



Maasai Mara COVID-19 Emergency Relief

The Maasai people in Kenya — already a vulnerable and marginalized population — have been hit especially hard by COVID-19. With the closing of livestock markets and the complete collapse of safari tourism (exacerbated by months of historic flooding), they have lost their only means of income. Families here are suffering from an acute collapse of food security.

On top of this, the reality of the pandemic is not widely understood here, increasing the risk of exposure to this community and to populations beyond. Our goal is to provide the basic needs of food, water, soaps, and other provisions while families stay safe at home.

An additional concern is the viability of the wildlife, in this the most wildlife-rich region of Kenya. With no other choices, desperate families may turn to hunting. Unless we come together and help, this crisis is likely to have devastating long-term ramifications impacting development, culture, conservation, and the survival and well-being of thousands of people.

In early May, OliveSeed and the Mara Discovery Community & Empowerment Centre together successfully delivered emergency food and health supplies to 314 Maasai families in critical need in the Mara, focusing on rural areas around Aitong and Mara North Conservancy. No other organizations have been helping in this area.

This project extends this well-tuned initiative to over 300 more families in extreme need. We are also expanding the program to include sanitary towels for girls, deliver school materials for students at home, and provide educational outreach on safe protocols through radio programming broadcast throughout the region.

The Mara Discovery Centre, in the village of Aitong, has been a trusted locally run resource since 2009 and is a registered community association. All work is done by Maasai volunteers, managed by Amos Kipeen. OliveSeed is a 501c3 and the US partner of Mara Discovery.

21 May 2020

Mara COVID Response: Summer 2020

Amos Kipeen
Founder & Director, Mara Discovery Centre
Director, OliveSeed Kenya

EFFECTS OF CORONA VIRUS TO MAASAI MARA COMMUNITIES

- **Food Scarcity & Hunger**
The restriction on movement, the closure of markets, and the collapse of the tourism economy has made it extremely difficult for people to access food and other basic commodities, thus bringing widespread hunger.
- **Unemployment**
Cases of unemployment and loss of income are on rise. Hundreds of youths lost jobs that may escalate crime and drug abuse, and this may result in depression among young people.
- **Early Marriages & Gender-Based Violence**
Cases of early marriages are suspected to be on the rise because of the economic hardship posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which may be going unreported. This may result from difficulties in accessing food and money for basic sanitary materials for girls and female heads of household.

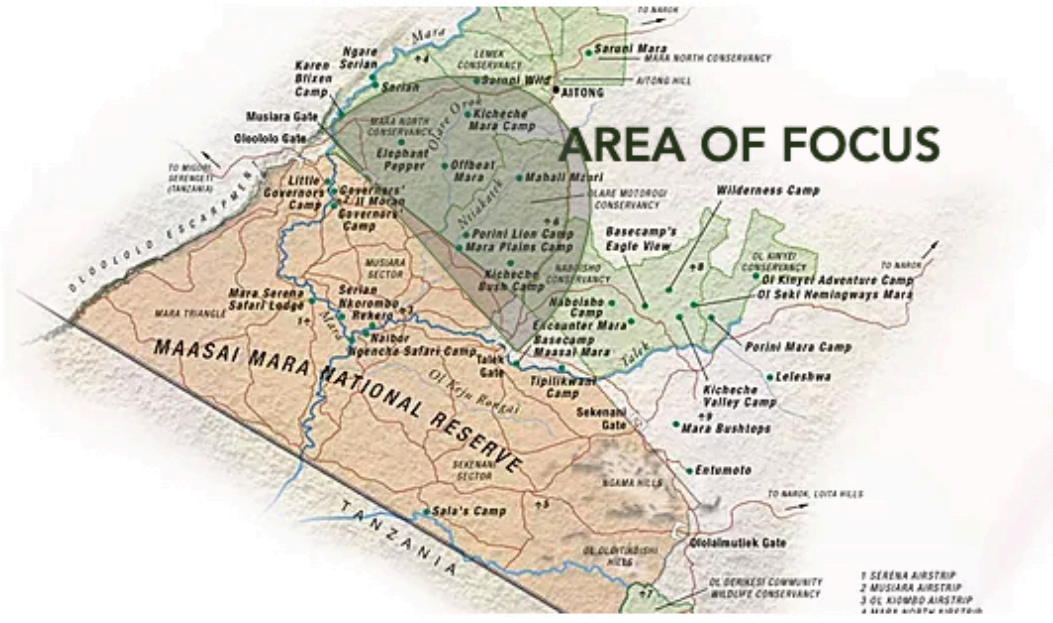
Gender-based violence is on the rise because of the restriction of livelihoods, creating hardship in the provision of basic needs. This results in quarrels and violence in families, which falls hardest on the females.

EMERGING & TRENDING GAPS IN RESPONSES

- The community seems to be forgetting the measures being put in place in controlling the spread of COVID-19 such as social distancing, handshaking, and hand washing. These need to be scaled up if this community and populations beyond are to be safe.
- The collapse of food supplies if not addressed in the end may cause conflict among the community and the service providers since people may look to it as being neglected by the concerned authorities. It may also cause families to hunt the wildlife.
- The community needs to be supported with basic sanitary materials since most cannot afford to have these, with scarce money now directed to food for basic survival.

