Tana River Life Foundation

Educating towards Peace & Sustainable Development in the Tana Delta

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**Introduction**

The Tana Delta, which forms part of Tana River County in Kenya, is a fertile basin rich in natural resources and wildlife.

Spanning an area of 16,013 km$^2$, and with a population of slightly over 100,000, it covers the extensive delta where the river Tana fans out into the Indian Ocean, to the plains of the Tsavo National Park on the east, and the semi-arid hinterland towards the north in the direction of North-Eastern Kenya and Somalia.

The entire delta is served by only two tarmac roads, both of which are poorly maintained.
People of the Tana Delta
The Tana Delta is multi-ethnic, comprising Pokomo, Orma, Wardei, Watha, Wailwana, Giriama, Swahili, Luo and Somali people amongst others. The dominant tribes are the Pokomo and Orma.

These delta tribes with their very different cultures, languages and lifestyles, create a unique diversity that can enrich life for all in the delta. Unfortunately, by manipulating the ignorance of rural communities, this diversity has many times been used as a basis to create suspicion, disrespect and fear, hence to divide, and ultimately to destroy.
The Delta Paradox

The delta is rich in human potential and natural resources, including land, water, pristine natural environment and wildlife.

Paradoxically, it is also one of the poorest regions in Kenya with over 70 per cent of her population living below the poverty line.

Today, the delta is increasingly becoming the focus of national and multinational corporations seeking large tracts of land to develop plantation style food-for-export or bio-fuel projects. Lately, the delta has also attracted oil and natural gas exploratory activities.

The vast majority of her people derive their livelihoods from the land and the river, through pastoralism, subsistence farming, agro-pastoralism, fishing and hunting in its indigenous forests. These people, whose entire livelihoods will be directly affected by any future development in the delta, must be able to participate in an informed way in the entire development process. If this fails to happen, they and the next generation risk becoming marginalized, disenfranchised or even displaced, all in the name of ‘development’.

Ethnic Violence – 2012/2013

In the period from August 2012 to January 2013, Tana Delta Sub-County was ravaged by ethnic violence. The conflict, which several reports have termed ‘politically instigated’, resulted in entire communities being displaced. In particular the Pokomo and the Orma communities living in villages in Chara, Ozi and Kilelwani locations, beyond the reach of all-weather roads, were most badly affected. Villages were abandoned, classes were interrupted and some schools, such as the newly constructed Buyani Secondary School, were vandalized and forced to close.
Peace and Reconstruction

Entire communities have struggled to rebuild their lives in the past months since the violence ended as abruptly as it started. Buyani Secondary School restarted in August 2013 with 27 pupils studying in two classrooms borrowed from Chamwanamuma Primary School.
**State of Education in the Delta**

Education infrastructure in the delta, although much improved over the last ten years, still lags far behind the rest of the country. Tana River County scores lowest in the Kenyan National Exams. It also has the lowest transition rates between primary and secondary schools and the lowest literacy level nationally.

**Education towards Peace and Sustainable Development in the Tana Delta**

The low literacy rates impede the rural communities of the delta from participating effectively in the development process affecting their resource-rich land. They can only know as much as they are told.

Youth without basic education who find themselves on the margins of a changing rural economy are easily manipulated. That probably could be the reason why we saw entire communities across the delta supposedly become enemies overnight, acquiescing to the mutual destruction of livelihoods and lives, all in the name of ‘protecting’ their rights.

Providing for a more educated and informed community is probably the most cost effective method for ensuring equitable and sustainable development in the Tana Delta. Educating the youth of the delta makes them more inquiring and discerning. It helps develop their talents and skills so that they too may benefit directly from new economic opportunities. Education reduces the susceptibility of rural communities to exploitation for economic gain.

An educated community is empowered to make more informed choices for themselves.
Tana Delta Peace Forum (TDPF)
The Tana Delta Peace Forum was set up by the office of the Deputy County Commissioner in 2013 as a concerted effort to address issues of Peace and Development in the Tana Delta. It is a joint Public-Private initiative bringing together the County Security and Intelligence Team and development partners operating in the delta, including the Kenya Red Cross, Accord Kenya, Tana River Life Foundation (TRLF), Nature Kenya.

TRLF, jointly with Accord Kenya, organized the first series of structured dialogue for Peace and Reconciliation between Pokomo and Ormas elders held in November/December 2013.

Being a major education stakeholder in Tana Delta Sub-County, TRLF continues to push for greater access to affordable, quality education for all ethnic communities in the delta, targeting especially the outlying communities most affected by the 2012/2013 violence.

Evaluation of TRLF Development Programmes
In evaluating the effectiveness of any development programme, we may not always look at the number of people we actually assisted (the output) but at how we actually helped them (the outcome).

Since 2007, TRLF has been working to improve access to affordable, quality education for communities in parts of the delta more accessible by the all-weather road networks. It is these communities that were least affected by the 2012/2013 ethnic violence.

The donor-funded TRLF development programmes have helped entire communities make a choice for peaceful co-existence and development over ethnic violence, an invaluable outcome for all communities in the delta.

There is a compelling need to scale up TRLF development programmes to reach out to communities across the entire delta, especially communities in the more inaccessible, interior locations.
Appendix

(1) Tana River Life Foundation (TRLF)
TRLF is a charitable organization based in Idsowe village in the Tana Delta in Kenya. It was founded as a private trust in 2005 by Gabriel Teo Kian Chong, a Malaysian citizen resident in Kenya, and registered as a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) with the Kenya NGOs Coordination Board in 2007 (Reg. OP258/051/2007/0440/4836 & Kenya Revenue Authority VAT Pin No.P051200475T).

(2) Institute of Public Benefit
TRLF was awarded income tax exempt status by the Kenya Revenue Authority for a 5 year period from 24th April 2013 to 24th April 2018 in recognition of its role as an Institute of Public Benefit.

This effectively means that:
- TRLF is now officially recognized as a charitable institution in Kenya;
- TRLF will be exempt from tax on all income earned;
- Donations to TRLF by Kenyan taxpayers are deductible expenses for tax purposes.

(3) TRLF - Mission & Vision
The foundation’s mission is to assist individuals and thereby entire rural communities, especially the marginalized and economically disadvantaged, to become self-reliant in dignity.

Tana River Life Foundation’s vision is for a more just and honest society, leading to a more complete humanity for all.

Through education support schemes, sustainable agricultural projects, community-based entrepreneurship schemes, and youth integral formation programmes, TRLF seeks to nurture the inherent talents and potentials of peoples such that they have the freedom and ability to build lives of dignity for themselves, their dependents, and their larger communities.

By connecting peoples from economically developed and developing societies, TRLF also seeks to give more meaning and depth to each life that it encounters.