

# The use of donkeys for transport in Kajiado, Kenya

by

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## Abstract

*Rural women and development workers in Kenya face the challenge of reducing the time and effort women spend on domestic transport tasks so they may reallocate their time to more remunerative activities. A study was carried out in Kajiado District, Kenya, to improve understanding of the Maasai pastoralists' existing transport practices. This study showed that there was potential for Maasai to use their transport donkeys more effectively and for a wider range of tasks. Initiatives were developed and a pilot programme started. Following training demonstrations with donkeys, the women used their animals to fetch firewood (a new activity for donkeys), and to carry larger quantities of water (four rather than two jerrycans). One woman experimented in carrying building poles, something which none of them had tried before. Using the donkeys, the women were able to halve the number of trips normally taken for the tasks. The initiative is starting to have an impact on reducing the time and effort the Maasai women spend transporting household necessities.*

## Introduction

Kajiado District of Kenya covers an area of 21,105 km<sup>2</sup> and is primarily inhabited by Maasai pastoralists engaged in livestock production. Much of the district receives less than 500 mm average annual rainfall. The Maasai are being encouraged to settle. They are beginning to change their pastoral way of life, building longer term housing and engaging in sedentary agriculture and income earning opportunities in addition to livestock.

The District Agricultural Office (DAO) has been implementing an animal traction project since 1988, promoting the use of donkeys for preparing land for crop cultivation. The DAO worked with women's groups, youth groups and contact farmers. In 1994, the DAO realised that lack of adequate transport was a considerable constraint to rural communities, particularly women, and that donkey-related transport had the potential to

resolve some of the difficulties. IT Kenya's Rural Transport Programme was requested to work with the DAO and help the communities address their transport problems.

## Transport in Kajiado District

The Kajiado district lacks access roads, although tracks are found in most parts of the district. Thorns cause frequent punctures to bicycles and pneumatic-tyred carts and other vehicles. Very few vehicles operate in the interior and the costs of hiring such vehicles are prohibitive. Formerly, donkeys were the main means of transport. Donkeys were used when shifting homes from one place to another in search of pastures, to carry household items, elderly people, the sick, and the weak. Capable of travelling distances of 40 km or more per day, they were used for carrying goods for barter and to fetch maize from other agricultural groups. They were also used for carrying water and cow dung. By the early 1970s, as motor vehicles became more common in Kenya, the importance of donkeys declined in some areas. People started to neglect donkeys. In areas where landholdings are small, donkeys are becoming scarce. But households with large landholdings still tend to own donkeys.

Livestock are moved mainly on foot along established stock routes. The other main commodity produced for sale by communities is charcoal. This needs to be transported. In the high rainfall agricultural areas crops and inputs also need to be transported. The population is scattered and distances to facilities such as grinding mills, medical centres and livestock markets can be considerable. Since transport services are few, most people reach these services by walking.

## Studying the transport problem

In 1994, a collaborative study (IT Kenya and DAO, 1994) was carried out in Kajiado District. The objective was to identify transport problems faced by the communities, and to determine what needed to be done to improve the transport situation for local communities, especially with

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respect to women. The study was carried out using participatory rural appraisal techniques, particularly community mapping. Considerable information was gathered on transport tasks; common uses of different means of transport such as donkeys, bicycles, wheelbarrows and motor vehicles; ownership, hiring and borrowing of transport; and transport availability within the district. Some of the findings are presented in Table 1. From the following key findings emerged from the study.

Pastoralists travel long distances and lack adequate transport services to reach health centres, grinding mills and livestock markets. Access to water is a major problem, with many women travelling a 10-20 km round trip to collect it. Women are responsible for collecting water, but men also cited water collection as a major problem. Donkeys do not carry as much water as they could. They generally carry two 20-litre jerrycans or four 10-litre tins placed in panniers, because the Maasai do not like to see the donkeys carrying more than 40 litres. However, other people in the area will load donkeys with 40-80 litres of water. Women fetch firewood on foot, carrying it on their backs. Donkeys are not used for carrying firewood. Moving sick people from the interior is a major problem and homemade stretchers are used for acute cases. Donkeys are rarely used. There are very few vehicles going to the interior parts and hire charges are exorbitant.

