficult to access an education and even more difficult to attend regularly. Early pregnancy is particularly prevalent in this community; in fact, the average age of women having children is fifteen.

## Water and Sanitation

None of the households in the community of Ngosuani have access to clean water or adequate sanitation facilities; resulting in ill health and the significant spread of disease. Water borne illnesses like typhoid and cattle borne illnesses like brucellosis are very common, particularly in children. Illness is one of the key reasons children are not able to attend school regularly. These life threatening conditions can be prevented with access to clean water, sanitation facilities and education on sanitary food preparation techniques.

With the only water source being more than 12 km away from the village, women and girls must travel six to eight hours each day to collect water. Even upon arrival they must often wait a very long time in queue as this water source is used by many people. This daily journey makes it difficult for women to care for their children during the day, including ensuring that they attend school. It also makes it extremely difficult to engage in income-generating activities and for girls to attend school. The constant need for water contributes to the lower attendance rate and high dropout rate of girls in the school in Ngosuani.

Currently the sanitation facilities in Ngosuani are equally inadequate with only two latrines for more than 410 students. This is particularly important for girls in the community, who often have to leave school as they get older due to the lack of sanitation facilities.

## Health Care

Access to health care in the Ngosuani community is limited at best. Generally using herbal medicines to cure illness, community members often only access clinical care when the situation becomes serious. As there is no formal health facility in the community, accessing this care means leaving the village and draining critical family resources.

There is currently one trained health care worker in the community of Ngosuani. With a population of more than 1800 people, that worker is overwhelmed combating illnesses like typhoid, malaria, pneumonia and brucellosis. One of the most common illnesses treated in the community is malnutrition.

Women giving birth in this community are extremely vulnerable, with 15 per cent dying in child birth. In Ngosuani, poor access to pregnancy and maternal information and access to facilities during birth, particularly when complications occur, significantly decrease the chances of a woman surviving childbirth. Unfortunately even if mother and child survive birth, a child in Ngosuani has a 10 per cent chance of dying before his first birthday and five per cent before the age of five.

## Alternative Income

In Ngosuani, 95 per cent of the population survive on less than two dollars per day. Men are the main source of income for a family and generally earn approximately 20 USD each month. This Maasai community has traditionally engaged in cattle farming. This industry is particularly vulnerable in times of drought as the fields the cattle feed on become dry and farmers are forced to either sell their cattle or move their stock far distances to find greener pastures. This absence has a particularly difficult effect on the families left behind. Livestock disease has also plagued this community, depleting stock numbers and often translating to illness in the community as well.

A community without an agricultural tradition, the people of Ngosuani purchase their food and goods from local markets. Often without steady sources of income from their cattle, 85 per cent of the population has gone into some sort of debt purchasing basic necessities and paying fees for things like school or health care.

Women in this community have a rich tradition of beading but the necessities of raising children and the arduous water collecting process have made it difficult for them to use these skills to bring additional income into their homes.