PROJECT

	Activity	Budget (USD)
<p><i>Purchase & deliver food provisions to the most needy & vulnerable families</i></p> <p><i>Address extreme disadvantage & inclusivity</i></p> <p><i>Amplify public awareness on basic human rights</i></p>	<p>Door-to-door distribution of food provisions including maize flour, red beans, vegetables & cooking oil Provisions for 2+ weeks</p> <p>Delivery to include people living with disabilities in rural locations & other identified special hardship cases These are hidden families that are suffering tremendously, many in hard-to-reach locations</p> <p>Target: 300+ families in greatest need</p>	9000
<i>Transportation</i>	Truck rentals & fuel	500
<i>Provide protective gear & sanitation</i>	Purchase & distribute 1000 face masks & hand soaps with the food deliveries & in village centers	1000
<i>Increase Covid-19 awareness to contain the virus</i>	Run public health education campaigns throughout the region by radio programming & direct outreach in villages, in partnership with staff from Enturoto Health Clinic in Aitong	1500
<i>Protect girls from abuse because of lack of sanitary towels</i>	Provide & deliver sanitary supplies & added food to adolescent girls in poor families	1000
<p><i>Continue access to learning materials & ensure children from poor families retain knowledge</i></p> <p><i>School is ongoing, even though students are home</i></p>	<p>Prepare & deliver reading & learning materials & added food to school children at home in poor families, in partnership with local teachers</p> <p>Target: 250 homes with school children</p>	1000
TOTAL		14,000



Letter of Appeal from Amos Kipeen

AITONG, KENYA

APRIL 2020

For more background, the following is the original letter from Amos Kipeen before we began our first emergency relief in April.

I am writing on behalf of Mara Community due to the impact of the current pandemic COVID19 on Mara residents and the immediate communities. The Coronavirus pandemic is the defining global health crisis of our time.

As people across the world struggle to adapt their way of life to the unfolding COVID-19, the Maasai people of East Africa, particularly the communities living around the Maasai Mara game reserve and its environs, are already having to change ancient customs to minimize the impact of the disease.

There are over a million Maasai people in Kenya, and this great people risk getting largely impacted by the economic downfall caused by this pandemic.

As a pastoral community that is dependent on livestock, the government order to close the vibrant livestock and groceries' markets has taken our only means to buy food, as the community has to sell their animals to buy food. While the pastoral traditional production system has already been brought to a halt, the nutritional status of the local Maasai communities is often sustained through supplementary supply of vegetables and starch procured from the market.

Further, being close to Maasai Mara, the community was largely dependent on tourism. The government order to close its border has deprived the community of a major source of revenue as many camps have closed. Hence many of the community members have been rendered jobless or others sent on compulsory unpaid leave. Due to high illiteracy in the community, the impact of this pandemic is not fully understood, increasing the risk of contracting the disease. Hence the need for a rapid response.

We continue with educating the community on the measures being taken to limit the spread of the disease through taking various drastic measures like immediate and indefinite dissolutions of cultural rites of passage such as the building of ceremonial structures (Manyattas), and of warrior's graduation and burial rites. The various rites of passage that are critical in identity formation and sustenance of cultural heritage have been disrupted prematurely and indefinitely. It remains to be seen how the community will respond and redefine such rites of passage post COVID-19.

While there are no confirmed COVID-19 positive cases yet within our Mara communities and even the larger Narok County [*as of early April*], it's dreadful to imagine the likely repercussions of such a scenario. Access to health services, clean water, let alone soap, sanitizers, and masks is constrained to say the least even under ordinary conditions.

Even before COVID-19 hit, 113 million people on the planet were already struggling with severe acute food insecurity due to pre-existing shocks or crises. This means they were already on the extreme end of the hunger spectrum-weak, and less well-equipped to fend off the virus. The vast majority live in rural areas, and in this particular case the Maasai community, and depends on agricultural production, seasonal jobs in tourism, or pastoralism. If they become ill or constrained by restrictions on movement or activity, they will be prevented from caring for their animals, accessing markets to sell their animals, and buying food and supplies.

These people have very little to fall back on, materially speaking. They could find themselves forced to abandon their livelihoods. By that I mean they might have to sell off their animals. Once a rural farming family does that, getting to be self-reliant again becomes extremely difficult. Some might even have no other choice than to leave their farms and the little animals that remain in search of assistance. This in return will present a very dreadful impact on our wildlife as most of the people will have no option but to consume what is available like poaching activities!

As the crisis impacts on every aspect of Kenya's society today, the effects will continue to be felt long after the crisis is over. Its impact on the socioeconomic activities in the country will expose already vulnerable and marginalized communities to more suffering. The economic fallout in the country is likely to be severe and long-lasting, consequently undermining the country's prospects of achieving its long-term development aspirations, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

- Amos Kipeen