Women are mainly responsible for the transport of house-building materials such as cow dung, sand, grass and poles. Both men and women rated vehicles as the most useful means of transport, but considered them too expensive. Women rated donkeys second and wheelbarrows third; men rated wheelbarrows second and bicycles third. More than half the households in the study group area owned donkeys. Very few owned bicycles, wheelbarrows or motor vehicles. Donkeys are mostly used by women to carry water and to go to the grinding mills.

In some areas people have stopped using donkeys because they have bought vehicles. However, they now find it difficult to run the vehicles, and remain faced with transport problems. Panniers are normally made by women although it is mainly the older women who know how to make the more elaborate panniers and saddles. These items are important in assisting people in transporting goods, and the more elaborate ones are in scarce

supply. Bicycles are not used by women and there are very few Maasai men using them to transport goods. Bicycles are costly and prone to punctures and many men do not know how to ride them. Men ranked bicycles below wheelbarrows in utility.

Several measures to address transport problems were suggested by the groups. These varied, depending on each group's situation and the transport problems and options facing them. Some of the main measures suggested were provision of demonstrations and training on loading donkeys to carry other goods or greater quantities, and promotion of donkeys for transport purposes in areas where they are no longer present.

### **Efforts to reduce transport problems**

Following the study a joint pilot programme was developed and implemented by IT Kenya and the District Agricultural Office. The primary focus is on helping the Maasai, especially women, to make better use of the carrying potential of donkeys. The programme will also organise a promotional campaign to persuade people to invest again in pack donkeys in areas where donkeys are no longer used and women are consequently forced to carry water on their backs. These are areas where men have invested in pickups and the younger men have little regard for donkeys.

The objectives of the programme are to:

- reduce the transport burdens of rural Maasai, particularly women, in Kajiado District
- work with rural Maasai to improve the efficiency of their current methods of transport
- increase the transport choices available to rural Maasai, particularly women, in Kajiado District
- increase the capacity of communities and institutions within Kajiado District to use participatory techniques for planning and implementing activities that address the transport problems facing poorer people
- develop and test participatory techniques useful for resolving transport problems faced by rural Maasai women and their communities
- document the pilot project's progress and distil from it lessons for the future to share with other organisations addressing transport problems of the rural poor.

**Table 1: Access to services and resources and perceived problems in five Maasai villages in Kajiado District**

	<i>Meto</i>	<i>Mailua</i>	<i>Maili Tisa</i>	<i>Inkito</i>	<i>St Anna/ Entasopia</i>
Agro-ecological zone	V/VI	VI	VI	V	IV
Distance from road (km)	72	24	6	18	42
<i>Average time for return trip</i>					
Water: dry season (hours)	10	12	6	4	0.5
Water: wet season (hours)	4	7	3	2	0.5
Firewood (hours)	4	1	6	6	4
Grinding (hours)	12	48	12	8	2
Shop/markets (hours)	12	16	1	4	4
Small health centre (hours)	2	2	2	4	4
Health centre (hours)	12	24	10	8	10
Livestock market (days)	2	5	5	2.5	3

***Main problems perceived by women***

Problem 1	Water: people go long distances especially in dry season	Water: long distance and waiting time	Water: unreliable supply	Health services far; transport of sick	Health services: movement of sick people from interior
Problem 2	Grinding maize: long distance, queuing and unreliable	Grinding maize: long distance to road and have to go with others	Health services: very far	Grinding maize: very far and queuing time	Movement of secondary school students at start and finish of term
Problem 3	Farming: lack of implements	Market: open air market sometimes waterlogged	Grinding maize: long distance, queuing time	Water: unreliable	Firewood: go long distances, attack by wild animals, aches

***Main problems perceived by men***

Problem 1	Water: long distance, deep to draw	Water: long distance	Water: unreliable	Health services far; transport of sick	Health services: movement of sick people
Problem 2	Livestock market far	Livestock market far	Health services: very far	Farming: lack of machinery and seeds	Movement of secondary school students
Problem 3	Health services: distance and carrying sick	Farming: destruction by wild animals	Farming: lack of fencing and machinery	Water: unreliable	Transport of livestock and farm produce

