



WATER FOR KAJIADO: EMPOWERING INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES IN KENYA

IN JANUARY 2023, MODEL, ACTRESS, AND PHILANTHROPIST SELITA EBANKS PARTNERED WITH KBFUS TO RAISE FUNDS FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF FOUR NEW WATER WELLS IN THE SOUTH RIFT OF KENYA. THOSE WELLS WILL HELP ALLEVIATE THE DIRE WATER SHORTAGES AFFECTING RURAL, INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES, WHICH HAVE STRUGGLED AMID THE ONGOING DROUGHT IN EAST AFRICA - THE WORST IN AT LEAST 40 YEARS.

With the severe and worsening drought in East Africa expected to continue, sustainable solutions to extreme weather conditions have become essential to survival in a vulnerable region where millions already experience mass displacement, food insecurity, and malnutrition—in addition to a host of other consequences. The water crisis in particular has had ripple effects, such as sometimes fatal encounters between wildlife and humans, and the

need to dig deeper, more expensive wells to ensure access to clean water, according to a report released by Oxfam in August 2023.

Earlier this year, Selita Ebanks launched Project 40-4-40: Water for Kajiado, in partnership with the King Baudouin Foundation United States (KBFUS) and Ewang'an Nadede Advocacy Initiative (ENAI Africa), a local community-



based organization. The aim was to raise \$40,000 to provide access to clean water and essential services to five rural villages located in Kajiado county, in what is known as the Maasai community of the south rift of Kenya.

PROJECT 40-4-40

Ahead of her 40th birthday in February of this year, Ebanks was researching safari tours in Kenya, a signature tourist attraction for the East African country, when she first learned about the ongoing drought. “I could not imagine visiting a country where I knew people were without something as essential as water,” says Ebanks. “I wanted to find out how I could contribute in an impactful yet sustainable way.”

In a short video posted on social media at the start of the year, the Cayman Islands-born Ebanks announced a fundraising campaign with KBFUS that focused on the urgent need for water:

“The community ENAI Africa serves is suffering because the drought has undermined already limited access to

water for the people and their livestock. This community has only one drilled water well that requires a two- to five-mile walk each day to collect water.”

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RUTH MAPARA

The goal of improving access to water was proposed after a site visit by Masana wa Afrika (which translates to “the warmth of the sun embraces Africa” in the Xitsonga language), a new foundation that spun out of The ELMA Foundation’s Community Grants Program (ECGP), which has been active since 2012 and provides general support to community-based organizations in Africa. Masana aims to support proximate organizations like ENAI that play an important role in providing direct and accessible services to underserved and vulnerable communities.

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

Long term, sustainable solutions reflect the committed, holistic approach of ENAI Africa, which was founded in 2010 by Dr. Lanoi Parmuat, a community leader with Maasai indigenous roots. “ENAI Africa’s objective is to enable indigenous communities in Kenya and other areas in Africa to achieve gender equality, and improve education, food security, access to quality healthcare, and social economic empowerment,” explains Ebanks.

More importantly, ENAI Africa is one of the very few organizations doing this work within a remote geographic radius, helping to build capacity and empower rural villages in the south rift of Kenya, with a particular emphasis on young girls and women. Ruth Mapara, Director of Masana wa Africa adds, “ENAI has made great strides in ensuring that its services reach the most vulnerable members of the community. Locally led organizations such as ENAI often do this important work in resource constrained environments, and it is crucial to drive more resources to them so they can sustain their impact.”

Dr. Parmuat and Ebanks first met virtually, after the latter had reached out to a contact at ELMA Philanthropies, an affiliate of ECGP that supports early childhood development and maternal health initiatives around the world. “It was her reverent tone that first told me I wanted to assist her with her work,” says Ebanks. “I have worked with many organizations over the years and it’s a unique sensation you feel when meeting someone whose life work is to help other people.”

“A lot has been achieved,” says Dr. Parmuat, while reflecting on the work she has led these past twelve years. She cites a few examples, including policy advocacy on sexual reproductive health, as well as specific initiatives

addressing gender-based violence and female genital mutilation, a harmful and still prevalent traditional practice that subsequently can lead to early forced marriages, further compromising the futures of young women.

“AS AN ADVOCATE FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN’S RIGHTS, I WAS TOUCHED BY ENAI AFRICA’S COMMITMENT TO EMPOWERING WOMEN AND PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY.”

SELITA EBANKS

ENAI Africa has also recruited and trained over 1,000 community health promoters in Kajiado, equipping them with digital technology to improve community health units for universal coverage at the household level, adds Dr. Parmuat.



NEXT STEPS

Addressing the water crisis is a key step toward limiting the consequences of a larger humanitarian crisis that has taken hold in the region due to extreme weather, which has only gotten worse in the past 20 years as a result of climate change. The drought is an unfortunate example of this new reality, according to a scientific report released in April 2023 by World Weather Attribution.

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DR. LANOI PARMUAT

Moreover, the lack of access to clean water poses a threat to progress in other aspects of ENAI Africa’s work, such as the prevention of water borne diseases or education.

“The time spent moving from one point to another in search of water should be minimized so that girls can attend school,” says Dr. Parmuat. As livestock perish and malnutrition rates increase as a result of the drought, many children have been forced to prioritize helping their families. “The water will also boost other alternative sources of livelihoods,” adds Dr. Parmuat. “For instance, food forests, pasture planting, the planting of indigenous trees, as well as fruit trees in school gardens.”

Beyond expanding access to potable water, Dr. Parmuat hopes to focus on food security, nutrition for school children, and the Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) program, a partnership between Kenya and USAID to “improve water supply and sanitation access, hygiene promotion, management, and environmental sustainability in rural areas.”

As Ebanks’ 40-4-40 campaign approaches its goal, a needs assessment was already carried out. Additional contributions are needed now, so that construction can begin. Meanwhile, as more than 3,500 individuals continue to rely on the same, singular source of water, Dr. Parmuat’s passion continues to inspire others to join her cause.

“As an advocate for women and children’s rights, I was touched by ENAI Africa’s commitment to empowering women and promoting gender equality in the south rift of Kenya,” concludes Ebanks. “I hope to continue to build a relationship with Dr. Parmuat and learn more about other ways in which I can contribute to her efforts, with the hope of one day visiting her in Kenya.”

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