

# REVIVING DUKANA

Resilience and Empowerment in the Heart of Kenyan Desert



A DUKANA MULTI-PURPOSE CASH ASSISTANCE (MPCA)  
PLUS PROTECTION & SAFEGUARDING PROJECT ARTICLE

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## RESILIENCE AND EMPOWERMENT IN THE HEART OF KENYAN DESERT

Kenya's arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs) are grappling with significant climatic shifts characterized by a stark increase in the frequency and severity of droughts and heavy rains. These changes have severely affected agriculture and livestock, which are the lifelines for local livelihoods. Between 2021, 2022 and part of 2023, prolonged dry spells led to severe food shortages, impacting over 2 million people in the ASAL regions. Meanwhile, approximately 4.2 million Kenyans faced worsening conditions of acute food insecurity due to ongoing droughts. Water scarcity and a lack of climate-smart agricultural knowledge further exacerbate the vulnerability of these areas.

Marsabit County, in northern Kenya is part of this sprawling region that sustains 16 million people and 70% of Kenya's livestock, has long relied on pastoralism. This age-old practice of herding animals across drylands has been the backbone of local communities for over 10,000 years. However, the area has faced increasingly severe and recurrent droughts over the past two decades, profoundly impacting these communities.

The repercussions of these droughts extended beyond livestock loss. Local communities were economically drained, grappling with acute water and food shortages. In March 2023, the situation worsened when heavy rains triggered flash floods, displacing over 800 households and rendering many roads impassable. These floods compounded the hardships the vulnerable livestock populations faced, resulting in further losses. The combined effects of drought and floods have placed an immense strain on Marsabit's traditional way of life, challenging the resilience and survival of these pastoral communities.

“Our livestock numbers are dwindling as we lose our main livelihood to drought, pushing our resilience to its limits,” Abudho Elema Mamo, a community member from Dukana, explained.



Marsabit County has experienced severe effects of climate change in recent years, with consequences that extend far beyond the loss of livestock.

# Resilience and Empowerment in the Heart of Kenyan Desert

Dukana, lying 293 kilometres from Marsabit town, contends with an unforgiving environment where sparse vegetation barely survives in the challenging soil conditions. The failure of five consecutive rainy seasons stripped the land bare, exacerbating the hardships for its inhabitants. Gumato Huka, from the local Step to Step Women group, highlights the added social burdens.

"Girls are dropping out of school at higher rates due to increased domestic responsibilities and the pressures of child marriages, often heightened during drought-induced emergencies," says James Forole, the Head Teacher at Dukana Primary School. He adds that "During droughts, the lack of basic sanitary products for girls during menstruation compromises their dignity and education."

In response, Plan International Kenya, alongside Strategies for Northern Development (SND), launched an initiative named "Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance Plus Protection and Safeguarding," continuing the efforts from the previous Marsabit Drought Emergency Response Project.

This six-month intervention by Plan International and SND aimed to mitigate these severe conditions by providing essential support and resources to vulnerable girls and young women in Dukana, ensuring their dignity, health, and a chance for a brighter future are safeguarded despite the harsh realities of their environment.



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# UPLIFTED VOICES

Step-By-Step Women's Group Empowered to action.



The Step-By-Step Women Group, comprised of resilient young mothers marginalized for having children outside of marriage, has indeed ushered in a new era. These women, long stigmatized and ostracized by their community, have faced considerable obstacles, ranging from minimal community involvement and restricted access to social benefits, to bearing the brunt of pervasive negative stereotypes. Displaced from their homes, many found themselves in urban areas grappling with a severe scarcity of shelter, clothing, and job opportunities, which pushed some towards illicit activities as a desperate means of subsistence.

Established in 2016 and officially registered in 2019, the Step-By-Step Women Group was formed as a beacon of hope—an organized voice to articulate their concerns and actively seek the support they desperately needed. Despite initial hurdles in securing humanitarian aid and being consistently sidelined during critical stakeholder discussions, the group's tenacity gradually yielded results. Each member began contributing Kes. 70 monthly to a collective fund, creating a supportive "merry-go-round" system that provided assistance to one member at a time.

In response to the acute needs of these determined women, a multi-faceted cash assistance program was tailored specifically for the 64 group members during its second phase, enabling each woman to contribute Kes. 1,000 monthly. This initiative culminated in amassing Kes. 128,000 over two months, significantly enhancing the group's savings and establishing a robust foundation for future initiatives and sustained fiscal practices.

"The savings and financial management training was a turning point for us. It not only taught us how to manage our money but also how to envision and plan for our future. We are now equipped not just to survive but to thrive and invest," expressed Talaso, a group member.



*The training on savings and financial management marked a turning point for Step-By-Step Women Group. It taught them not only how to manage their money but also how to envision and plan for their future.*

## Step-By-Step Women's Group Empowered to action.

Complementing this financial support, the project introduced vital training in business and economic empowerment to help the women navigate the vicissitudes of climate change and bolster their livelihoods. This training, centered around Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLA) principles, provided them with essential financial management skills and cultivated a profound sense of independence and self-reliance. Empowered with new knowledge, the group inaugurated a profitable shoats slaughtering and butchery venture in September 2023, initially generating a profit of Kes.16,000.

"We felt invisible, struggling on the margins of society without a voice. Today, we stand as proud business owners and active community contributors, economically and socially. This transformation has been life-changing for me and all our group members," shared Adho Yattani, the group's chairlady.

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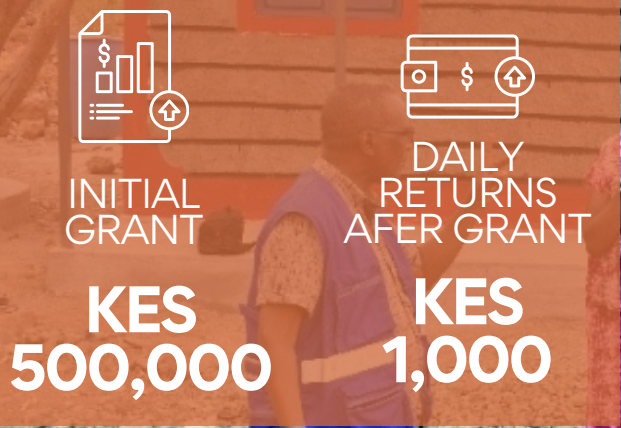


## Step-By-Step Women's Group Empowered to action.



The initiative granted the Step-By-Step women group a Kes. 500,000 award to enhance their livestock trade and expand their butchery operations.

Encouraged by their burgeoning success, the initiative awarded the group a Kes. 500,000 grant to further develop their livestock trade and butchery operations. In the third phase of this intervention, aimed at fortifying community resilience, a state-of-the-art livestock product value addition facility was established, complete with solar-powered deep freezers, a water tank, and a pit latrine to uphold stringent hygiene standards. The group actively participated by contributing local building materials for the construction, thereby reinforcing their ownership and connection to the project. This new facility dramatically boosted their net daily returns from Kes. 500 to Kes. 1,000, marking a significant milestone in their journey toward economic empowerment and communal uplifting.



The roof structure on the right shows the original iron-framed butchery, now juxtaposed against the newly constructed facility for value-added livestock products on the right.

"Seeing our butchery business flourish has been incredibly empowering. I never imagined we could achieve such success. This project has provided us with more than just income, it has bestowed upon us respect and a voice within our community," reflected Dalu Duba, a grateful participant of the group.

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Dukana Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance (MPCA) Plus Protection & Safeguarding Project was implemented in partnership with PLAN International Kenya.