Source: IT Kenya and DAO, 1994

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Photo: J Leyland



*Maasai women using a donkey to carry firewood in Kajiado, Kenya*

The work started in 1995, with feedback sessions involving four pilot groups selected on the results of the whole study. These feedback sessions were designed to reawaken awareness of transport activities and reconfirm, or revise if necessary, each group's assessment of the main transport problems they face. The groups again suggested a number of measures to resolve these problems. For example, problems of water collection could be addressed by drilling boreholes, having storage jars and collecting run-off from galvanised iron roofing sheets as well as by increasing the loads carried by donkeys and by introducing donkey carts. Proposed solutions were discussed based on affordability, sustainability and suitability.

The pilot group in Meto unanimously agreed that the community should be trained in how to increase the carrying capacity of donkeys so as to reduce the number of trips to water sources. They were also eager to learn about loading firewood on donkeys, asked to be trained in hygiene and wished to acquire donkey carts for transport of goods and of sick people. At the same training session the group, using their own donkeys, demonstrated their panniers and harnessing equipment, how they load and use the donkeys,

and any particular problems they encounter. Subsequent training included showing photographs of donkeys, carts and sledges being used to carry different items. These stimulated much discussion on local practices as well as the benefits and problems associated with adopting new techniques.

In Meto, given that the main goals were to carry more water and to carry firewood, demonstrations were given of donkeys carrying two bundles of firewood and four rather than two jerrycans of water. Initially, women found the two jerrycans tied together difficult to lift onto the donkey, and in one demonstration the donkey, being unused to carrying firewood, actually ran away. Nevertheless, the demonstration and carrying of the water and firewood to nearby homes impressed the women. The group was left to carry on using the jerrycans for a number of weeks, and to demonstrate such use to neighbours and others. Following training, the women started using their donkeys to fetch firewood and to carry the four jerrycans instead of two. Although the donkeys were still not accustomed to carrying firewood, the women using them for water and firewood collection were able to cut in half the number of

trips normally taken for these tasks, and could therefore rest on alternate days. No problems were experienced in loading the donkeys with the extra water. One woman also experimented with carrying building posts, something which none of them had tried before.

This training is but one of the activities planned to assist Maasai communities, particularly women, to reduce their transport burdens and resolve transport problems. Although the work is at an early stage, it is starting to have an impact on reducing the time and effort Maasai women spend in transport tasks. A future activity will be to bring women from different parts of the district together to share knowledge and experience on pannier designs so that these can be improved and used for carrying a wider range of goods. The women will also have the opportunity to exchange practical ideas and advice with other donkey users. Some projects have sought to introduce animal carts to women's groups as a way of alleviating transport problems but many of these projects have run into management and maintenance problems. Efforts can be more successful if they focus on women's existing resources and knowledge.

### Conclusions

One of the challenges facing rural women and development workers in the Kajiado region of Kenya is to help the women reduce the time and effort they spend in domestic transport tasks. Collecting water and firewood and carrying maize to the grinding mill are burdensome and

time-consuming activities for rural women. Relieving this burden can allow women time for more remunerative, rewarding activities. Because women frequently have easier access to donkeys than to cattle, pack donkeys provide a potential solution to some of their transport problems. Although one might have expected that the Maasai, being nomadic pastoralists, would already be using their donkeys optimally, a 1994 study found that there was potential to use the donkeys more effectively and for a wider range of tasks. The study helped develop a better understanding of existing transport practices. Using this, and building on existing donkey use, IT Kenya's programme has had an effect on reducing the time and effort women spend on the household chores of water and firewood collection.

One of the areas of concern noted in the study is the marginalisation of donkeys as a form of transport when motor vehicles are introduced. Because vehicles are rarely used for women's daily transport activities of water and firewood collection, women may be forced to revert to carrying these household necessities on their backs and heads if their husbands fail to see the value in retaining donkeys. This would seem detrimental for the women and is perhaps another challenge facing those trying to address rural transport problems in the region.

### Reference

IT Kenya and DAO, 1994. *Rural transport study 1994: Kajiado District*. District Agricultural Office (DAO), Kajiado and Rural Transport Programme, IT Kenya, PO Box 39493, Nairobi, Kenya. 41p.